

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

**Political Forum:
10 Questions
on Georgia's Political Development**



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Foreword

The new Georgian state is approximately 15 years old - depending on what is considered the moment of its inception. There have been three changes of government in Georgia during this period, two of which were unconstitutional. All three times the changes were claimed to have been made in the name of revolutionary transformation and the establishment of a dramatically different political system. The latest change of government, the Rose Revolution, took place in 2003. Enough time has passed since then to draw some general conclusions on what the main characteristics of Georgia's political evolution and political system are, how they can be categorized in terms of the fundamental notions of political science and what trends of political system development have become discernible.

Despite heated political debate, these issues have not been raised so broadly yet – or at any rate, no professional discussion on these issues has taken place. The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, together with the Ilia Chavchavadze State University, came forward with the initiative to launch a discussion of this nature. In order to make the discourse more structured, we asked its participants to supply answers to 10 questions. The initial versions of the answers were discussed at the authors' conference on December 8-9, 2006, but they had the opportunity to edit the draft texts afterwards. Assessments in the book reflect the period before January 2007 – events that happened afterwards could not influence the views of the authors.

The submitted texts vary considerably both in volume and content. Some of the authors supplied relatively brief answers to the 10 questions asked, whereas others did not directly follow the proposed format and turned in comprehensive analytical articles on the topics at hand. At any rate, we hope that the material below will be of

Foreword

interest to readers. It is an attempt at a more-or-less systematic assessment of Georgia's recent history by a diverse group of people.

Below is the list of the 10 questions we asked. In the texts of the authors who answered the questions in this order, only the item number of the question is supplied as the chapter title; otherwise, we have kept the author's headlines.

1. What has Georgia achieved and what has it failed to achieve following the restoration of its national sovereignty? How, if at all, did Georgian society and culture change during this period? Which social or cultural factors (changes) had the greatest effect on political processes?
2. Please provide a brief assessment of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency. How would you formulate his political program (views)? What were his main achievement and his main failure? If the political regime of that period can be categorized, what innovations did it introduce compared to the preceding regime? What was the main reason for the toppling of his regime (the "Christmas coup" or the popular uprising of 1991-1992)?
3. Please provide a brief assessment of Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency. How would you formulate his political program (views)? What were his main achievement and his main failure? If the political regime of that period can be categorized, what innovations did it introduce compared to the previous regime? What was the main reason for the toppling of his regime ("Rose Revolution")?
4. Please provide a brief assessment of Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency: How would you formulate his political program (views)? What are his main success(es) and failure(s)? If the current political regime can be categorized, what innovations has it introduced compared to the previous regime?
5. The opposition is objectively unable to compete with the authorities. What is the main reason for this (repressions by the authorities, the government's obvious successes, lack of charismatic opposition leaders, objective systemic problems, something else)?

10 questions on Georgia's political development

6. If the opposition gains strength in the future, what will be the likely values/slogans/messages that will account for this (supremacy of law and human rights, protection of social rights, preservation of ethnic identity, tackling of corruption, etc.)?
7. What will form the structural framework for the stronger opposition of the future – the opposition parties of today or completely new groups? If you deem the latter option more probable, where will those new groups come from (from the ruling party after a rift, from some social stratum which has hitherto not been a major player in the political arena, from somewhere else)?
8. How stable is Georgia's current political system? What is the outlook for the development of the political system in Georgia in your opinion (establishment of a Mexican- or Japanese-style system with a single dominant party, gradual development of liberal-democratic pluralism, Latin American-style perpetual revolutionary cycles)?
9. How important is the influence of foreign political factors on Georgia's political evolution? Please specify how exactly this influence has manifested/manifests itself. How has this influence been changing over the past 15 years and what types of influence do you expect in the near future (next 3-5 years)?
10. Assuming that Georgia has the government which is most acceptable for you, what should be the priorities of its political program and what are the most important steps it should take?

Archil Abashidze

1.

So many major changes had to be implemented in Georgia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union that expecting any great achievements in a short time would have been extremely unrealistic. A completely different political and economic system was (and is) to be established, which takes quite a lot of time, especially in a society with an underdeveloped political culture. The first thing to be noted with regret looking back at the last 15 years is that Georgia succumbed to provocation and failed to unite around the idea of building its statehood. The political leaders of that period proved unable to put national interests above their own personal ambitions. They failed to rebuild the state institutions (old institutions were demolished, and they did not create new ones) at least to the extent that would prevent the country from falling into the hands of criminal “brotherhoods” – first armed gangs and later corrupt clans. One might say that we had to learn from the many mistakes which could have been avoided. (The example of the civil war would suffice.)

Progress and development were out of the question amid the blazing conflicts and civic strife in the country. Besides lost territories and thousands of victims, the conflicts set the country back several years – years which society should have been using to formulate the idea of the country’s development (in other words, an idea of what we want to build in this country and what the Georgia which we are building should be like), instead of wasting them on endless debates and bickering on trifling issues.

Discussion on significant achievements is possible only if we consider the experience of the last few years. I will return to this issue later. At the moment, let me just note that the most significant achievement of the recent period was the risky venture undertaken by Georgian society – changing the government – although not through elections,

but also without violence, bloodshed and further destabilization. For a country like Georgia, effecting peaceful change on this scale is a major achievement, one which inspires hope that the populace is no longer as politically inert and fatalistic as before (i.e. it better realizes its role in the process of state governance and will not tolerate indefinitely open derision from the government); in addition, the people drew appropriate conclusions from the experience of the last 15 years and realize where violence may lead, so it is now possible to talk about the development of the political culture of society and a shift from the emotional, affective social behavior to rational actions.

In addition, society is emerging from the cloistered and constrained situation in which it found itself in the 1990s. Myths that were created about everything Georgian are being gradually dispelled. Direct contacts with Western culture (growing numbers of Georgians traveling to the West to work or study, the arrival of foreigners in Georgia) brought about more objective assessments of our own abilities and the debunking of some existing superstitions. The new highly competitive environment (which is very different from that of the Soviet times, when little attention was paid to quality and it was always easy to find someone who appreciated Georgian culture, originality and wine) has conditioned the growth of the concepts of *competitiveness* and *professionalism*. It is understandable that this has caused a social shock of sorts. Hence the fear that foreign influence might wipe out something valuable and important, but this is also a great incentive for revival and the creation of something new. Society must accept this challenge; it should prove that it deserves to exist. The developments of recent years inspire hope that, despite all difficulties, Georgia will succeed. However, we should not harbor an illusion that everything can be achieved any time soon.

2.

The worst characteristic of the Gamsakhurdia period was the unprecedented disunity of Georgian society. Not only the government, but all political actors (nearly everyone was involved in politics back then) had a marked inability to reach an agreement or compromise. This stemmed from the hitherto unseen personal ambitions of the

political leaders on the one hand and a lack of political experience on the other, which (together with their ambitions) prevented the leaders from seeing that endless and merciless confrontation of that kind would end with lamentable results and harm the common cause in which many of them believed, perhaps sincerely. As for inexperience, it has to be said that none of the leaders of the period had any experience of governance (let alone state governance), and many of them apparently thought this quite an easy job (according to the popular opinion of the period, the main thing was to win independence, and then we would somehow tend to ourselves). But switching from slogans to doing the job proved not so easy. Fighting against the Soviet regime is one thing and building an independent democratic state is quite another.

These confrontations resulted in the tense and aggressive environment in which everyone argued with everyone else about something and saw enemies everywhere. Democracy was one of the fundamental slogans of the times, but in reality, no-one respected different opinions and some even stooped to repressing them. Naturally, a society which proved unable to find a civilized form of dialogue between political actors acquired a bad image in the international arena. This too kindled the conflicts in Abkhazia and Ossetia, and in general, made the prospects of ever building a state quite bleak.

It is interesting to note the assessments people who were actively involved in the politics of the period (calling them all politicians would be wrong) have made of the situation. Some are certain to this day that negotiating was impossible, whereas others admit that they made many mistakes due to their inexperience and youthful radicalism. Any admission of mistakes should be welcome. It is only regrettable that the entire country had to pay for the mistakes of people who acted emotionally.

3.

The initial period of Shevardnadze's presidency was spent achieving the country's stabilization, which again took time and effort. In the field of foreign policy, a pro-Western course was chosen and some achievements were made too, which culminated in Georgia's accession

to the Council of Europe. At the same time, talk started about the prospects which Georgia could only dream of (membership in the EU, although it was described as a long-term prospect, was a strong incentive for the country). However, the domestic situation was unenviable to say the least.

Unfortunately, the second period of Shevardnadze's presidency was not cloudless either: The regime was very secretive and all decisions were made somewhere in the corridors (in the best traditions of communism) and the key principle of decision making was clan interests. The ceaseless clandestine and hushed-up distribution of power and outright neglect for the public interest reached such a pitch that even the extremely patient Georgian society, with its rich experience of putting up with almost everything, found it unbearable to live in a country like that. The state desisted from (or never started) performing its most basic functions: maintaining order, providing education, supplying electricity. Moreover, the government was not interested in how many citizens it had. The population of Georgia was said to be "four and a half million", and the number of those who left Georgia – to "approximately one million". It is clear how fair and democratic the elections would be in a country where the exact number of voters was unknown.

Furthermore, the state confronted the citizens and often acted against them: policemen abducted citizens, energy sector bosses got rich by selling the electricity which was meant to light people's homes. The country started to look more like several clans' family businesses than an independent state. And people's attitudes were changing accordingly. International organizations and Western countries, which were helping Georgia get rid of Russia's influence, had similar sentiments. (Everyone realized that a weak and permanently subsidized Georgia would never make it.)

The establishment of clan rule can be considered the main failure of the Shevardnadze period. Clans were getting richer and stronger by appropriating the national budget and grant money. The boundless spread of conformism and hypocrisy were of no less negative significance. Such an extent of turning a blind eye to corruption and lawlessness gave rise to the legitimate question as to whether this

society would be able to adapt to democratic principles, or rather, to establish those principles.

The final period of Shevardnadze's presidency also featured a concentration of power in the hands of some of the ministers who were not under the president's control any more. The basic political principle of Shevardnadze was his survival as a political figure at all costs. Although his "balancing policy" yielded him many successes personally, it ultimately caused all-round stagnation in the country.

However, it has to be noted that the main achievement or flip-side of the Shevardnadze regime was that the government did not hush up the media (despite the attempts by some heads of power-wielding agencies) and did not or could not check the development of the nongovernmental sector, which played an important role in laying the groundwork for the "Rose Revolution".

4.

Saakashvili actively set about carrying out reforms as soon as he came to power and achieved significant success. In domestic policy, the vigorous military reform resulted in the creation of a strong Georgian Army. Georgia does not intend to go to war with anyone (i.e. Russia) and attaches greater importance to diplomatic talks in regulation of the conflicts as well, but every nation should have a sizeable army if only to use it in emergencies (not necessarily hostilities; military units are sometimes used to deal with the consequences of natural disasters or to support the police if the crime situation gets out of hand).

That the Georgian state has managed to start performing one of the main functions of state – maintaining law and order – merits special notice and appreciation. Following the reform of law enforcement departments, the new authorities carried out effective measures against the criminal world, which had grown extremely strong and influential under Shevardnadze. The steps that the government took in its fight against crime, especially organized crime, should be welcomed. (Together with the education reform, the law enforcement reform instilled in the public a hope for the future, in particular, the hope that a generation will come in a few years' time which will be

knowledgeable and have sound goals in life.) The abolition of the traffic police and introduction of the Patrol Police might irritate some people because the government tends to remind us of the change too often, but it truly has made the lives of ordinary people easier.

Reforms were carried out in the education system, where corruption became rampant in the late 1990's and heavily eroded and encroached on society's ethical values. For years the impunity of the management of higher education institutions was an important factor contributing to the spread of nihilism in society.

The developments in Achara were an important success. There have been some positive changes regarding the frozen conflicts, which are manifested in more proactive approach to taking these issues to the international arena. Prospects for joining NATO are now real and intense talks are under way. Although relations with Russia have become quite strained, this is largely caused by Russia's irritation with and reaction to Georgia's successes and pro-Western orientation.

Despite significant achievements, there remain issues which the government has not been able or willing to resolve yet, and in some cases it has even carried out undesirable changes. Let me highlight several such issues:

- I. Constitutional changes broadened presidential powers; at a time when the degree of independence of the judiciary is small and the majority in parliament is composed of the members of the president's party, this heavily upsets the balance required for the separation of powers.
- II. The issue of elections remains problematic. What is striking here is not only the unverified voters' lists (during the latest elections, there were much fewer irregularities and rigging on Election Day itself, which inspires hope that this is how it will remain in the future), but also the electoral code currently in effect, under which the authorities wield substantial influence over the process of staffing the electoral commissions. The procedures of staffing commissions at all levels lack transparency, which raises serious doubts about the electoral administration among the public. Legal amendments which envisaged switching from the party-based principle of staffing the

electoral commissions to the professional principle are already in force, but this and a number of issues still remain on the agenda. The flaws in the electoral code were not very manifest during the latest elections due to the popularity of the presidential party on the one hand and the weak degree of trust in the opposition parties in society on the other. But more aggravations of the situation are likely in the future due to flaws in the code.

Overall, the amendments to the code can be said to have ended the party-based procedure for staffing the electoral commissions only formally, whereas in reality, they did not eliminate the reasons for doubts about the electoral commission. The formal switching from the party-based to professional electoral commissions cannot yield the desired results if the procedure of selection of candidates on a competitive (contest) basis is biased and most importantly, lacks transparency. According to the law currently in force, all three tiers of the electoral administration consist of bodies whose members are appointed from above: the chairperson and all six members of the Central Electoral Commission are nominated by the president and appointed by parliament; district commissions, which have five members, are elected by the Central Electoral Commission by a majority of the total number of members; three members of the precinct commissions are appointed by the district commission, and the remaining two members are appointed by the parties which came first, second and third in the previous elections. This procedure raises doubts that the commissions cannot be free of the influence of the higher-level commissions, not to mention the fact that this system gives the ruling party a major advantage in the elections and effectively enables it to staff the commissions with the candidates of its choice.

That an electoral official should have a certificate is a positive new development of sorts in the amended electoral code. It is now required by law that to become a member of the electoral commission, a candidate should have a certificate, although certification too cannot be considered particularly effective for a number of reasons. Holding a certificate does not guarantee membership in the electoral commission (many candidates might successfully pass certification, but the number of vacancies in the commissions is limited). It is the Central Electoral

Commission which chooses commission members from among the certified candidates. It remains unknown to the public by which criteria the Central Electoral Commission makes these decisions. What is known, though, is that the Central Electoral Commission has not only failed thus far to establish the criteria which guide it during selection of the members of district commissions, but has not even recognized the number of points the certified electoral officials scored as at least one of the criteria for selection, which effectively makes certification meaningless.

The public also does not have answers to a great many other important questions: By what criteria were the Central Electoral Commission members selected and by what criteria did the Central Electoral Commission itself select the members of the district commissions? How does the commission manage to consider several hundred applications in a very short period of time and what specifically are the principles and criteria guiding the commission? This is unknown to the public, and doubts arise that loyalty continues to play an important role in the selection of the candidates. It is known that there were no interviews with the candidates, i.e. the documents filed must have made it possible to reach a final decision and decisions which lack transparency give rise to rumors. Accordingly, the impartiality of lower-level commissions which were staffed by these commissions is also called into question.

III. Local self-governance is still very weak and underdeveloped. The issue of the country's administrative-territorial system is a major hindrance to the decentralization process. Due to the frozen conflicts or insufficient political will to resolve this issue, progress in the decentralization process is slow and labored. A lot of hard work is to be done in this direction (first and foremost, with respect to the creation of an appropriate legal framework) and, most importantly, postponing the issue any further is undesirable and risky. Of course, no-one should entertain the illusion that the devolution of power from the central to the regional level and agreement on the revenues of the regional and local budgets will be quick and easy, but the process of gradual devolution of some of the central powers to the regions has to begin right away.

Overall, however, it is noticeable that the authorities feel greater responsibility to the public. Frequent public appearances by ruling party members, which the opposition often labels as a PR campaign, are also a sign that the authorities are often ready for a dialogue with society. The shift from politics in the corridors to more open public politics in the country is perhaps a credit to Saakashvili's political style and is dramatically different from Shevardnadze's style.

5.

It is obvious that the opposition parties' influence in Georgian politics today is very weak. The opposition finds it hard to win the hearts (and votes) of the voters because, on the one hand, it is difficult for the opposition to operate in the post-revolution environment, especially when the president is successful, strong, and proactive. On the other hand, the opposition itself is disunited; the opposition groups do not seem to be able to join forces (create electoral blocs) even against the common opponent. And third, the parliamentary opposition's actions are often amateurish and off-target. (Statements by the leaders of some parties that the authorities are in their death throes, the debate in parliament on the color of the newly painted facades and the tastes of Tbilisi government officials, personal insults and fisticuffs in parliament, the fruitless boycotting of parliament sessions are all good examples of this.) The opposition does not discuss alternatives to the policy the government is implementing, tries to disparage the achievements which in fact should make every citizen of this country feel elated and sometimes does itself more harm than it does the authorities (e.g. the notorious wrestlers' case, when some of the opposition leaders used their parliamentary immunity to protect people who violated the law).¹

6-7.

Opposition members would probably do best to go out of their way to establish ties among one another. Even more importantly, the opposition should be consistent. But if leaders of all opposition parties (and even lesser leaders) do not restrain their ambitions for all the other opposition groups to rally precisely around them ("I am the smartest/have most money"), then the Georgian opposition will con-

tinue to endure failures, and achieving any major success will be out of the question. The opposition might achieve some success in the future elections only if they manage to move gainful issues (e.g. uninvestigated murders) to the fore and if the authorities make grave mistakes. The opposition will not achieve much with its current arrangement of forces, nor is it likely that it will manage to rearrange in the near future. That the opposition's ranks will be reinforced by defectors from the pro-government camp is also doubtful. (No matter how harsh the confrontation between individual government members might be, it is extremely doubtful that some political heavyweight will leave the government and side with the present-day opposition.)

Yet another shortcoming of the opposition is the lack of new faces. The public is quite familiar with all the opposition members. Accordingly, people remember what positions they used to occupy during Shevardnadze's presidency and even before that. Others simply do not have enough political weight to lay claims to anything major at this stage, and most importantly, they have no "team", a factor which was also so conspicuous in the latest elections.

In the future, the opposition will try to use as slogans even those weaknesses of the authorities which we discussed above (the weak judiciary, the slow pace of local government reform, concentration of power in the president's hands, notorious murders). Whether the parties manage to strengthen their positions in society with these slogans is a different matter. The incumbent authorities are unlikely to sit and watch as the opposition gains strength and not take advantage of the opposition's weaknesses.

The opposition's refusal to hold a dialogue with the authorities is downright unjustifiable. The opposition's role is engaging in a heated, but businesslike dialogue with the authorities, moving to the fore the authorities' mistakes and better alternatives, rather than talking about the personal foibles of the ruling party members. The opposition would do itself and the public good if it became more business-like.

8.

The present-day political system in Georgia features the institution of strong president, which came into force after the adoption of

constitutional amendments. The model in which the judiciary is very weak, the vast majority of seats in parliament belongs to the members of the president's party and the opposition is disunited and disorganized cannot be considered the best option. The argument that the country needs to be governed with a strong hand during the transition period is partly true, but the question arises of how long the transition post-revolution period will continue and when the process of separation of powers will begin. This issue is particularly pressing because Georgia has accumulated quite a bitter experience of replacing presidents through strong-arm methods, and the tendency toward concentration of power in the president's hands raises concerns. In addition, at this time all political unions (parties) in Georgia are created around a single leader. Replacing the ruling party in the elections will be difficult if only because these political parties do not propose any clear-cut political programs and traditionally emphasize their leaders' personal strengths. Accordingly, changing the government by holding elections in which some strong political party will defeat the ruling party is unlikely.

After the introduction of constitutional amendments which broadened the presidential powers even further (e.g. the power to dismiss parliament if the national budget or the composition of the government is not approved within three months), the balance between the branches of power can be described as anything but equal. The further weakening of parliament is especially undesirable at a time when the independent and unbiased judiciary is still in the process of getting back on its feet and, as we can see, this process too is not proceeding very smoothly. Talking about the stability of the system is perhaps a little premature. Everything will depend on how events unfold during the next few years: if the last three years' course and pace of the reforms are maintained and democratic institutions grow stronger, it will be possible to discuss guarantees of stability. Saying this today would unfortunately be no more than wishful thinking.

9.

Over the last decade, the influence of foreign factors over the processes that unfolded in Georgia has been significant and intense.

10 questions on Georgia's political development

With the arrival of Shevardnadze, the West's interest in Georgia doubled. Regardless of what we might attribute this to – to the West's geopolitical interests (which the Georgians used to overestimate, even when this interest was much smaller than it is now – according to the widespread and naïve opinion of the 1990s, the West would simply pamper us because of our advantageous geopolitical location) or to sympathy for and desire to help a small county which is so devoted to the idea of democracy, it is a fact that Western countries provided substantial financial and technical assistance to Georgia during its bleakest period. The important developments like strengthening the media and civil society, which paved the way for democratic processes in Georgia, were made possible precisely with Western countries' assistance. (However, under Shevardnadze their assistance also helped mold mafia-like clans and make them richer.) Georgia's accession to international organizations and the country's prospects for the future are also tokens of this support, not an outcome of the unprecedented successes which we have achieved on our own.

A rapid growth of the importance of foreign factors is to be expected during the next few years because after the Rose Revolution, Georgia itself came up with the initiative to begin a more intensive phase of dialogue with the West. Georgia's ambition to join NATO will inevitably result in even greater interest in the reforms which are under way in Georgia. (We already receive recommendations and advice as to which changes should take place in our political system to make our accession possible.) Recommendations to fundamentally reform the courts have already been voiced in Western countries, and probably no-one doubts that there are many more to follow. Despite the positive changes of the last three years, there is still a lot of work to do (if only with respect to protection of religious minorities' rights). This is why the West is likely to become more demanding and strict toward Georgia because Georgia too makes ambitious demands. Accession to NATO and joining the list of candidate countries for EU membership is a tall order for a country which only recently embarked on democratic reforms and has yet to prove that it is stable enough and does not intend to sway from this course.

10.

In the near future (a few years' time), the following issues will perhaps command most of our attention:

1. Regaining control of the lost territories. The government's desire to involve international organizations and Western countries in this process and replace the Russian blue helmets should be commended.
2. Carrying out judiciary reform. The public should trust the courts. If the mistrust which currently exists toward the court system is unfair, the government must produce convincing proof of this.
3. Expanding the state assistance programs for socially vulnerable groups because poverty still remains widespread. Despite the steps that were already made in this direction, taking care of the army of the poor and jobless which the incumbent authorities inherited from their predecessors is no small task. It certainly is quite a burden for the national budget, but this should be one of the priorities because it is an important factor for the stability of the system.
4. Sustaining the achievements. First and foremost, this refers to law and order, which is important if only to keep the recently-acquired image of a stable country. Sustaining the achievements is of decisive importance; we should sustain and build on what we already have (here we can remember the same improved education system, energy situation and improving crime figures). There were examples in the past of deriving no benefits from good beginnings (anti-corruption initiatives and reforms of the Shevardnadze era). We should not let this happen again.

Notes:

¹ Supporters of three quite distinguished athletes (wrestlers), arrested in June 2005 for allegedly blackmailing a Greek businessman, insulted the judge and deteriorated the situation in the court room during a hearing, claiming that, upon leaving the court, several dozen wrestlers and other supporters went on to hold a rally on nearby Rustaveli Avenue, effectively blocking Tbilisi's main street. Regular police and riot police had to intervene. Some opposition members who rushed to the scene condemned the actions of the government for the "excessive use of force by police". Later, the leaders of the opposition parties hurried to condemn the actions of the crowd in the courtroom and make good statements made during this "criminal riot" by some opposition party members.

David Aprasidze

This article does not claim to be scientific research. However, it does lay claim to being no less ambitious because it is a compilation of my personal views about Georgia's development. Although the article considers Georgia's case alone, it has to be underscored that Georgia's case is not unique.

1. State and society in Georgia at a glance

The last 15 years in Georgia can be viewed as a struggle between a “weak state” and a “strong society”.¹ In addition, the meaning of society, as mentioned here, is not so much “*Gesellschaft*” as tradition and political culture. Despite the common fallacy that Georgia has a 3,000-year history of statehood, it is a fact that the Georgian people have never had any experience of modern statehood. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia, just like all post-Soviet countries (with the possible exception of the Baltic states) found itself faced with extremely complex challenges:

1. Transformation of political and economic systems (democratization and liberalization) in the absence of the main determinant – the state;
2. Development of statehood without the nationwide (universal, not ethnical) consensus;
3. The unenviable international environment of negative Russian influence and effectively absent interest of the West (the United States and Western Europe) in the first half of the 1990s.

In this situation, the following have become the main issues of Georgia's political development of the last 15 years (1991-2006):

1. Conflicts on national borders, i.e. the geographic area in which political, economic and other processes are unfolding;

2. Interrelations between the state (effectiveness of political power) and democracy (separation of power);
3. Foreign orientation, mostly as a means of achieving political goals, less as a tool of value system identity.

Upon closer consideration, the main political process revolves precisely around these issues to this day. The effectiveness of governances is measured against these benchmarks, and the main public discourse is mostly dedicated to these issues. Accordingly, the struggle between state and society also focused on three topics, which make it possible to divide the period of independence into three phases:

1. I am a state – Gamsakhurdia² and Shevardnadze (1992-2003) before the adoption of the 1995 constitution;
2. The state is a façade – Shevardnadze’s presidency in 1995-2003;
3. Is the state strong? Down with state?! – after the “Rose Revolution” in 2003.

The above phases are different in terms of the state’s and society’s influence precisely on the progress regarding the abovementioned issues: If in the beginning, society (tradition, culture) dictated terms to the yet-nonexistent, or rather, embryonic state, in other words, societal values molded political institutions, in the following phase, state (institutions) started to transform the value system (political culture), which, especially in the third phase, shifted the balance of power in the state’s favor. In other words, Georgia’s political history of the last 15 years is a road from the influence of political culture on the institutions to the institutional generation of political culture.

A brief analysis of the three phases follows to support this argument. Because the process – especially the third phase – is not over yet, discussion about the current situation will be more of a predictive and speculative nature.

2. I am a state: Gamsakhurdia as a product of the people

By the time Gamsakhurdia came to power, the nature of relations between society and the state in Georgia was in large part determined by the so-called “Soviet legacy”: the USSR was seen as

“not our state”, repression was understood as the state’s function, not one of its mechanisms, and individuals were to either “take ownership” of the state out of considerations of personal prosperity (become part of the nomenclature) or create their own microcosm which would be independent of the state (become a “tradesman” or a “crime boss”). In effect, both frames of reference created informal networks which wielded levers of political and economic power. In addition, in the end of the Soviet period (from the 1980's), informal networks started to acquire increasingly clear-cut ethnic forms: political and economic ties were increasingly cloistered within ethnic territorial entities or ethnic groups.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the state was substituted by society. Gamsakhurdia’s state was an instance of the formalization of Georgian political subculture from the remains of the dead Soviet state³: Georgians’ views about governance, power and its legitimization showed signs of a traditional political culture – the strong leader who epitomized a paternalistic ruler who “covers up for the family’s immorality”⁴. The principles of separation of powers and individual freedoms were completely alien to Georgian political culture. Accordingly, Gamsakhurdia was a product of the people in a sense that he embodied the “father who cares about the Georgian family”.

It is in situations like these that the role of a person who is in a position to influence the social reality becomes particularly important. Gamsakhurdia as a person was not an “enlightening leader”. He did not succeed in becoming a leader like Vaclav Havel or even Lech Walesa. In terms of his values, Gamsakhurdia was just an ordinary person among his people, who failed to use the power concentrated in his hands to achieve social development.

It is almost impossible to talk about “achievements” of the Gamsakhurdia government: the logical outcome of his government put in serious jeopardy the prospects of building the nation state, in particular, ethnic conflicts, the so-called “Christmas coup” and international isolation. Besides the inertia of the Soviet legacy in the form of the local Soviet military, the main reason for the “Christmas coup” lay in the demands of the public. The putsch was a manifestation of

the new subculture-level confrontation within society, this time not ethnic-, but social status-based: the “elite” society in Tbilisi, whom Gamsakhurdia confronted with “populism targeting the masses”, demanded that it should “control the state”, in other words, that the head of the family must change.

3. State a la Shevardnadze: The hybrid era

The return of Shevardnadze gradually brought back the Soviet style of governance. For the first few years, he was a captive of the “Gamsakhurdia legacy”, although, unlike his predecessor, Shevardnadze was more successful in gaining an upper hand over society and imposing on it the governance system with which he was familiar. From the mid-1990s, important changes occurred in the international environment: The West became more active in the region in the areas of security, energy and promotion of democratic institutions. To Shevardnadze, political stability meant the consolidation of his power, which rested on two main pillars: the revived Soviet-style informal networks (naturally, persons changed, but the type of governance was the same) and international (especially Western) support. Even the anatomy of the ruling party, the Citizens’ Union, reflected the merger of the two. It was also evident in the fundamental principle of arrangement of the political system: the influence of so-called reformers was greater in the legislative sphere, whereas the executive levers were concentrated in the hands of the more conservative wing. This was a direct indication that Shevardnadze, an expert in the Soviet politics of the previous 10 years, upheld the principle of primacy of informal practice over formal practice. To him, the practice of a (rule-of-law) state was but a façade, behind which the Soviet government apparatus continued to operate as before.⁵

It has to be said in addition that this simulation did leave its mark. In 2001, when the security service began an audit of the private and very popular Rustavi-2 TV station under the pretext of financial irregularities, hundreds of people demonstrated against. It transpired that the simulation had a real effect: the façade institutions managed to change the political culture, especially with respect to the direct

participation of the people in political processes. The reformers' wing, which the system needed mostly as a façade, turned into a real force. Thanks to international assistance in the form of grants, that group became a force to be reckoned with economically as well.

Yet another reason for the weakening of the Shevardnadze regime was its extreme inefficiency: As is often the case with similar regimes, the regime's legitimacy depended on its social (in a narrow sense of the word) success. In this sense, Shevardnadze was successful only until the late 1990s. The regime's inherent firmness lasts only as long as the leading actors are certain of the leader's success. Precisely until that time the regime is capable of remaining attractive to new members. But from 2000, Shevardnadze became a center of gravity for only intellectually excessively weak and marginalized forces.

The dynamic of the Rose Revolution derived largely from these factors: the reformers' wing, which had turned into a real force, masses which were "angered" with the regime's lack of success, and the key figures who started to doubt the need for the regime – all served to create a situation in which even token international support would make political change inevitable.

4. Is state strong? Down with state?!

The struggle between state and society was renewed in 2003. For the first time in Georgian history, state institutions perform real, not façade, functions. The difference between the new government and its predecessors is that, while Gamsakhurdia could not perceive the need for state institutions at all and Shevardnadze viewed them only as performers of the façade functions, the new government believes in their effectiveness. The fast pace of institutional development, which is manifested in frequent structural changes and reshuffles of personnel, is a prime example of this. In contrast to the preceding government, the incumbent authorities are "not afraid any more" of strong state institutions.

The incumbent authorities are precisely the political force which (owing to their educational background or other kinds of frequent contacts with the Western world) is the farthest way from the main characteristics of the traditional political culture of Georgian society.

First and foremost, this implies viewing the legitimacy of political power not so much in ideological terms, as from the standpoint of its effectiveness and participation. The new government knows well not only the theoretical, but also the practical importance of the people as a source of political power. By comparison, public opinion made no difference for the Shevardnadze government, and nothing was being done to mold or change it. In contrast to that, the new government deems it important to keep an eye to public opinion and is trying to shape it to promote its political goals.

The strengthening of the state under the new government brought to light a few important problems in the field of relations between state and society. It emerged that civil society was in effect quite weak and its “mythical” strength could exist only in the weak Shevardnadze state. The same is true about the mass media. The ruling political regime today is more successful at attracting qualified young professionals, which, given the general scarcity of qualified human resources, puts those who counter the state in a very difficult situation.

This is the cause of the “democracy crisis” which, at first sight, is noticeable in Georgia. And the fastest way of dealing with the crisis is, theoretically, weakening the state again. However, this would certainly not strengthen democracy. The current situation in Georgia once again proves that the effectiveness of the state is a necessary prerequisite for democracy.

5-6-7 Façade political institution. “Demise” of parties

If something still performs only façade functions in present-day Georgia, it is political parties. The virtual disappearance of the opposition is one of the difficult challenges for the political system, especially at the initial stage of its establishment. In addition, it has to be noted that this is not a fatal flaw of the country’s democratic development. On the contrary, some studies show that in many Eastern European countries, transformation was the fastest and most successful precisely where reformers had absolute power at the initial stage.⁶

The reason for the weakness of the opposition in Georgia is that the institution of the political party has not gone beyond the façade

stage of development. The objective cause of this can be found in society, as there exists almost no demand for political parties as conduits of political participation. Political parties are either unions created around a leader by groups of friends, or come into existence with help of the Western training courses and assistance, or both. In other words, their lack of success stems from their structural defects.

It has to be added that neither did the political parties manage to demonstrate their importance to the public. Certain of the effectiveness of state institutions, the new government managed to change the attitude of the political culture toward these institutions by developing public trust toward them. It would be excessively idealistic to demand strengthening of the parties, especially opposition parties, from the government (although funding the parties from the national budget should be considered, at least in part, as a step in this direction) because it is natural for any government to resist strengthening the opposition, especially if the government is driven by the ambition to carry out fundamental changes. Accordingly, the reasons for the weakness of the political parties should be sought in their leaders' mistakes: these mostly include a wrong choice of political issues and tactics and a lack of pragmatism in achieving their goals. It is inappropriate to urge the authorities for a compromise and be uncompromising yourself at a time when the authorities' electoral advantage is undisputed.

A stable development of the political system, and especially further liberalization of the economic system, will automatically strengthen the opposition. However, it is hard to imagine that classical ideological parties will emerge in Georgia. To a certain extent, the reason for this is that the era of classical parties effectively ended before any natural developments in this respect could possibly take place in Georgia.

It is hard to say what issues the future opposition will seek to move to the fore. This will probably be contingent on what domestic and foreign challenges the political and economic system will face. It is possible, for example, that with greater convergence between Georgia and the EU, the issues of national identity and expediency of economic integration might move to the fore. Presumably, by that time the Georgian political and economic system will have a greater degree of stability as well.

It is probably already possible today to predict that the composition of the future opposition will change completely. Today's opposition political spectrum has failed to rise to the fast social and institutional changes. Accordingly, neither uniting nor new regrouping are likely to prevent the "demise" of the present-day opposition. From among the present-day opposition, only the part of the new generation which accumulated some knowledge of the usefulness of the institutions and whose connections are not limited to informal ties alone stand a chance to remain in the political arena. In addition, this group should unambiguously denounce their current leaders and their political tactics.

The main supplier of personnel for the future opposition will be the ruling party of today and the new generation of politicians which will emerge as a result of the ongoing or future changes in the economy and education sector. In addition, such groups will be created from the members of the ruling party not as a result of restructuring of the "old" parties or groups, but through the splitting up of the National Movement into factions. Tentatively, these developments are expected to take place by the 2012 parliamentary elections, when the new parliament will have been formed a year before the presidential election.⁷ As for the new political forces, great importance is attached to education reform, which makes education and participation in the political process more accessible to various social strata. The liberalization of the economy and diversification of capital are also important, as they rule out the possibility of controlling the economy from a single political center; in other words, they promote political diversification too.

8. Political system

No young political system can be stable in a classical sense, so in Georgia's case, I will use the minimalist definition of stability, according to which a system is stable if it remains within the confines of the civic framework, i.e. averts military or armed confrontation. Perturbations and fundamental institutional changes are therefore possible in such a system.

If we take a general view of the Georgian political system as a formalized representation of governance, it will be obvious that, com-

pared with the 1990s, significant progress has been made towards stability. In particular, the strengthening of state institutions at the expense of fragile traditional institutions is obvious. Second, if we look at the political system only as political institutions and processes in the aggregate, we will again see the elements of stabilization, as compared to 2003. The search for institutional modus, which was evident during the structural changes and personnel reshuffles, is effectively drawing to an end. The significant personnel changes in 2006 (e.g. resignation of Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili) were an indication of stability of the institutions, not their crisis, because they took place without any substantial political perturbations.

If the environment is favorable, the political system will develop towards liberalization. Education reform and the course toward economic liberalization are part of the prerequisites of this. Only if this holds true will the prognoses about the political parties made in the preceding chapter also come true. This is why the establishment of the Japanese, Mexican or Latin American models is hard to imagine in Georgia. Presumably, the development of Georgia from now on will follow the Eastern European pattern, especially if Georgia's integration with NATO and the EU continues.

9. Foreign factors

There have been numerous references to foreign factors in this article. This is no accident. The influence of the international environment and external actors on Georgia's development has been quite important and at some stages even crucial.

Among the underlying causes of Gamsakhurdia's defeat was the presence of only Russian negative influence at that time, both in terms of the ethnic conflicts in particular and in terms of political culture in general.

The pretend changes of the Shevardnadze era, which were followed by quite real transformations, were in large part the result of the West's interest and policy. Although these factors did not completely cancel out Russia's negative role, they did balance it.

At the present stage of development, the key importance in the success of institutional development and the consolidation of the political

system is linked to the foreign factor. Accession to NATO is decisive precisely for the establishment of a stable environment for Georgia's political and economic development. The defense umbrella will not only rule out Russia's negative influence as a possibility, but will also make political and economic liberalization irreversible. After joining NATO, the authorities will not be able to "taboo" different issues by labeling them as security-related.

10. Instead of conclusion: "Keep on building?"

"Keep on building!" – this campaign slogan of the ruling party should become a guiding motto first and foremost for the authorities themselves. Today they are successful at strengthening state institutions. At the same time, they always have to keep in mind the factor of political culture. To some extent, this is where the government's quite frequent leftist populism derives from. It is important for the authorities to maintain a reasonable balance between tactical concessions to society and strategic goals. Otherwise, this type of populism might, on the contrary, strengthen the traditional political culture.

The main challenge facing the government is strengthening those political institutions which do not serve the purpose of consolidating its power in the short run, namely, the local government and the judiciary. In addition, strengthening these institutions will enhance the stability of the political system and, as a consequence, will both help the incumbent government be successful and create the possibility for its members to remain in the political arena after a legitimate change of government. It has to be noted that in both cases (especially with local governance), the authorities again fear the prevalent political culture, although here too greater trust is required in the socializing influence of the institutions because the political culture can only be changed through action.

It has already been mentioned that the authorities are not obliged to think about the institutional strengthening of the opposition. The liberalization of the political system and the openness of the economic and education systems will naturally facilitate the establishment of the institution of political opposition. In addition, the authorities should not attempt to marginalize the existing opposition because this again might

affect the political culture. One of the main components of the participatory culture, pragmatism, which makes it possible to discuss conflicts in a civilized manner and exchange information among different groups, is still underdeveloped in Georgian political culture. Effectively, both the authorities and the opposition are suffering from so-called groupthink syndrome.

Another of the principal tasks before the authorities is to not get “locked in” and retain their ability to renew themselves. To succeed at that, it would be desirable if the authorities better clarified their main political values (e.g. their views of the role of state, individual rights, territorial and court systems) and start recruiting new people using precisely this value system, not solely personal loyalty or the often difficult to comprehend criterion of “professionalism”. This would be important first and foremost in developing government bureaucracy, although it would prove useful in party personnel policy as well.

Involving the conflict zones in this discourse will be extremely difficult because Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been developing in a different way over the last 15 years. The authorities’ attempts to introduce a new dynamism to the conflicts are evident, first of all in South Ossetia. Building an inclusive nation and changing the political culture accordingly will remain one of the main priorities for the government.

The authorities’ activities have thus far been aimed at liberalizing the political system and making it more stable. At the same time, it would be desirable if the authorities did not forget about the power-reforms dilemma which is so familiar to transitional countries. Any reform (reform could just as well be called modernization for our purposes here) requires political power, and staying in power is often achieved at the cost of the principles of the reforms. The young government should understand that, however successful and long their terms in office might turn out to be, the time will come to change the government, and precisely a stable political system will guarantee that this change will not require the complete disappearance of the incumbent government from the political arena.

Notes:

¹ John Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton University Press, 1988).

² Georgia's first post-communist president was overthrown in the "Christmas Coup" in January 1992.

³ What is implied here is that Gamsakhurdia did not even try to make any substantial changes to the state machinery.

⁴ Compare with "amoral familism" – Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of Backward Society* (The University of Chicago, 1958); see the Georgian translation of the term in Aleksandre Rondeli, *Small Country in International Relations* (Tbilisi, 2003), p. 254.

⁵ Gigi Tevzadze, *Georgia: Simulations of Power* (Tbilisi, 1999)

⁶ Michael McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship," *World Politics*, Vol. 54 (January 2002): 212-244.

⁷ This speculation proves once again that prognoses should be avoided in political science. The constitutional changes initiated in late 2006, as well as further possible amendments, might give a different direction to the developments, not to mention other, less predictable and more surprising variables.

David Darchiashvili

1.

Georgia still has a long way to go on its path toward a united, strong and, most importantly, liberal democratic state. The latter has no alternative for Georgia because a) liberal democracy is the most suitable form of freedom of the individual, and in my opinion, members of Georgian society are a freedom-loving people; and b) Georgian statehood is greatly indebted to and dependent precisely on the support of liberal democratic countries.

At this stage, the foundation has been laid for achieving the above objective: A noticeable portion of the population is taking a sincere interest in issues of statehood and deems living in the sociopolitical system of statehood as a serious and desirable endeavor. This has been particularly apparent since 2003. The 2003 revolution would not have taken place or would have been conducted with different slogans and had a different nature if the sense of citizenship and statehood had not developed in a insignificant part of Georgian society from the very outset.

The revival of Georgian statehood takes its origin first and foremost in the ethnic nationalism of the late 1980s. This spirit and ideology was smoldering inside the Soviet nomenclature system latently or, to be more precise, without organizing guidance of the state, for decades, and took the shape of a struggle for statehood in the last two decades of the 20th century. Despite manifestations of its naivety, precociousness and often inhumanity by initially romantic, or ethnic (these are not mutually exclusive), nationalism, it later paved the way for rising civic nationalism.

Today civic nationalism dominates the official discourse. It strengthens and cements with patriotism the quest to establish universal imperatives of democratic and human rights. Without civic nationalism, corruption and organized crime would be more widespread. Without society's nationalist self-identification, aspirations to prosperity would

not entail the realization of the need to formulate independent policy and accordingly – especially due to Georgia’s complex geopolitics – would again encourage undemocratic tendencies. Only Russia wants a Georgia without statehood, and now, as in the past, the processes which are under way there are not even remotely democratic.

And yet, the Georgian project – to become an accomplished state – is only half-way through at best. One thing that the Georgian public and its political elite have failed to achieve is dramatically changing the political culture and making it even somewhat similar to its Euro-Atlantic counterparts. However, this is a boon in a certain sense: our political culture and the values and rules of coexistence certainly have their advantages. But in general, this widens the gap between us and our main guarantors of security, both the EU and the United States.

The point is essentially this:

The Western people, especially the politicians and officials in the focus of our attention, attach great importance to the established rules of action, the planning of one’s steps, political correctness both in choice of vocabulary and in action. In its entirety, this is a political culture immersed in – and perhaps even tired of – centuries of experience. It tends to be cautious about surprises. It was no accident that the US military administration installed in Afghanistan in 2003 preferred to deal with more predictable “warlords” and “strongmen” (leaders of armed groups) than with religious or tribal leaders with which it was much less familiar – even if it was assumed or at least not contested that the former might have been much more suspicious from an ethical standpoint.

Second, the West is a stranger to viewing the world in black and white. There is relativity in everything. The open society doctrine, according to which no single theory or group can claim to hold a monopoly on the truth, is Western. Human rights also derive from here. One of the reasons for the weakening of the Bush administration’s positions of late has been the fact that it has been oblivious to all of this. And I will not even mention the acute sense of the supremacy of law and conflict of interests in the West.

Unfortunately, these generally sound principles, whose benefits are so evident in the successes of the Western political and economic

systems, sometimes manifest themselves in a degenerately inflexible, bureaucratic form because of human foibles and humankind's limited capabilities. As a result, people who implement humanitarian aid or development and democratization projects in countries like Georgia and who are not always the most successful and progressive representatives of the Western bureaucracy are often unwilling to make efforts to understand the local social and political nuances and prefer excessively rigid adherence to instructions. They are trying to fit the local reality into the principles of democracy, supremacy of law and human rights as perceived through the prism of their personal interpretation of the instructions. This might not be the best method for building a viable liberal democratic system; thinking otherwise would constitute a "black-and-white mindset" and thus, a deviation from the Western principles of relativity and open society. At any rate, it is clear that the pace of establishment of the supremacy of law and democracy should stand the test of applicability to the imperatives of national and regional security.

But let us go back to the positive aspects of our political culture. The understanding of Western institutions and political culture is gradually improving in Georgia today, but the country has not yet rid itself of naivety, infantilism and impatience. These are manifest in the popularity of operating with the notions of "good" and "bad", "right" and "wrong", which willy-nilly is further encouraged by the inflexibility of some representatives of international agencies.

The view that "good" is what the person who experiences it thinks to be good or right still prevails in Georgia. As a result, recurrences of the ethos of the Russian saying: "[if] I am the boss, you are a fool, [and if] you are the boss, I am a fool" sometimes occur in politics. I will not deliberate much about Russia here, but Georgia's problem (and perhaps its chance too) is that "the boss" is a notional concept here and, as such, is not directly contingent on the actual position of power, and many people, regardless of their status, deem themselves the epitome of truth and wisdom.

As a result, the lack of mutual support, the lack of desire or ability to reach a compromise, the tactics of show of force, intimidation and blackmail still prevail in political circles, and these are in

no way characteristics of people in power alone. In addition, the government has more information, a better vantage point to see the general picture, and they even might be thinking more about the need for a dialogue with at least some of their opponents. But ultimately, the dialogue is taking place very slowly and painfully, if at all. Mistrust prevails.

And the outcome of all this is that the especially tired and cautious part of the Western world, as well as those who tend to view international developments only as interpreted into the language of generalized instructions and manuals, are looking for – and finding – excuses to justify their suspicions and lack of desire to develop closer relations.

Together with other reasons, be they derived from geopolitics or flaws in the democratization process, this socio-psychological one is, in my opinion, key to finding the explanation for our ignorance of whether we will knock on NATO's door by 2008 or if Russia closes the doors that remain open to us by that time.

The only way out is this: social anthropologists, historians and representatives of other branches of social sciences know that values, symbols and words are determined historically and culturally. The same events, facts, verbally expressed notions and principles acquire different meanings in different historical periods and cultures. Accordingly, there is a need to “conquer” the depths of social culture and social psychology to lay a solid foundation for both Georgian-European and internal Georgian dialogue and mutual understanding.

2.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia¹ was certainly not uneducated or completely deprived of political intuition and logic. Otherwise, although he would still be able to become popular (mass psychoses are a possibility in preindustrial – and not only preindustrial – cultures), he would not have been able to create the *Round Table* electoral bloc and would not have been able or willing to run in and win the elections while the Soviet Union still existed. A number of recollections, notes and reports show that the next political generation's much-coveted idea of the Eurasian energy and communications corridor was not at all alien

to him. He managed to consolidate the Georgian ethno-nationalist energy and focus it in a direction which was both detrimental to the Soviet nomenclature and favorable for building independent statehood. Unfortunately, his disregard for the interests and perceptions of ethnic minorities, lack of desire or ability to start a political or social dialogue, and the influences of the Soviet central power – which remain a factor to this day – led the Gamsakhurdia regime to suffer a fiasco.

The Gamsakhurdia regime was too short-lived to take any sort of clear-cut shape. A joke gained currency later on: Q: What is the difference between Gamsakhurdia's and Shevardnadze's presidencies? A: We let the latter take his time, but not the former. But judging by emerging trends, his regime was taking the shape of a populist, infantile, and accordingly, extremely unstable political system.

Gamsakhurdia proved unable to create and control loyal and efficient security and law enforcement bodies. At the same time, against the backdrop of rising ethno-socialist populism, he alienated not only late-Soviet bureaucracy – which had by that time started to evince the signs of bourgeoisie – and the criminal underworld, but also academic and student circles, which traditionally advocated individual freedoms. In this situation, offending sensibilities of a number of political parties, which mainly consisted more of clientele rallying around several leaders than of substantial segments of a clearly defined constituency, was a relatively minor problem.

The fact that Gamsakhurdia's immediate entourage was mostly incompetent and/or self-interested also played an important negative role.

In short, Gamsakhurdia managed to dangerously diminish his social support base in a matter of a few months. He mainly relied only on the “court camarilla” and the ambivalent, less-knowledgeable lower-class masses. Against him were his political opposition: liberal intellectual circles, diverse groups engaged in commercial activities, the young “street elite”, criminal world, and the organized part of ethnic minority communities. These groups had nothing in common, nor were they connected with the Kremlin. But the toppling of the Gamsakhurdia regime by Russian-backed armed people was more of a result of Gamsakhurdia's erroneous domestic policy than of the conspirators' professionalism.

Neither should it be forgotten that Gamsakhurdia's drama unfolded in an environment unfavorable for Georgia's political development: neither the EU nor the United States were inclined to facilitate the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Their active support for independence of the Baltic States was an exception of sorts.

3.

The second Shevardnadze era – his “second coming” to Georgia² – which spanned from 1992 until 2003, was divided into several distinctive phases. Initially, until approximately mid-1995, he was busy with the problem of consolidation of power. In this period, Shevardnadze combined cooperation with “warlords” with democratic impulses of giving numerous political parties equal chances. Accordingly, he maintained the status of a more or less acceptable figure for the diverse political forces which toppled Gamsakhurdia. But each of these groups had their interests and views, and balancing them out could not continue endlessly. As it became clear in time, Shevardnadze too had his interests and vision.

At that time, Shevardnadze was seen as an indispensable option because the majority of citizens were not particularly fond of either Gamsakhurdia's supporters, who were fighting the civil war, or Tengiz Kitovani's and Jaba Ioseliani's armed units,³ who were on the other side of the barricades; neither side inspired hopes of stability, democracy and solution of the country's problems. As for getting one's bearings among the myriad of political parties, it was objectively difficult. There were several more or less reputable political groups, but their professional and electoral prospects were never promising.

Shevardnadze had his foreign political charm too. His arrival coincided with Georgia's recognition as an entity under international law, which was an outcome of the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union. Shevardnadze was known in international circles as the liberal foreign minister of the perestroika era. This afforded both material dividends in the form of foreign political assistance and social and psychological comfort and reassurance that he would sooner or later return to normalcy a country which was embroiled in ethnic and civil conflicts.

And in 1995, that time seemed to have come – although at the cost of handing control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Russia and accession to the CIS, which was considered a step back toward Russia, but Shevardnadze did manage to end the civil war and check the rampage of the unruly armed groups.

The new constitution put the president, i.e. Shevardnadze, beyond the reach of efficient parliamentary control, but at the same time the president could not dismiss parliament or fully control and consolidate the political spectrum. The adoption of a number of laws and giving the police its functions ushered in a hitherto unprecedented good business environment, which was important.

But from approximately 1999, the country entered a different period, which was also not free of paradoxes. That year, Georgia withdrew from the CIS Collective Security Treaty and joined the Council of Europe, a move which was preceded by a number of law enforcement reforms. The ex-Russian army generals at the Defense Ministry were replaced by pro-Western figures. A little before that, a dream came true: Georgia was declared a corridor for transporting Azerbaijani oil to the West.

But at the same time started the perturbations of the new constitutional system and the atrophy of the vital functions of the young Georgian state. Parliament's transformation into an informal trading floor for private or state-owned company stocks became increasingly noticeable. Simultaneously, the increasingly strong police assumed the function of racketeering or "protecting" businesses, which before was done by illegal armed groups. The courts and the Bar were gradually becoming submersed in the bog of corruption. Most importantly, organized crime also got involved in the process of establishing clan-based governance, which is usual for fragile and corrupt political systems. Gradually, it became hard to understand whether it was high-level police officials and influential politicians who sometimes resorted to criminal kingpins' services or vice versa. At the dawn of the new millennium, about two thirds to three quarters of the businesses operated in the "gray" sector. The country got close to the "mafia-dominated state" model, which is known to political scientists and in which citizens go to criminals, not the state, for protection and guarantees.

As for the paradox, the following considerations can be cited as its tentative explanation:

- a) Society had only the desire to attain real statehood, but lacked the relevant experience to do so. In that situation, everything would easily revert to the swamp of chaos and corruption unless the ruling elite itself would take political responsibility and demonstrate a strong will to build appropriate institutions not only on paper;
- b) Shevardnadze proved to lack strategic vision and the ability to carry out long-term plans. If democratic stability were to have evolved in Georgia on its own, he would not have minded. But these things do not happen on their own. After he consolidated his power, Shevardnadze apparently lost interest in further work and struggle. His family members became an inseparable part of the newly established clan.

There remained yet another significant unresolved problem which prevented Shevardnadze from forming his idea of the inherent qualities of the main consumer and creator of the Georgian state – the Georgian nation. Against the backdrop of unresolved Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts, Shevardnadze vacillated both between the civic and ethnic concepts of the nation and between the pro-Russian and pro-Western foreign political orientations. The more displeasure grew in the West with Georgia's unaccomplished statehood, the more Shevardnadze, who turned out to have exhausted his ability to reverse the negative dynamic, instinctively leaned toward Russia.

However, as the years passed, civic consciousness and the ability to realize the existence of problems grew in society. The pluralism of political life and the media facilitated the process, as did the growing number of civil organizations – one more, this time around positive – characteristic of the Shevardnadze regime. As a result, these factors, or forces, which Shevardnadze himself fostered, toppled the ageing president as he betrayed their ideals.

4.

According to the official and already accepted – including internationally – definition of the November 2003 events,⁴ it was a peaceful,

democratic, so-called color revolution – a term denoting the process of transformation of some of the communist/authoritarian regimes. Of course, there are opponents of these definitions too, mostly among the votaries of conspiracy theories and/or supporters of previous regimes. Essentially, assessments may vary because social developments mainly take place or are reflected in the mind and consciousness. Even abstracting from personal political sympathies as much as possible, I would still call those events a revolution.

According to the definition from the theory of revolutions, these sorts of events are characterized by mass frustration with the existing social and economic situation; the revolution is associated with imbalance among components of the social system, namely, political, cultural and other subsystems, resources and demands; a revolution means overthrowing a political regime by a mass movement in an extra-constitutional way; revolution implies not only mass mobilization and change of regime, but also fundamental social, economic and cultural changes; revolution is also associated with a fast transformation of government and class structures of society, which take place amid the conflict between the elite and the lower classes. Modern studies focus increasingly on ideological and cultural components of revolution as well.

Revolutions can be relatively peaceful or bloody. Revolts and coups are different in that they do not transform institutions and are less concerned about finding a legal or ideological vindication for the change of government.

Of course, none of the actual historical events unfolds in full accordance with the ideal abstract presumptions of any theory. The Georgian Rose Revolution was unique among both revolutions in general and so-called color revolutions. But it was a revolution because the Shevardnadze regime had incurred ultimate mass displeasure; his opponents proved strong and capable enough to mobilize tens of thousands of people for days; the change of government could not be contained within the constitutional limits; transformation of both institutions and the social structure of society started and continues; both the constitutional balance between state institutions and the composition of the political elite has changed. The fact that there are representatives of the old regime among the political and economic elite is

not in conflict with the change. If nothing else, the roles of these particular individuals are quite different now. And finally, changes in the official rhetoric, symbols and education system clearly point to cultural and ideological transformation.

It has to be said that, besides the political opposition, several civil organizations also played an important role in the revolution. The process was guided by not merely organizational, but ideological leadership which had its vision and knew what fundamental changes were to be launched in the country and how.

The new Georgian political regime, which is justly associated first and foremost with the figure of President Saakashvili, is both revolutionary and transitional. The principle of supremacy of law is not rejected: there is strong consensus among the ruling elite on building a liberal democracy and integrating into the Euro-Atlantic area, and supremacy of law is a prerequisite for this. But in practice, transformation is tinged with revolutionary colors and is affected by the problematic impact of the imperatives of state security and the combat against counterrevolution and organized crime. This is manifested in the disproportionately growing political weight of individual institutions and persons and in extra-legal actions.

The contention by the opponents of the revolutionary regime that all this is taking place solely on account of the elite's love for money and power is moot. In many cases, Georgian law turned out to be powerless to redress damages to the budget that were caused by corrupt or criminal dealings by dismantling the illegal networks or "triangles" behind these dealings. As a result, the executive had to shoulder the burden of combating lawlessness instead of the judiciary.

Of course, this is risky, as is the insignificant representation of the opposition to Saakashvili in parliament and local governments – as the old maxim goes, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The rule of just people has never been enough to uphold justice – appropriate institutions are required. But the kind of balance among the institutions and political forces which results in impossibility to reach a decision or revenge by criminal or xenophobic forces is no less dangerous; precisely these types of forces were influential in the final period of Shevardnadze's presidential tenure.

This circle of problems – finding a balance between authoritarianism and supremacy of law, between liberalism and democracy – is the main dilemma facing the Saakashvili government. The situation is further aggravated by the complicated foreign political background to this dilemma. The Russian authorities are making no secret of their desire to topple “the Saakashvili regime”. It is also clear that the Kremlin’s desire could not be stirred up by selfless loyalty to democracy; and if it does attain what it wants, the project of building a stable liberal democratic state in Georgia, which is currently being implemented, albeit with difficulties, will be postponed indefinitely.

The successes of the Saakashvili government are the following: He revived the public’s belief in its ability to build a state and that there is an opportunity to do so. Crime and corruption no longer reign with impunity, and it is hard to overestimate not only the structural, but also the cultural significance of this. Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian relations have gained a promising, if risky, dynamics. The government managed to enter the Intensive Dialogue phase of talks with NATO and to secure new multi-million dollar assistance programs. Of course, the process is neither completed nor irreversible – I discussed the reasons above. Hopefully, the ruling elite fully realizes the threats of the aforementioned dilemma and the next two years will be spent on consolidating the rule of law.

What should be noted with particular emphasis are the new developments in the education, cultural and ideological spheres. For the first time since restoration of national sovereignty, the state education system and newly founded Public Broadcaster are beginning to introduce the principles of open society. The new national curriculum, the Public Broadcaster’s code of ethics, revamped faculties at the two leading universities and new programming on the Public Broadcaster channel attest to this.

5.

The self-evident weakness of the opposition is in part an outcome of the revolution itself. By supporting the revolution and its leader, a large part of the population denounced those who denounced the revolution. But this is not, and cannot be, the only reason. What’s more, the revolution happened four years ago. The new opposition is

incipient within the revolutionaries themselves. The number of disenchanted ordinary citizens is growing too, because no revolution or simple change of government can meet everyone's expectations.

Presumably, the opposition's approval ratings should gradually rise in this situation. However, unless the authorities themselves make dramatic mistakes, the current balance in the political arena is unlikely to be upset for the following reasons:

- a) Saakashvili has established himself as a charismatic leader. Despite his sometimes emotional tone and aversion to criticism, he remains the most popular politician. He has proven that he has a talent for reversing/changing rash actions or statements and finding a way out of critical situations with minimal losses. Until recently, he managed to find a balance between populism, nationalism, and a rhetoric befitting the builder of a rule-of-law state in a manner which maintained for him support from social circles with different interests and views. It is unlikely that he will lose these skills in the foreseeable future.
- b) It seems that Georgian society wants a strong and popular leader during the transition stage. The social demands of a large number of people are law and order and economic growth. Despite problems in both areas, society takes note of positive changes compared to the "dark ages" of the Shevardnadze period.
- c) The existing constitutional model and electoral system encourage the establishment of the "winner takes all" principle. In conjunction with the popularity of the ruling party leader, the Georgian electoral system and broadness of presidential powers decrease the opposition's chances.
- d) The opposition finds it hard to formulate a clear-cut electoral platform which would cater adequately to the social and economic demands of a large part of the population. Some opposition parties have managed to make some progress in this regard, but they are not strong enough individually, whereas a platform for joining their forces does not exist. In addition, the opposition chose the path of extremely radical criticism of the government. They seem to emulate Saakashvili in this respect, who was irreconcilable in his confrontation with

Shevardnadze. However, this tactic can be justified only against an extremely unsuccessful and unpopular government. Most of the opposition spectrum is made up of old familiar faces, and it is unlikely that these people will manage to become more popular than they already are. The newcomers who appear from time to time among the opposition's ranks are unable to compete on par with not only the authorities, but even with the long-standing opposition.

The opposition usually cites intimidation of its supporters (especially from among business circles), an electoral system that serves the purpose of strengthening the already strong, and the rigging of elections as the explanations for its lack of success. The latter argument is least convincing, as it is not endorsed in any international or local election monitoring report since the revolution. Of course, there have been, and still are, irregularities during the elections, but they certainly have not played a decisive role in the opposition's weakness.

The second reason, however, is worth taking into account. Neither the seven percent barrier in the parliamentary elections, nor the mixed system of elections to the Tbilisi city council cultivate pluralism in the elected bodies. But neither can it be said that these systems are downright undemocratic. As mentioned above, these sorts of rules demand more efforts and unity from the opposition.

As for the intimidation of the pro-opposition business circles by the authorities, the accusation certainly merits an independent inquiry. If it is established that there have been instances of intimidation/blackmail, which would require civic courage and cooperation with the court from the aggrieved businessmen, the authorities will not be able to shun responsibility for this. But the problem here might lie not only in legal, but also systemic social, political and psychological aspects: most Georgian businesses come from the gray sector past. Accordingly, they are institutionally interested in being close and loyal to the authorities in order to avoid losing the influence they attained in a less-than-legal manner. In this situation, any government would be greatly tempted to take unfair advantage of businesses' political weakness. This is a major problem for the country's liberal democratic development, but it is doubtful that uprooting it will not take years, even if there is the necessary political will to do so.

A similar problem exists in relations between the law enforcement and judiciary systems. The latter was until recently staffed with corrupt and incompetent people. There were exceptions, but their existence only proved the pattern. The young elite who came to the executive branch quickly purged the law enforcement system and started to fight organized crime. Several guilty judges were also exposed. This resulted in confusion and fear in the court system, and the judiciary ended up under the political authorities' informal influence. The year 2006 saw both debates on this problem and new systemic changes to make the courts independent. These changes show that many people in the government realize the risks that the weak judiciary poses to efforts to build a liberal democratic Georgia. However, changing the situation radically takes time, and 2007 is decisive in this respect.

6-7.

The opposition might gain strength if the authorities prove unable to address the flaws in the process of the establishment of the principle of rule of law and, at the same time, to enact efficient market mechanisms of social security. The former worries the West, local human rights organizations, and the part of the general public which has civic consciousness; the latter concerns all socially vulnerable strata, which constitute a very large number of people in Georgia. The opposition should naturally keep focusing on these issues, although currently it is in a disadvantageous position because the authorities do demonstrate that they act on these problems and remain popular, whereas the opposition chose the tactic of engaging in radical confrontation and seeking to totally discredit the government. This tactic of the opposition is in conflict with its own declared values because precisely the government, however many flaws and mistakes there might be in the process, is seen as a promoter of precisely these values. It is the government which has to make dramatic mistakes, desist from addressing social and legal problems and transform into a self-centered, exclusive elite in order for the voice of the opposition to reach hundreds of thousands of people.

There is a theoretical chance of emergence of the opposition of a different type – the “red-brown”, i.e. national-socialist one. There

is some potential support base for this in society, especially if such groups enlist financial and political support from abroad or from the local criminal underworld. The 2006 developments and arrest of Igor Giorgadze's supporters showed, however, that in practice, the possibilities of forming and strengthening this type of the political opposition are limited: the strength of the government and pragmatism of a large part of the population are the most effective deterrents against the emergence of national socialism.

Unless the political processes are accompanied by sudden perturbations, only relatively fringe groups will exist in Georgia besides the ruling force. However, another serious political force may emerge from part of the present-day opposition and one of the groups within the ruling party. But this is not very likely, at least until the next parliamentary and presidential elections, because this would require Saakashvili's assent and support, or a major fall of his approval ratings.

8-10.

The current Georgian political system is not stable if we decree the supremacy of law and other principles of liberal democracy as prerequisites for stability. For now, the country heavily depends on several leaders of liberal democratic views, including Saakashvili himself. They have their social support base – of which the dynamic young generation merits special mention as their views combine patriotism and openness to the inevitable realities of globalization. The leaders have the support of middle-age and older generations too, although these groups tend to be more amorphous in their views and values. However, among youth and other age groups there are both people who want a faster pace of democratic transformation and nationalist and xenophobic circles. The activity of these is contained by the strength of the government and their own philistine inertness. But for the liberal democratic processes to become irreversible, there is a need for firm institutional support: stable and strong liberal parties as an organizing force, which should rally people with civic consciousness, courts, professional civil service, networks of community organizations, and strong and independent media.

Of course, significant progress has been made in these directions. The police, universities, the Georgian Public Broadcaster and public schools are all different today. But these and other institutions have not stood the test yet in terms of how well they would be able to continue to develop and serve the purpose of the modernization of society in case of a change of government.

As noted above, the short-term prospects for a stable multi-party system are dim. If the government manages to find an effective continuation for its course toward the country's modernization, Georgia will be governed by a single dominant party. At best, its top tier will remain united and emphatically reform-oriented, but locally, at the middle and lower tiers, careerism and favoritism will begin to flourish. This is dangerous, and it is why the Georgian political project is paradoxical: reforms are difficult without a dominant political force, but the existence of a dominant political force is systemically conducive to the creation of a social stratum which is against the reforms. The way out of this paradox is the existence and proper functioning of strong and independent social institutions like universities, media and non-governmental organizations. As for the political elite, who on no account want to artificially weaken their own positions (and perhaps they should not), they should spare no effort to reform the judiciary and make it independent in order to firmly establish the principle of supremacy of law. If this proves successful, if the dominant rule of Saakashvili and his team does not transform into multi-party pluralism, but brings about a strong and authoritative judiciary, a powerful network of civil organizations and private business organizations, a higher education system which is integrated into the leading Western academic circles and a secondary education system which cultivates critical and independent thinking – then the country will have a chance to remain a member of the community of civilized nations when the Saakashvili government is eventually replaced.

The desirable prospect of this kind is threatened from inside the country by the eternal instinct of “zest for power”, which is especially noticeable at the lower and middle levels of government – at least while the high-level officials sincerely (if with excessive self-confidence) remain reform-oriented. But a no less dangerous threat which is to be reckoned with comes from outside: there is plenty of evidence

that the failure of the Georgian project is one of the main goals of Russian foreign policy. It is unlikely that anything will change in the next three years. This makes the tasks facing the Georgian political system very difficult; on the one hand, this necessitates further consolidation of power and the growth of its influence, and on the other hand, this makes Georgia an object of criticism of its allies given the weakness of its democratic institutions.

Will the Saakashvili government be able to prove to its own citizens and the international community that the strong president, strong law enforcement system and the “winner-takes-all” electoral system are all needed precisely for the country’s modernization and democratization at the current difficult transitional stage? Yet another paradox is that the president alone does not – and cannot – supply an answer to this question: for the successful completion of the country’s modernization phase, support is needed from the seemingly fringe opposition, monitoring and advocacy nongovernmental organizations and the media too. In order to accomplish the project of modernization of the country and stay the course toward liberal democracy, more efforts should be made to ensure mutual understanding and to reach an agreement on the “rules of the game” between the strong government and much weaker democratic circles outside the positions of power. The weakness of the latter is neither immense nor particularly desirable.

Notes:

¹ A nationalistically colored dissident in Soviet times, after first multiparty elections, Gamsakhurdia became chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet (in 1990) and the president of Georgia (in 1991). Under his leadership, the Georgian government organized an independence referendum and declared secession from the Soviet Union. Following an armed coup in December 1991, Gamsakhurdia was ousted. His supporters continued to put up armed resistance to the successive Shevardnadze’ regime until Gamsakhurdia’s death in 1993.

² From the early 1970s to the mid-1980s he was the first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party.

³ Warlords of the late 1980s-early 1990s. The latter was also famous for having an extensive criminal past and a moderately successful career as a novelist.

⁴ After parliamentary elections of November 2, mass protests took place, led by opposition leaders and civic activists, condemning the alleged falsification of the election results. Eventually, the protests grew into the so-called “Rose Revolution”.

1. Problems and achievements after independence

The major problem and difficulties that we have encountered in Georgia since gaining independence have had to do with the establishment of the statehood mentality among the Georgian people.

Georgia was not a political agent when it was one of the republics of the Soviet Union with a puppet government at the top. Consequently the Soviet period Georgians had almost no statehood mentality. All that brought the population together around the term “Sakartvelo” was culture, literature, history with its past heroic narrative and among all of these was sports too. (Everyone remembers how sincerely patriotic the support of “Dynamo” Tbilisi, the major soccer team, was.) True, there was also a dissident movement; however it was not overwhelmingly popular among people before Gorbachev’s perestroika. Any effort to extend the cultural patriotism to the political dimension was extremely risky. One of the attempts resulted in shooting at a demonstration in 1956.¹ The student demonstration of 1978 for the defense of the Georgian language’s official status as state language was successful, though extremely risky.

The events described above were more of an exception rather than a rule. After gaining independence, the movement which was led by politically inexperienced romantics (being a dissident and courageous does not automatically make a person a politician), Georgia, without any clear political views or rigid political course, turned out to be unprepared in the world political arena. It was clear that achieving independence (which was a natural outcome of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the tragedy of April 9² was not something necessary for reaching this goal) was not an aim in itself and there were more complicated challenges to face. It has become clear that the population of Georgia remained politically immature and inert even after achieving the much desired independence. The example for the

above-mentioned is that after being disappointed in the previous candidates the new leader was elected by the vast majority of votes. (90 percent voted for Gamsakhurdia; the same number voted for Shevardnadze too, although he had a radically different political course, and the same happened in the case of Saakashvili.) This indicates that it is easy to gain the trust of Georgian people, who choose to make decisions based on emotions rather than on sober reflection. (For example, we can remember the emphasis put on Z. Gamsakhurdia's handsome appearance by his supporters.) It is a usual habit among the Georgian populace to entrust their fate to a charismatic individual rather than examine the political program presented by this individual and his party. (On the global scale, however Georgia appreciates European and Western values. The evidence for that is the ousting of Z. Gamsakhurdia, who went against the general tide.)

I think it is an achievement that the political perception of Georgians, which did not exist at all, was eventually born. As any infant, it is very weak as yet. The criterion for successes and shortcomings, in my opinion, depends on how fast the statehood mentality grows. Having one's own flag in the UN is of big symbolic as well as real importance. This does not mean, however, that our statehood is established. Georgia should realize, as in the famous fable, that it is yet like a frog fallen in sour cream that must fiercely struggle in order to feel under its feet the rigidity of the butter that is accomplished statehood.

Police reform is to be taken as success in the process of building a state. Although the fact is that the crime rate has not decreased but rather increased. Still, it is not only crime statistics that matter, but the police's reputation as well. It is a victory already when the streets are cleansed from the corrupted, easily-bribed policemen. Presently, the new police recruits have quite a good salary and they have no incentive to take bribes, and this ugly habit has been quickly disappearing among the population as well.

It is impossible to create a state without respect for law. Before becoming independent, laws in Georgia were perceived as something alien and hostile and violating them was a cool, "macho" thing to do. The private and state sectors were quite far from each other (one of

the results was the amount of litter thrown in public places). This attitude has not changed much, though there are some promising improvements. And bringing under control the taxation system and requiring businesses to install cash registers were painful but necessary changes. Without extracting mandatory taxes from the population on a regular basis, the previous vicious circle will still remain: the state budget does not receive income from taxes, so, the state cannot pay salaries, and if there are no salaries why (and how) should I pay taxes, etc.

With respect to politics, Georgia has not yet reached the satisfactory security level. The territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are lost and there will always be threat of insecurity from the northern neighbor unless we join NATO. The membership procedure seems pretty difficult and problematic, though. It is sort of an insurmountable predicament: the situation within Georgia is not secure, the territories are lost, and the inner conflicts still remain to be resolved. These are the reasons why NATO is not eager to admit Georgia as a member country. Without becoming a member, however, it is almost impossible to resolve the conflicts mentioned above.

The unequivocal orientation towards the West that began during the period of Shevardnadze is still to be evaluated as an accomplishment. The clear political course, though risky, is better than being politically unresolved and spineless. Georgia cannot remain on the sidelines of the struggle of the great political powers. Georgia has to take risky moves in this universal political “poker”. Therefore, it was a good decision for Georgia to join the anti-terror alliance and sent its military contingent to Iraq. These prove that in the international arena we are a small, less vital, but still active player that is able to bear responsibility.

The education reform and joining the Bologna process are, in my opinion, necessary measures to take. Notwithstanding the fact that it proved to be too severe for some professors and had some shortcomings when described in detail, strategically it was the correct thing to do. It is not a success yet but a step taken towards it. There is one vitally important thing: students should be motivated by the belief that after graduating from university and receiving education very similar

to western standards, they will be able to start working and earn their livelihood independently. Otherwise the reform cannot overcome the apathy that existed throughout years in Tbilisi's universities.

With respect to employment in Georgia, the situation is quite dismal: thousands and thousands of Georgian citizens live abroad hunting either for legal or even illegal jobs to sustain their families back home. The prospects for finding a solution to this major problem in the near future are rather gloomy.

2. The three presidents

Zviad Gamsakhurdia

The gaining of independence and starting of the process of formation of Georgia as a responsible political agent is the only achievement made at the time when Gamsakhurdia held the office of president. At least formally, democratic institutions were established and a democratic constitution was drafted. By “formally”, I mean that the democratic system did not really function and Georgia was ruled by the “Round Table Independent Georgia” (which was ironically called the “Rock Band ‘Dictatorship’”). The authoritarian rule persisted all over: there was no freedom of media; free expression was stifled everywhere, including in parliament; appointments to positions within the institutions that are supposed to be self-regulating, like the television or the cinema studio, were dictated from above.

The hallmark for the downfall of the regime and the reason for the loss of popular support was its separation from the intelligentsia. Since the government was still weak and the political repressions did not have mass character – there were only few political prisoners, like Jaba Ioseliani and Gia Chanturia – the situation could be described as “comic dictatorship”. In fact, the abuses of the government roused public indignation and derision rather than fear and terror. Because the intelligentsia formed the informal ideological backbone of society, the government, through its alienation from the intelligentsia, lost chances for gaining ideological hegemony and public trust. The ideology advocated by government authorities – Guram Petriashvili, Mzia Bakradze – was not tolerated by society.

What was this ideology? It was “neo-nationalism”. The prefix “neo” signifies that before Gamsakhurdia such an ideology was held only by a certain segment of Georgian society which never was a major voice. Although, Georgia was theoretically oriented towards the West even during Gamsakhurdia’s time, in practice a model very different from the Western one was getting established. The idea was promoted that Georgia is special (unique, exceptional), it bears a particular divinely set spiritual, messianic mission for the rest of the world³, the “Georgian spirit should be clothed in a Georgian chokha (national costume)”, etc. According to Gamsakhurdia’s ideology, Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), the acclaimed father of the modern Georgian nation, was highly cherished and respected. However, the emphasis was made more on his nationalistic aspirations rather than on the no less essential part of Ilia’s mentality – liberalism and Europeanism. The Georgian nationality was proclaimed as a more important, mystical phenomenon than Western civilization and its liberalism and emphasis on the rights of an individual. Everyone remembers how the philosopher Merab Mamardashvili⁴ was heckled at the meeting of the National Forum when he stated: “Nationality is of a great value, however the truth is still of a greater value”; this he stated to oppose the national, or ethnocentric hysteria, which came to the fore after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Gamsakhurdia’s government did all it could to encourage this pseudo-mystical national hysteria. During Gamsakhurdia’s regime the pro-European tide that represented the mainstream of the Georgian aspirations receded. On the contrary, the Georgian folklore was *artificially* being brought to fashion by purposefully extending the time allotted for it on television. For example, the famous TV program “Iluzioni”, which showed masterpieces of Western cinematography and introduced European civilization models to Georgian society, was cancelled. The essentially anti-European national program that Gamsakhurdia tried to institute was unacceptable for the vast majority of Georgian society and the ideology of Gamsakhurdia’s administration lost ground even before its removal from power.

One important point to be highlighted with respect of Gamsakhurdia’s national program: this program was of an extremely ethnocentric nature. “Georgia for the Georgians” was the slogan that clearly reflects its essence. In another words, the real hosts in Georgia are

only the ethnic Georgians. As a result of the unbearable ideological climate, many ethnically non-Georgians left the country. Under this particular state of affairs the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia was terminated and transformed into “Samachablo”. This was followed by an armed conflict, which in turn made Georgians and Ossetians enemies in general when there was no ground for it (as opposed to what happened in Abkhazia, where ethnic tensions had been escalating since at least the 19th century). The flight of ethnic Ossetians from towns of Bakuriani and Kareli was an outcome of this armed conflict. In one of his interviews to a Russian newspaper Gamsakhurdia called Ossetians “A wild, illiterate nation”.⁵ Such politics served to strengthen Abkhaz separatist sentiment. The separatists had a good chance to become the main, and later even the only voice in Abkhazia following the logic: “Why should we desire integration with a country where we are acknowledged as guests and qualified as second-rate citizens?” At one meeting Gamsakhurdia insisted that the words “Apsua” (the name Abkhaz call themselves) and “Abkhaz” mean different things and that the real “Abkhaz” were a subgroup of the Georgians while the “Apsua” were a North Caucasian tribe that migrated to Georgia later – which was a sufficient reason for considering them as guests and not autochthons. It is because of this ethnocentrism that Andrey Sakharov call Georgia “a small empire”. This was a mistake, but only because the term “empire” has since ancient Rome been based on supra-ethnic political categories. The terms “ethnocentrism” and “empire” appear to be a contradiction.

The main causes of the fall of the Gamsakhurdia regime, as I have already outlined, are: (1) alienation of the government’s socio-political program from the intelligentsia⁶ and from the greater part of society; and (2) the neo-national ideology that the government offered to its citizens.

Yet the immediate reason for the downfall of the regime was the Yanaev coup in 1991 that aimed to restore the USSR. The alarmed President Gamsakhurdia abolished the Georgian National Guards and reduced them to a status of a police division. This was caused by his great fear that in case the coup succeeded, and in case the Georgian

military units bore the name of “National Guards”, the Soviet troops would invade Georgia; however, reducing them to the status of “militia”, could avoid major military action from the north. The coup failed. It played however a devastating role for the reputation of the president among the Georgian military. “That is how easily he gave up the independent Georgian army! While simultaneously on the TV-live he calmed down the population saying that the Moscow coup was not reason for any fear,” they said. One unit of the National Guards, headed by Tengiz Kitovani, disobeyed a presidential order and withdrew the soldiers subordinated to him to the Tbilisi Sea. Soon after, he came to Rustaveli Avenue and besieged parliament. After a few days of fighting, with numerous casualties from both sides, the government fell and Gamsakhurdia managed to escape from Georgia first to Armenia and later to Chechnya.

How can we qualify this? For some, as for Shevardnadze – who arrived in Georgia shortly afterwards – it was a “democratic revolution”, for others, supporters of Gamsakhurdia, a brutal coup with no legal foundation at all. I cannot say that the truth lies exactly in between those two extremes, however it shares the aspects of both: it truly was a democratic revolution in the sense that it toppled the antidemocratic authoritarian rule. Moreover, after the armed confrontation began, the largest part of the intelligentsia supported the Kitovani-Sigua-Ioseliani triumvirate – in other words, military takeover; the latter was also supported by most of the rest of society as well. Everyone feared that tyranny and oppressions would become more intense and ruthless if Gamsakhurdia were victorious, thus the “comic dictatorship” would turn into a real one. However, it is another issue whether if before the shooting started the public at large wanted to get rid of Gamsakhurdia at the cost of the civil war. I think the answer would have been “No”! Kitovani’s radical measure left no alternative to the society but to take sides. This was a great tragedy for Georgia and it could have been avoided. In my opinion, the Gamsakhurdia regime and his ideology had to be gotten rid of, though it could have happened through a longer, more tedious, but less violent process, surely not through Georgians shooting at each other. The ancient Greeks adage “Violence begets violence”, proved its validity in

Georgia, and I think, one of the key reasons the war in Abkhazia was lost was that the Georgians had their fellow Georgians, followers of Gamsakhurdia, as a threat from the back.

Shevardnadze

Eduard Shevardnadze's term in office played a key role in the process of the establishment of Georgia as a state. His popularity and reputation throughout the world and friendly relations with major Russian, European and American political figures were an asset for Georgia at that time. Even ardent opponents of Shevardnadze agreed that he should be president. This greatly helped stabilize the situation in the country.

Eduard Shevardnadze came to power during a very difficult, turbulent period, when actual power was in the hands of Jaba Ioseliani⁷ and Tengiz Kitovani (partially Tengiz Sigua as well). Jaba Ioseliani's personal initiative played a key role in bringing him to Georgia. Therefore, Shevardnadze had to take him and the other heroes of the "democratic revolution" into consideration whether he wanted to or not.

Shevardnadze came as a democratic ruler. This created a great opportunity for uniting Georgia, since the accent was made on liberal values and not on ethnocentric ones. Hence, the separatists in Abkhazia and Ossetia were left without their main arguments – that Georgians are narrow-minded, chauvinistic people who wished to portray them as second-class citizens. Unfortunately, the invasion of Sokhumi under the leadership of Kitovani and the initiation of war brought this process to a close. I do not think that Kitovani was following Kremlin orders and was given money for this. I believe that this has to do with his personal irresponsibility and lack of sober state of mind; however, whatever the reasons are, the outcome was the betrayal of Georgian strategic interests⁸. I do not share the assumption that Kitovani acted in accord with Shevardnadze and did not pursue personal aspirations. Shevardnadze can be accused of many flaws but not of extremism. I think it is impossible that he could have undertaken anything like that, especially when he did not feel yet solid enough as president.

The great success on the initial stage of the Shevardnadze rule is pacifying the country after the loss of the war in Abkhazia and reining in military groups, especially the Mkhedrioni. There is a list of virtues such as courage, wit and brains that Jaba Ioseliani apparently had, though he was not a progressively thinking person, not a person fit to be a statesman. This is evidenced by the fact that he did not join the Mkhedrioni to the Georgian national army even after Gamsakhurdia's government was succeeded by that of Shevardnadze. The Mkhedrioni became an armed gang bearing narrow clan interests. Jaba Ioseliani could not fall even under the definition of "a repenting criminal", for even after becoming a professor he still clung to the old, criminal doctrines and they seemed to be quite dear to his heart. It is true that the Mkhedrioni did temporarily limit the power of criminal authorities ("thieves in law"), however it itself was infected with the same mentality. Shevardnadze contributed a lot to the process of building of the Georgian state by terminating the Mkhedrioni and other criminal factions.

I think progress was made on the international level when a direct course towards the West was chosen without exacerbating the uneasy relations with Russia. Another step forward was getting rid of the romantic and impractical attitudes that existed in the Gamsakhurdia period.

No matter what happened afterwards, the establishment of the Citizens' Union, which was founded on European values, was a progressive endeavor as well.

The reason for the collapse of Shevardnadze's government, however, was corruption and the extreme poverty in which the people lived. Representatives of the Shevardnadze government were not only helpless in eliminating corruption, but also played an important role in it. The critical mistake that Shevardnadze made was when he surrounded himself with submissive, easily manipulated people and not with a professional and spirited entourage. Democratic values were infringed upon as well: evidence for the latter was the rigging of the elections to give the majority of the votes to the Citizens' Union in the Georgian parliament. Before the elections began, Shevardnadze used the Aslan Abashidze⁹ factor too: as a president to a subject, he

asked Aslan Abashidze to release Tengiz Asanidze, Abashidze's political rival – from prison knowing from the outset that Abashidze would refuse to obey. With this he alarmed the Georgian populace against Abashidze. Therefore the issue of rigging the elections, with the pretext that “let us tolerate the violation of the laws, lest Abashidze prevails”, was indisputably a great drawback for democracy. During Shevardnadze's term as president democracy was applied to the free speech and mass media, which, of course, is good, though nothing basically changed: the newspapers and some TV channels criticized the violations by state officials and shortcomings of the state policy openly, though for a long time, no actual changes followed. It is worth mentioning that the freedom of media, this high merit of democracy, played one of the key roles in putting an end to the regime. Shevardnadze failed to execute in Georgia what Putin had done in Russia in terms of clamping down on the media. He gave it a shot though – everyone can remember the security services' raid on “Rustavi-2” in 2001. The public, however, vigorously defended this democratic value. The TV show “Dardubala”¹⁰ gravely affected the reputation of the president (although this TV show was funny, I still did not like it because of the reason that often it had a clearly destructive message against the state and its system); it seems that the president's administration was ineffective and useless since he was not able to win back his name and authority. The background of the success of the “Rose Revolution” was in following: a disastrous government that is not able to undertake any constructive modifications is neither loved nor feared any more. In my opinion, it was wise for Shevardnadze to resign and “go home” and not to use weapons against the demonstration. Had he chosen the latter, the enraged people might have later demanded his execution (such threats were already audible). Fortunately, the Ceausescu scenario did not reoccur – this sin still bothers the Romanian people, thank God it did not happen to us.

Saakashvili

The political convictions of Saakashvili do not differ greatly from those of Shevardnadze. The removal from power of Shevardnadze

is in this respect entirely different from the situation with Gamsakhurdia: the reason why people came into contradiction with Gamsakhurdia was that they disagreed with him on the general-ideological level. In Shevardnadze's case, however, the public went against him because he violated those democratic principles that he himself claimed to be advocating, and the phony elections were clear evidence of this.

The main reason for the "Rose Revolution" was not the social dilemmas; the basis that gave rise to mutiny was the abuse of political belief and democratic principles. The latter undoubtedly means advancement in people's socio-political self-awareness, though I am still not sure whether the faked elections would have caused revolution had the government provided better social conditions for people and not created such frustration and disillusionment.

The international line remained the same: we strive for integration with the West and NATO. The difference, however, is that there is more emphasis on antagonism towards Russia.

I have already discussed the achievements of Saakashvili's government: the police and education reform, making cash registers mandatory and regulating the tax system. Another very impressive success was bringing Achara under the jurisdiction of the central administration. The energetic fight against corruption is also a very positive development, but not as positive when it bypasses the legal procedures. The government that claims to have chosen a course towards a free market economy should not use the cheap method of attaining popularity by "taking away from the rich and giving to the poor". Such Robin Hood-esque methods of "stripping off" the corrupted would help in placating people's passions up to some point, though in the long run they are hardly efficient. First of all, the social conditions of the people must be improved, the new government must provide new opportunities for employment. As a result of the "stripping off" policy, business representatives might get scared and avoid making large investments, which is critical for the development of the country (maybe this is why one of the world's wealthiest Georgians, Bidzina Ivanishvili, finances almost exclusively charity enterprises and shuns making serious investments in Georgia).

In my opinion, the activities undertaken by Saakashvili against criminal authorities (“thieves-in-law”) are vital; the previous government was not so determined in eliminating this powerful anti-social institution.

The legal reform is rather ambivalent: on the one hand, corrupt judges are dismissed, which is good; on the other hand, the latter are replaced by judges loyal to the government, which makes it very unlikely that the judiciary will operate independently. There were hasty changes made by the legislature – in particular, decreasing the minimum age of judges from 35 to 28 – in order to ensure that the new vacant positions could be filled by judges whom the government finds suitable. Such changes introduced in the legislation for the sake of dealing with minor, temporary situations are tokens of authoritarian rule.

The relatively minor achievements, like renovations of roads and highways, painting the façades of houses, building fountains, are quite conspicuous. The grand statue of Saint George on Freedom Square (I am not considering the aesthetic value of the statue here) is acceptable as a general symbol of victory of good over evil and as an artistic means for spurring optimism of the people, regardless of what religious confession they belong to.

However, if the statue is meant to indicate that the Rose Revolution has a heavenly guardian in the person of St. George – since both the “Rose Revolution” and the Achara upheaval happened on the days of the saint’s commemoration (November 23 and May 6) – then it rather bears witness to the government’s lack of self-confidence and feeling of insecurity than to the opposite.

3. The opposition

What are those values that the reinforced opposition should come together around? (Or, to put it otherwise, what are those values to gather around that will enable the opposition to become stronger?)

A powerful opposition is necessary for strengthening the democratic structure that as a result is vital for developing the country. Therefore, the President Saakashvili was sincere in his expression of disappointment at the opposition’s total failure to make an impact.

Around which principles should the opposition unite in order to become more powerful and influential among society at large? – Around those ideas, of course, that are popular among the people and admired by the ordinary citizens. I shall try to list them here:

- First of all, the idea of promoting the statehood mentality. To this end, the opposition should prove that it is not a constant enemy of the government, but rather a practical and beneficial body, in other words, it is a constructive and not destructive opposition. It might seem utopian, but the opposition should put the interests of Georgia above its own aspirations for power and should support the leading party in those enterprises that are objectively useful for our country. For example, if I am a teacher and there is another teacher less qualified applying for a vacancy appropriate for me, I should not be happy that the latter gives poor lessons, because after he leaves I am left with totally unprepared students. So, the opposition does damage to itself when it tries to use any way possible for criticizing the government. For example, the cases of Kvitsiani mutiny or the wrestlers' demonstration¹¹. At the time when the Sandro Girgvliani¹² process was taking place, the private interests and political concerns of the opposition were obviously gaining the upper hand. So the criticism, resulted in less practical, more emotion-based actions and not in denouncing the clear violations of legal rights, like introducing a new law especially adapted for the case mentioned above, according to which the defendants in the same case of the same trial could be placed in the same cell.
- In order to be well-liked, the opposition should demonstrate that it has high morals and virtues and seeks to serve the people. The opposition should clearly demonstrate to people that it is concerned with the fate of the country and is not overwhelmed by clan interests, is not striving for power to become wealthy. This is no less important than the liberal democracy and principles of the free market itself, since under conditions when rapaciousness comes to the fore the principles mentioned above might undergo devaluation, while, on the contrary, demagogy and reactionary ideas might gain the upper hand among the population. Adducing an example from the middle ages: corruption among the Catholic

clergy propped up the popularity of the heretics among the people (as vividly depicted in Umberto Eco's famous "The Name of the Rose"). Even though contradicting the traditional doctrines, the heretic preachers demonstrated a great sense of sincerity and uprightness. After all, is it not possible for a person to be a monarchist and of a high moral standing, or, to be a liberal-democrat and a reprobate? The best of all is the mixture of both – the progressive socio-political ideas as well as high morals, since, I think, the intellectual participation in the Hegelian development of the socio-political ideas and the adequate sense of orientation amidst the modern ideological climate is tightly connected with the dimension of morality.¹³ Progressive, fashionable ideas possess objective power in their own virtue. Therefore, those ideas might be used by those politicians whose only goal is to seize power through them. If there will be many candidates with the same up-to-date liberal-democratic platform, the main principle through which people will make their choices will be the personal features and moral stature of politicians rather than their programs.

- As mentioned above, for the opposition to be successful it should support, next to honesty, the most famous ideology: nowadays this is liberal democracy, appreciation of law as a supreme authority, etc. It is also necessary to emphasize the doctrines of traditional Christianity: loyalty and support for the Church, devotion to the traditions of Georgian family. These are crucial factors, since liberalism in Europe has become practically post-Christian, which is not the case with Georgia, where Christianity and liberalism are envisaged in a peaceful and synergic co-existence. In the Georgian political discourse liberalism should be connected with the idea of serving one's nation – just in terms of Ilia Chavchavadze's nation-building program – on the level of rhetoric at least. In sum, the course should be firmly set on Europe, which, however, does not mean a blind replication of the European models, but a critical and reflective approach. In case of idolatrous and heedless imitation, there is a danger that people will get disappointed with the Western liberal values and distrust them as a "Masonic conspiracy" or "Soros' intrusion?"

- The opposition should place emphasis on civil society; ethnocentrism should be gradually balanced out with the idea of supra-ethnic citizenship with guarantees that every ethnicity has an equal opportunity to participate in the country's political-economic life; to gain the minority votes the opposition should present a practicable program for full-scale involvement of ethnic minorities in the country's affairs. Along with discourse of intensification the supra-ethnic civil idea, the opposition should not also forget the importance of the traditional national ideals of Georgians: these ideals should be preserved and developed, yet with a better sense of openness towards the other ethnicities – just in terms of Ilia Chavchavadze's motto: "Nothing national has value unless it has value also for humankind as a whole".
- The opposition should also work out a clear foreign policy, even if it involves risky steps. Taking a risk is better than being undecided. It is also very important to be aware of one's own strengths: in the Realpolitik, power dominates over objective justice. Unfortunately the principle: "You're up and I'm down" still rules. This is especially true with Russia. Will the West confront Russia because of Georgia? Making an enemy idol from Russia was not a successful enterprise before, though nowadays it has been more or less successful. I am not sure what benefit it will bring. The Georgians deported from Russia showed an enviable degree of patriotism and political alertness, when they did not direct their anger towards the Georgian authorities, as Russia hoped, but towards Putin. Nevertheless, hysteria and radicalism is hardly an option in relations with Russia.
- Another vital point for the opposition is to have a charismatic leader. Without a leader like that victory cannot be achieved in the Georgian reality. The possible reason for that is the lack of political culture of our residents, or, put in another words, the continuation of the "Bazaleti Lake"¹⁴ complex.
- In terms of staffing the government, it is important to focus on hiring professional cadres rather than people who are just loyal to those in power.

- Promoting business – neutralizing the fear factor of local businessmen and laying the groundwork for foreign investment. Lately, the latter issue has been a subject of a special attention for the opposition: that the government oppresses businessmen and the opposition is ready to represent their interests.

Notes:

¹ In March 1956, as a response to Khrushchevian condemnation of Stalin's "cult of personality", which Georgians took as an oblique attack on Georgia, Georgians (mostly students) demonstrated on the pretext of defending Stalin's memory. However, during the demonstration slogans like "glory to independent Georgia" were now and then shouted. The shooting of the demonstration claimed approx. 100 civilian lives.

² On April 9, 1989 a demonstration calling for Georgia's independence from the USSR was held in Tbilisi. Soviet troops armed with military spades routed the demonstration killing 19 – mostly women and girls.

³ Actually, Gamsakhurdia's ideology was a mixture of Christianity, nationalism and some sort of mysticism that involved tenets of both Christianity and theosophy. It remains only a riddle how he and also his fellow dissident Merab Kostava could combine Christian tenets with those of German mystic and founder of anthroposophy Rudolf Steiner, whom both Gamsakhurdia and Kostava held in high esteem. For instance, Steiner held the idea of souls' transmigration believing that he himself was, in fact, the incarnation of Thomas Aquinas, while traditional Christianity since the fifth century expressly denies the teaching of souls' transmigration.

⁴ Merab Mamardashvili (1930-1990), – Georgian philosopher, one of the most original and influential thinkers during the Soviet era. He became famous through his lectures on Kant, Descartes and Marcel Proust, where he created an alternative philosophical discourse in opposition to the Marxism-based philosophy of the Soviet academia. By the end of his life he returned to Georgia and besides his regular lectures also participated in the dramatic events of 1989-1990. Another famous motto of Mamardashvili, for which he was harangued by the nationalists was: "If my nation chooses to follow Gamsakhurdia, I will go against my nation".

⁵ "Komsomolskaya Pravda", January 1991

⁶ Including its hysterical Russophobia and close relationship with Chechen resistance leader Jokhar Dudaev based on ideals of chivalry and romanticism.

⁷ Jaba Ioseliani (1926-2003). A former criminal authority in Soviet Union times, who later changed his ways and became a professor of drama and a writer. Later, after Georgia gained independence, he formed a military organization called the Mkhedrioni ("Horsemen"), which played an important role in the civil war against Gamsakhurdia and later fought in Abkhazia. "Mkhedrioni" and Ioseliani later spun out of control and no longer obeyed the official government under Shevardnadze. It was

for this reason that he was imprisoned under the pretext of having attempted to assassinate President Shevardnadze.

⁸ When asked whether Kitovani was to be called a traitor for not having consulted with the president on the invasion of Sokhumi, Shevardnadze avoided giving a direct response, though he did evaluate Kitovani's action as an "irresponsible act". When Kitovani was about to do the same, however, he was arrested and there was no necessity for such euphemisms any more.

⁹ Aslan Abashidze was appointed leader of the Achara Autonomous Republic of Georgia by Gamsakhurdia. After Shevardnadze became president, Abashidze was formally/legally subjected to him, though in reality he was the sole sovereign in his realm, not obeying the central government when he did not wish to.

¹⁰ A series of animated cartoons caricaturing Shevardnadze and his regime broadcast by Rustavi-2 TV.

¹¹ Both Kvitsiani and the professional wrestlers were involved in unlawful activities and were justly checked from the side of the state. Thus, supporting them, as some members of the opposition did, was not the most prudent thing to do.

¹² Most probably, out of personal vengeance, high ranking police officials ordered the kidnapping of Sandro Girgvliani so that he could be "taught a lesson". He was brutally beaten to death by several Interior Ministry personnel. Due to the lack of evidence, those who gave the order escaped arrest, and only the actual perpetrators were sentenced. At least this is the version that is generally believed by the most of the Georgian public.

¹³ Dimitri Qipiani is good example of this: morally upright, extremely honest, he turned out to be the only one who Iliia Chavchavadze respected in the "Generation of Fathers". In his socio-political attitudes, however, Qipiani was a retrograde: for example, he was against the abolition of the serf system.

¹⁴ According to a legend, under Bazaleti Lake there is a golden cradle with a mysterious child, who will grow up and save Georgia from all its ills. The "Bazaleti Lake" complex indicates thus an attitude of personal passivity and irresponsibility for one's own future.

Kakha Katsitadze

1.

Since independence, Georgia has achieved the status of a universally recognized entity under international law and become a member of organizations (e.g. the World Trade Organization) to which even Ukraine and Russia have not yet acceded. Some, though in my opinion insufficient, steps have been taken towards integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. A more or less stable national currency has been introduced, and a number of reforms have been carried out, which, in principle, should pave the way for the transition to a market economy.

Failures are incommensurately more numerous; I will list them in order of political, socio-psychological and economic aspects.

Political sphere:

- A real separation of powers and uprooting of authoritarian tendencies still has not been achieved.
- Change of government by elections still has not been achieved.
- Georgia remains a typical developing country with all the flaws and shortcomings of such countries (underdeveloped local governance, absence of a truly independent judiciary, etc.)
- Territorial integrity has not been restored.
- The problem of the lack of competent personnel in positions of authority to develop the strategic course in their respective areas, still has not been resolved.
- Society still has not realized that its problems can be resolved only by itself, not some messiah who will alone shoulder the burden of doing the job which the entire society has to do.
- Society has not tackled its ambivalent Freudian complex of sorts toward Russia; Russia is simultaneously viewed as a kindly – if only potentially – paternal figure (the solution to our territorial

problem depends on Russia, our economy needs its market, it supplies us with natural gas and electricity) and, at the same time, as an “evil stepfather”.

- The population is infantile; the public has not yet realized what independence means.
- The economic growth which appears in official statistics has no influence whatsoever on the living standards of the majority of the population.
- Georgia has yet to break its dependence on Russia for energy resources.
- Clans and the system of “protection” still exist in the economy. Despite steps in the right direction, a Western-style market economy remains a distant dream.

All these factors have great influence (usually proportionate to one another) on the political processes in Georgia. Hence the answer to the first question: Georgian society and culture (I understand that the first question mostly refers to the political culture) essentially have not changed for the better. There is a minor progress, for example, in the non-governmental sector and the media, which is free (but usually under-qualified and incapable of analysis). But talking about any significant level of development of our society or substantial rise of the political culture seems unfounded to me.

2.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s political belief system can be described as an attempt to restore a medieval-type political system in Georgia (of the kind depicted in the novels of his father, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia). This is where his traditionalism and skepticism toward – and at times outright rejection of – classical Western liberal values took their origin. Among his main achievements, the inclusion of the broad masses of the population in the political process merits mention (it is doubtful that anyone has ever managed to mobilize such huge masses of people to attain political goals in Georgian history). However, aside from positive aspects, this has had associated risks too. Another undisputable achievement was holding on the

entire territory of the country, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the referendum on the country's independence, which prevents even the present-day ill-wishers of Georgia (Zatulin and his ilk) from claiming that South Ossetia and Abkhazia supposedly split off from Georgia before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. One more achievement of the Gamsakhurdia regime was that the escalation of the confrontation in Abkhazia into an armed conflict was prevented. No matter how much some people might talk about the "apartheid law" (under which more seats in the Abkhaz legislature were delegated to ethnic Abkhaz than ethnic Georgians despite the fact that the latter far outnumbered the former in the general population), it is clear that thanks to that system, we temporarily averted what happened later under Shevardnadze. Another improvement over the preceding regime was of course Gamsakhurdia's anti-Communist attitude. His was the first anti-Communist government (which the government of the First Republic patently was not) in modern Georgian history. To boot, his anti-Communism was so effective that, in contrast to a number of other post-Soviet republics (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova), it drove the nail into the coffin of Communism as more or less influential political force in the country. In addition, Gamsakhurdia's anti-Western, or at least non-Western, attitudes need to be underscored here. He was the only influential politician in Georgia who would not allow Western domination in the region. In this sense, the ouster of Gamsakhurdia by Russia was tantamount to a political *hara-kiri*; this made it obvious that Russia was no longer capable of either planning or implementing its imperialist policy.

Now let us discuss the negative aspects of Gamsakhurdia's political activities. The following should be highlighted among them:

- Radicalism of political methods;
- Failure to achieve a full public consensus, which was necessary in that situation. Although Gamsakhurdia's opponents' contribution to the failure to achieve such a consensus was not any less than his, the degree of his responsibility was incomparably high compared to, say, Irakli Tsereteli, because Gamsakhurdia was in power;
- Unsound personnel policy, as attested to by the fact that the vast majority of Gamsakhurdia's officials simply abandoned him. Of

course, statements that he should have kept the Soviet-era “professionals” in their posts were absurd – how professional they were became evident during Shevardnadze’s presidency. But it is also true that the Gamsakhurdia government did nothing, or almost nothing, to create a professional corps of officials for independent Georgia;

- There was no people’s revolution. I think that the term “Christmas coup” is much more appropriate for what happened. The reasons for the coup stemmed from the conflicts which are inherent to a newly independent state if it cannot manage to embark on the road toward liberal democracy. There are countless examples of this. Setting aside the most conspicuous and typical colonies (in Asia or Africa), let us take Greece in the 1820-1830s or Ireland in 1920-1930s as examples. In both countries, winning independence did not result in liberal democratic regimes; what happened instead was that in both countries, winning independence was followed by a whole series of bloody civil wars.

3.

In contrast to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze had no political beliefs, realistic or utopian, whatsoever. His objective was power for power’s sake, not as a means of attaining any positive goals. Perhaps Shevardnadze would have been very surprised if someone had asked him why he needed to be the country’s top official. His goal was coming to and staying in power. All of his successes or failures should be viewed in this context.

Restoring relative law and order, checking the rampage of criminal “brotherhoods”, achieving international recognition of Georgia, declaring the Euro-Atlantic course by the end of his presidential tenure and taking steps, albeit minimal ones, toward pursuing that course – all these should be noted as Shevardnadze’s successes. The introduction of the national currency and adoption of the not-too-useful constitution also merit mention. I deem promotion of new people at the beginning of his rule a positive development too. I have to note, however, that by the end of his presidential tenure, Shevardnadze completely shifted emphasis to communist-era officials. The relative freedom of the media should also be noted. The withdrawal of the Vaziani military

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base by the Russians was also a success. As for the failures, their number is incomparably greater. Namely:

- Leaving the South Ossetia crisis unresolved and “freezing” it to the extent that it cannot be “defrosted” to this day;
- Starting the war in Abkhazia, ending it in a fiasco and signing agreements which were against Georgia’s national interests;
- Deliberately avoiding reaching consensus with Gamsakhurdia. There is a theory that Shevardnadze ceded Ochamchire and Gali to Ardzinba to prevent the strengthening of Gamsakhurdia’s positions (let me underscore that this is only a theory which has currency mostly among the military);
- Involving the Russians, namely, Admiral Baltin, in the regulation of Georgia’s domestic conflict;
- Establishing a communist-style system of governance, especially by the end of his presidency;
- Creating a stagnant, so called “zastoy”-type regime (this too mostly refers to the end of his presidency, although in my opinion, the tendency existed from the very outset);
- Making deceit a tool of politics;
- Bequeathing pathological heritage to the successor regime; failing to train officials and civil servants for the time when they would no longer be in their government jobs;
- Implementing a vague foreign policy, so-called “balancing”, which essentially achieved nothing.

This is only a short list of negative aspects of the Shevardnadze rule. Compared to preceding regimes, he introduced falsehood, a complete lack of political principles and everything else which falls under the definition (incidentally, unfairly) of Machiavellianism. Besides these, Shevardnadze had no strategy whatsoever; he used to deal with all tasks using the principle “let us put this aside for now and see what happens later”. The result of this pseudo-strategy, which in reality was a tactic elevated to the status of strategy, was the Rose Revolution. Because of gaps in his education, Shevardnadze simply turned out to lack the

intellectual capacity to develop a strategy which would correspond to his objectives. He remained a tactician with a Communist background, which is precisely why he lost the battle with people whom he raised himself and who were strategists, albeit perhaps bad ones.

4.

Saakashvili's political credo can be defined as a modernization project which employs elements of nationalism and populism. Among his main achievements should be listed the bloodless end of the Rose Revolution, the bloodless toppling of the Aslan Abashidze regime in Achara, and restoring government control in the Kodori Gorge in a (almost) bloodless fashion. The development of political will in the government, the neutralization of Shevardnadze's corrupt style of governance, and reforms in a number of sectors were also positive developments. Compared to the preceding government, he introduced a more energetic style and more effective and intensive use of PR technologies. Some of the steps that were made in the direction of Euro-Atlantic integration should also be considered a success, although it has to be said for objectivity's sake that the failure to develop a complete systemic bloc of reforms resulted in the postponement until 2008 of giving to Georgia the status of a candidate country for NATO membership. The relative stabilization of the domestic political activity and its operation in a routine mode is also a positive process. Now let us discuss the failures. Just like under Shevardnadze and Gamsakhurdia, they outnumber successes during Saakashvili's presidency too. Namely:

- The problem of Georgia's territorial integrity is still unresolved;
- The political system is of an unstable nature; I mean so-called government carousels – continual movement of ministers from one post to another with very short intervals, which hinders the country's sustainable development. For example, Georgia now has its fifth (!) defense minister and third chief of the General Staff of the armed forces since 2003. Other ministers often change just as quickly, which is certainly not good for the country;
- Incompetence. Similar to the preceding two regimes, the integration of competent persons into the governance system still does not

happen. The falling average age of officials is good, but it does not provide any guarantees of competence (it has to be noted, however, that it largely depends on the particular minister in question, chairman of the respective parliamentary committee, etc.);

- Unresolved relations with Russia, stemming not only from the Russians' imperialist aspirations, but also from our authorities' policy;
- The effectively nonexistent independence of the judiciary. The same is true about local governance, but the weakness of the latter is caused not only by trends in the government, but also by the opposition's weakness – more on this in the answer to the next question;
- Complete domination of the executive branch over all other branches;
- Absence of a government strategy for a number of sectors. For example, there is endless talk about an army of NATO standards, but there is no decision at all on what the army should be like (Anglo-Saxon, German, French, Turkish models, some hybrid of these or something altogether original). And in this situation, where we do not know what type of an army we are developing, we pass the law on reserve troops, which is in itself nonsensical because the type of the reserve troops is contingent on the type of the army. Under the Saakashvili government, roofs are often built where the walls still do not exist.

5.

The opposition's weakness is first and foremost the opposition's fault. In general, our opposition has a knack for causing irritation among the public. This can be accounted for by lack of culture both in society (which still does not understand that the reason for the existence of the opposition is pointing at the government's shortcomings, something which does not at all mean that the opposition "hinders the government from doing its job") and among politicians, who cannot manage to get their message across to the people in a comprehensible manner. Let us recall the population's irritation with the opposition's actions during the Shevardnadze government in 1993-1995. I doubt that the population is much more sympathetic toward

the opposition now than it was back then. It is also significant that governments were changed by groups which split off from the ruling force (Sigua and Kitovani from the Round Table, many National Movement members from the Citizens' Union). This is why repressions by the authorities cannot be cited as the reason for the opposition's weakness. There certainly are individual instances of such repressions, but they are clearly not so frequent or large-scale as to attribute the opposition's weakness to them.

Neither can the opposition's weakness be explained by the government's successes. No-one would argue against the statement that there are large social groups which are displeased with the authorities, but these groups do not form the opposition's support base. This should not come as a surprise either if we take into account the fact that politics is not a zero-sum game and the weakening of one of the sides does not necessarily mean the strengthening of the other.

The absence of a charismatic leader among the opposition is a conspicuous shortcoming, but the point here is not only charisma, but also the leader's ability to persuade the people that their lives will be better than they are now when the opposition comes to power.

This is why the main reason for the opposition's weakness is to be sought in the opposition itself and in the current environment. The opposition failed to join forces in the run-up to the local elections of October 5, 2006, which quite a few voters expected them to do. The opposition failed to persuade the people that it is better than the government (the sentiment of the average Georgian on the street is that "they are all the same"). The opposition failed to come up with a comprehensive program which, into the bargain, would have to persuade the people that the program was feasible and that its implementation would benefit the public at large. The opposition failed to generate leaders whose charisma would rival that of the government leaders. This is a short list of the main reasons why the opposition cannot rival the government.

6.

The future strengthening of the opposition, if it happens at all, is unlikely to occur with any one slogan. Given its current situation, our

society pays little attention to slogans and policy statements. As was noted in the preceding answer, the opposition's weakness stems not from the absence of slogans, but from other causes. The main precondition for the strengthening of the opposition is persuading the public that they are better than the government and keeping the promises that were given to the population. In addition, the opposition needs to have a charismatic leader. The opposition should persuade the public that it will stay the course toward Euro-Atlantic integration, which is supported by the majority of the population, and at the same time settle relations with Russia and regain in some form access to the Russian market (even the most incorrigible optimists do not expect the natural gas price to fall). Of course, before coming to power, the opposition will need to persuade people that it will resolve the Abkhazia and South Ossetia problems, substantially improve standards of living and curb unemployment. As for slogans, the opposition will try to use a whole package of them. They will talk about the authoritarian tendencies of the government, lack of separation of powers, violations of human rights, social rights and Georgian identity. However, priority here will be given to modality, in other words, to how the population perceives the politicians' promises, not the meaning of individual slogans. It is clear, though, that the modality also hinges on what specific slogans and messages are used.

7.

A strong opposition will emerge only when there is strong public demand for it and the opposition meets the requirements which I discussed in the previous section. This will be a process which, so to speak, will create itself. Therefore, making accurate prognoses about the forms and methods of creation of the strong opposition is virtually impossible. That the oppositions which toppled governments used to be born within the authorities thus far cannot be a logical argument in support of the statement that this is how it will stay in the future. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that this type of the opposition will emerge as bifurcating processes within the government grow (if, that is, the abovementioned conditions are met), and it is quite probable that it will have the form of a coalition. The more or

less influential traditional opposition groups (I mean those whose nationwide approval rating is around at least 5%), groups that split off from the ruling party, as well as new potential forces whose only possible source is the increasingly displeased middle class (if, that is, such a thing will exist in Georgia) would join the ranks of the new opposition. However, even if all implied ifs and buts prove true, the opposition will still find it hard to unite given their ideological differences and ambitions, as well as technical problems.

Theoretically, another option is also possible: A relatively small group rallies around a charismatic leader and, although it does not win the elections, it comes second so definitively that the other political parties simply sink. If this happens, we will end up with a classic two-party system, but for this the difference between the political forces which came second and third places should be not tenths of one percent (like in the local elections), but around 15-20%.

8.

In one of the previous publications by the Caucasus Institute for Peace Democracy and Development, I used the terms “stable instability” and “unstably stable” to describe the Shevardnadze regime (after his victory in one of the elections). Despite the fact that there are many differences between the incumbent and Shevardnadze regimes (we discussed some of them above), for instance, incomparably stronger political will or incommensurately stronger state institutions, the description still applies. It applies for the simple reason that only liberal democratic regimes are stable in the true meaning of this word. Henry Kissinger noted in one of his articles that one of the peculiarities of the post-Soviet political systems was that people in power there are either in power or in jail. The government in Georgia will become stable only when its members will no longer be afraid of going to jail after stepping down. And to achieve this, the government system must acquire the form of a liberal democracy and the government must take the appropriate steps which I have discussed so extensively.

Now let us turn to the model of political development. Although typologically it is possible to discern some similarities between the decades-long domination of the Institutional Revolutionary Party in

Mexico and the decades-long domination of the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, there is a fundamental difference between them. The domination of the Liberal Democrats in Japan derived from successes which they achieved when they were in power: economic progress, improvement in the standard of living, the strengthening of Japan's position in the international arena – in a word, everything that allowed the party to deliver the country from its post-war shock. The reasons for the domination of the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico were completely different. They were predicated on the desire of the population to see some stability after years of revolutions, civil wars, and foreign policy failures (in this respect, the Mexicans had the same expectations for this party as the Georgians had for Shevardnadze), on top of which came the party's anti-Americanism and declared socialism (granting asylum to Trotsky would suffice), which was in harmony with the public sentiments of Mexico of that period (mid-20th century). Later the party consolidated its positions to the extent that the underdeveloped society turned out to lack the resources to replace it with some other political force. In addition, due to a number of reasons, no such new political force existed till a few decades ago (compare with the weakness of our opposition). If we compare the effectiveness of our ruling party's actions with the two above parties', there can be no doubt that, taking into account the weakness of the Georgian opposition, Georgia is destined to follow the Mexican model.

Latin American-style revolutionary cycles are practically out of the question in Georgia. There are neither the social nor military resources for this. If developments follow this scenario, Georgia will simply disintegrate into its constituent parts (This did not happen during the Latin American revolutionary cycles for the simple reason that the national borders (at any rate, by the 1890s, after the end of the Paraguay and Pacific wars) were already demarcated, and the regional states, despite their flawed political systems, already established (with the only exception of the territorial dispute between Bolivia and Paraguay in the 1930's). In addition, the struggle for geopolitical domination was not so intense there. Owing to these and a number of other factors, revolutionary cycles are unlikely in Georgia. They would be hindered both by the aforementioned factors and by the low, but still

sufficient level of civil consciousness of society, which will realize the potential threat of these sorts of revolutions. In addition, it is doubtful against the backdrop of the frustration that has followed the excessively high expectations for the Rose Revolution that any political force will manage to persuade the public of the need for a revolution, not to mention a series of revolutions.

In my opinion, the most realistic scenario is gradual establishment of liberal democracy as the degree of the country's Euro-Atlantic integration will increase. But this requires two domestic factors (we will discuss foreign factors in the following section). These are the government's good will and the existence of a strong and responsible opposition. Otherwise we will end up with the Mexican scenario which, given Georgia's geopolitical, social, cultural, economic and strategic realities, will be detrimental for the country. We will become the European Venezuela at best (it does not matter who will play the role of Chavez) or a mitigated version of Cuba (economic difficulties, strained relations with the large neighbor country, although a dictatorship of the Cuban style cannot set in due to Georgia's closeness to Europe).

9.

The influence of the foreign factors on Georgia's political evolution is immense. It is manifested by growing US influence and the progressive weakening of Russia's influence (let us remember that just a decade ago, ministers in Georgia were appointed on the basis of Russia-issued directives, and 10 years is a minuscule period from the historical perspective). Naturally, we do not believe that everything that happens in Georgia has been written in some foreign research center. But it is clear that the West, and first and foremost, the United States, can greatly influence the evolution of the political processes in Georgia. In addition, the West has two options: to turn a blind eye to those deviations from democracy (to put it mildly) which take place in the country because of Georgia's geopolitical location or to wield its influence and compel the authorities to take steps as quickly as possible toward building a liberal democracy. The recent developments, for instance, Daniel Fried's comment on President Bush's speech at the Riga summit, show that the West is increasingly inclined

toward the latter option. Over the next 3-5 years, I expect more vigorous influence of the US policy on the processes which are under way in Georgia to stimulate real steps toward liberal democracy, intensification of the EU political efforts (both in terms of support for democratization, economic support, and peaceful resolution of the conflicts), and persistent tensions in relations with Russia.

10.

Ideally, I see Georgia as a country of liberal democracy which is integrated with NATO and the EU and has the following characteristics:

- Real separation of powers and absence of authoritarian tendencies;
- Change of government only through free and fair elections;
- Strong system of political parties;
- Status of a developed country and part of the “golden billion”. Establishment of a real middle class;
- Restoration of territorial integrity;
- Responsible and competent government and responsible society;
- Developed civil sector. Free media and real nongovernmental sector instead of the media working in the self-censorship mode and quasi-nongovernmental organizations;
- Western-style market economy.

George Khelashvili

1.

Georgia's greatest* achievement since the beginning of the 1990s has been gaining and sustaining independence, although at the expense of the temporary loss of territories and economic decline.¹ Among the achievements, the most striking are the rise of statist identity, the establishment of political institutions, the deepening of democratization and modernization, increased integration into the international community, and the overcoming of ethnic nationalism.

The most outstanding among the failures of Georgia are the loss of control over the territories of Abkhazia and the former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast² and the weakening of the economy.

I will try to characterize both achievements and failures separately in the remainder of the chapter.

During the last 15 years, in spite of several civil wars, economic destitution and social and ideological crises, it is the recognition of the necessity of national sovereignty and political independence by the majority of population of Georgia that must be deemed a historical achievement. The gradual waning of the mistrust towards the state (especially after 2003) and the recognition of the need to include national minorities are sure signs of the rise of statist consciousness and the establishment of civic national identity. These signs of surmounting narrow ethnic nationalist attitudes indicate that Georgia has the potential to emerge as a modern state.

The establishment of a political system (however weak), which sustains political processes within legal frames, the emergence of basic bureaucratic structures and their growing professionalism show the extent of the progress made towards modern statehood. Moreover, this

* I will answer the question briefly in the beginning of every chapter and then elaborate on the main aspects of the brief answer.

process is reinforced by the establishment of security machinery which is not at the disposal of any single ideological force.

The greatest achievement of Georgian democracy is placing elections in the center of the country's political system. However, the weak structure of the political system (first of all, the political party system) after 15 years of independence poses many questions about the irreversibility of democracy in Georgia.

The success of the modernization process in Georgia is reflected in the unanimous and unchallenged choice of the Western (primarily European) political and economic model. This success, however, has reflected less on the economic and social development of the country. As in the case of political independence, choosing a Western orientation (not only in terms of geopolitics but also values) is a formidable achievement for Georgia.

Nationalism – the most outstanding aspect of Georgian political culture – fulfilled the most influential role in the formation of independent Georgia. Although ethnic nationalism hindered the integration of national minorities into the common national state, it has simultaneously led Georgia to choose independence and, to a certain extent, pro-Western orientation.³

The main failure – disruption of territorial integrity – has been a combined result of the realities of the international environment as well as the excesses of Georgian ethnic nationalism. Also, the economic collapse was caused, on the one hand, by objective conditions (the implosion of the Soviet Union, increased liberalization of the world economy as well as Georgia's limited resource potential), and, on the other hand, by the absence of a clear economic policy in the 1990s.

2.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's rule was the source of a host of problems in Georgia, including the most acute of them – the problem of territorial integrity. However, it was during Gamsakhurdia's rule that the consensus on independence and pro-Western orientation of Georgia finally emerged. Gamsakhurdia, as the first president of Georgia, initiated the problematic relationship between Georgia and Russia.

The achievements of Gamsakhurdia's government are limited to the establishment of this ideological and foreign political pattern. However, the merits of Gamsakhurdia's rule for the future of Georgia must be sought not so much in Gamsakhurdia's policies per se, but in the side-effects of these policies. Gamsakhurdia's excessive ethnic nationalism immunized Georgians against the nationalist disease and pushed them towards a more civic and liberal understanding of nationalism.

The list of the problems left behind by Gamsakhurdia can be quite extensive – the major ones of them being the radicalization of society and the marginalization of ethnic minorities. The successful resolution of these problems, especially of the latter, has proved to be impossible until now and seems very unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Two major factors contributed to the downfall of Gamsakhurdia – excessive emphasis on nationalism and the consolidation of the political elite against him. Gamsakhurdia mistakenly assumed that the ethnic nationalistic mobilization of Georgians would prove sufficient not only for him to maintain power but also for the country's political and economic development. But this mobilization of nationalism was not enough for either of these tasks and, as it became clear later, proved also insufficient for the forceful resolution of problems of territorial integrity.⁴

The mobilization of the Georgian elite against Gamsakhurdia was the second reason behind the latter's downfall. In 1991, the Georgian elite was still intimately connected with Russian ruling circles and had enough levers for mobilizing domestic and external forces against Gamsakhurdia. However, I think, Russia's role in Gamsakhurdia's downfall is overestimated – the decisive role was played by the Georgian elite (among them Eduard Shevardnadze), which effectively used Russian political and military resources to their advantage and to Gamsakhurdia's peril.

3.

The modern Georgian state was created during Shevardnadze's rule. This must be counted as the major achievement of the period of his governance. During his rule, Georgia found its first niche in

international politics and the international economy. In Shevardnadze's time, Georgian democracy and political institutions emerged and liberal values started to spread in society.

The major failures of his 12-year rule were the loss of control over Abkhazia, the weakness and inefficiency of the state machinery, the stagnation of economy and the demoralization of society.

In Shevardnadze's time, the most striking departure from previous regimes was the drastic increase in the impact of external factors. On the one hand, this increase was related to the weakening of Russia and growing Western involvement in the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, on the other hand, the increase of international influence was linked to the readiness of the Georgian political class to embark on liberal reforms from the mid-1990s.

The main result of the growth of influence of international factors was not so much what Shevardnadze had hoped for most – the restoration of territorial integrity and the end of the economic crisis – but rather the emergence of more liberal mass media, an energetic civil society and new ideas regarding the arrangement of the state. These societal institutions and ideas played a decisive role both in the downfall of Shevardnadze and in determining the future government's ideology and policies.

Shevardnadze's rule rested on two basic principles – state sovereignty and the sustainability of Shevardnadze's personal grip on power. Shevardnadze hoped that his pro-Western policies starting in 1995 would help him to fulfill both these tasks. It is difficult to say decisively which of the two principles had primacy. In fact, by expounding his pro-Western rhetoric, Shevardnadze denied himself the chance to retreat. When his rule and the state's development came in contradiction with each other, Shevardnadze proved unable (or unwilling) to substitute the West for Russia, as provider of political support, and thus saved his own regime from demise.

As in Gamsakhurdia's case, the most important legacy of Shevardnadze's period – the establishment of political institutions, the emergence of civil society, and the spread of liberal values – was a side effect of Shevardnadze's primary objective (maintaining power and manipulating Western support).

Shevardnadze failed to formulate the ideational and economic principles of the development of the state and to consolidate the necessary institutions. Accordingly, his governance style was limited to balancing between rival political factions, which would not continue forever. Thus, the downfall of Shevardnadze's regime was, first of all, caused by his own ideological omnibalancing and unawareness of the essence of modern statehood.

4.

Mikheil Saakashvili has further strengthened some of the tendencies that had been in place during Gamsakhurdia's and Shevardnadze's rule. In this respect, Saakashvili is less of a revolutionary than an heir to his predecessors. The main tendencies set in motion by Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze have become state policies under Saakashvili – national independence and sovereignty, pro-Western orientation and distancing from Russia – this political line had existed before him, but has acquired a much more prominent character in the last four years.

A novelty that Saakashvili indeed brought with him is the absolute monopolization of organized armed forces by the state. Thus, one could argue that state-building is the most outstanding aspect of Saakashvili's governance.

However, on the other hand, the concept of state building for Saakashvili's government manifested itself mainly in the strengthening of enforcement agencies and the centralization of power. The other, longer-run aspects of sustainable statehood (economic development, democracy, societal consensus, integration of secessionist minorities into the overall society) take a backseat or take the form of political campaigning for improving the government's image.

The greatest failure of Shevardnadze remains a challenge in Saakashvili's time as well – territorial integrity has not been restored. However, the problem has now acquired a different dimension – external support does not count any more as the sole instrument that the government seeks to exploit for the resolution of the problems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Among the problems inherited by Saakashvili, economic crisis looms large, and the energy problem has emerged as a major com-

ponent of it. Along with the conflicts, the energy deficit determines Georgia's continuous dependence on Russia.

Unlike his predecessors, Saakashvili's government has an economic policy which is rather minimalist and envisages hastened privatization. Such minimalism of economic policy can be called the "Frankenstein mode" – the government conducts textbook liberal reforms through privatization and awaits the moment when the lightning breathes the life into the dead body of the Georgian economy. Despite such minimalism, Saakashvili was the first Georgian leader to have defined an economic policy and, to a certain extent, carry it out.

In the modern history of Georgia, Saakashvili was the first to unify the ideas of civic nationalism, economic liberalism and statist republicanism and, to a certain extent, carry this task out in practice. However, in conditions of limited economic resources, increased pressure from Russia and the scarcity of qualified management personnel, the merger of these three elements for the advancement of state interests occurred only partially.

5.

Political opposition in Georgia has always looked weaker than the government, hence, the acquisition of power in the past happened either through armed rebellion (expulsion of Gamsakhurdia) or by means of mass popular protests (Shevardnadze's forced resignation). In neither case did the opposition look formidable enough to change the government.

Accordingly, the weakness of the opposition in Saakashvili's times does not necessarily indicate that the government's base is unshakable. Despite the strengthening of the state machinery, government cannot yet provide security from either external or internal threats.

There are a few basic reasons behind the weakness of the opposition under Saakashvili's governance, among them the absence of a solid ideological base and the deficit of economic and human resources.

The majority of opposition parties do not have a solid ideological base. The ideological platform of any given party, in the best case scenario, is merely declarative and does not correspond to political

actions. This discrepancy between ideas and actions breeds a certain apathy and distrust towards the opposition on the part of population, which then is reflected in the results of elections.

The scarcity of resources in the hands of the opposition is determined both by generic economic crisis as well as the exploitation of so-called “administrative resources” by the government. Despite the government’s liberal-economy rhetoric, the majority of economic actors depend on government’s regulatory policies or tend to perceive themselves as dependent on them. This hinders the private sector from funding the opposition even in cases where it is in the best interests of private companies.

The authorities have managed to monopolize the majority of popular themes among the population – nationalism, a firm position in relation to Russia, economic liberalism, independence and unification of the state. All these themes are spiced up with social rhetoric, which leaves the opposition with little to exploit. Therefore, most of the rhetoric of the opposition is limited to the criticism of isolated incidents and, sometimes, makes it look more Catholic than the Pope (e.g. by adopting a more intransigent approach towards Russia than the government does).

In addition, due to its ideational poverty and inconsistency, the opposition has failed to harness Western sympathy (that of governments, aid organizations, international NGOs), unlike the “young reformers”, who managed to do so under Shevardnadze. These deficiencies create conditions under which more energetic and educated youth move more towards the government than to the opposition.

Sometimes opposition parties look more like social unions than power-pursuing hierarchical organizations. Thus, sometimes the opposition rejects the main principle of politics – the readiness for a power struggle.

Ultimately, the opposition’s tactics for political struggle is inexpedient as well, as it rests on three basic methods – reliance on a hope for government blunders, attempts to unite the opposition, and the capitalization on popular discontent towards the government’s policies. In the first place, government’s mistakes would not necessarily translate into popular support for the opposition, second, the unification of

unpopular and weak parties would not increase their popularity and power, and third, permanent emphasis on criticizing the government and the absence of its own political views would hardly make the opposition more politically influential.

6.

As in most parts of the former Soviet Union, in Georgia too, the most acute political problems are those of a social character. Despite this, capitalizing on this problem has proved to be almost impossible in Georgia. The only two political forces who exploit this issue more or less effectively, are the ruling party and the opposition Labor party. While social issues play a mere rhetorical role in the ruling party's policies, Labor uses them as a source of cheap and ephemeral popularity. None of the parties have a consistent, ideologically sound approach towards the social issues.

During its 15-year development, the political center in Georgia consolidated around the liberal right. This development has had quite a linear progressive trajectory – from Soviet feudalism to Gamsakhurdia's conservative nationalism, then to Shevardnadze's social conservatism, and, in the end, to Saakashvili's economic liberalism and state-centrism. The next step should be a liberalism that is oriented towards social justice and relatively devoid of the tenets of nationalism and state-centrism.

Right-wing criticism of Saakashvili's government is, in the context of current economic and social conditions, a choice of only marginal political forces. Accordingly, effective criticism may come only from the left. Moreover, with the passage of time, Saakashvili's primary task will become not so much the modernization of the state but rather maintaining power, which will make the ruling regime more and more conservative and, consequently, help to reveal more vulnerable spots on the government's political body.

7.

A successful political party in Georgia should pay attention to ideological consistency and the development of effective political technologies. The majority of the opposition is the remnant of Soviet

society and, therefore, it is difficult to imagine that it can produce a viable political force.

A realistically viable future opposition may take shape from among the politicians of the new generation. Needless to say, the majority of the new generation politicians are either already members of the incumbent government or, potentially, will become its constituent part. Therefore, the future opposition must occupy that very niche of political ideas and spectrum that Saakashvili's government failed to seize – social issues.

With the development of the economy and the rise of welfare, two changes may occur – first, the economic resource base necessary for political struggle will expand and, secondly, the currently ignored theme of social justice will rise in prominence, which will create conditions for the emergence of political forces of the new type.

It is entirely possible that a new, viable opposition will emerge as a result of the split of current government. However, the question is what will split the government – or, in other words, around which insoluble problem will the intra-governmental consensus be disrupted. It is entirely possible that this split will be related to the issue of conflict management (like Israel, where inter- and intra-party dynamics often evolve around the different groups' policies towards the Palestinians). This may be organically connected to the nationalist theme. I think that a split in the current government may result from the disagreement over long-term national priorities. These contested priorities may include conflict resolution, the level and pace of democratization, social issues (a trade-off in the distribution of resources between social programs and business), and economic problems (a trade-off in the distribution of resources between security and welfare).

It is not likely that a split in the government will occur as a result of doubts expressed by any single political faction over foreign political priorities or territorial integrity.

8.

The sustainability of political stability⁵ depends on what the basis of government's legitimacy will be. It would be desirable for

such a basis to rest on societal consensus about ordering the state and division of resources, not merely on the benevolent political will of the government, however democratic it may be. The benevolent political will of the incumbent party (even more so for a group endowed with great power) can degenerate into banal corruption. In such case, again, a rather banal epoch of semi-authoritarianism based on sheer force emerges, which, in weak countries like Georgia ends in a change of the government (in the best case, through a velvet revolution, or, in a worse case, through an armed rebellion). The creation of political institutions and the building of societal consensus is an absolute necessity for long-term stability.

However, the main threat that can endanger political stability is foreign intervention (like Finland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia), which may follow a resumption of hostilities in the conflict areas or any particular provocation.

One more threat to stability is economic crisis, which may bring social unrest and, consequently, the descent of the political system into authoritarianism.

In a short-term perspective, Georgia's political stability is likely to be determined by the dominant role of the ruling party. In the coming years, it is difficult to imagine any other party capturing power through elections. The struggle for power between the ruling party factions (to put it more precisely, between the factions of the *government party*) will continue and result in tacit alterations in the distribution of power within the government. This may continue up to the point where, against the backdrop of a growing economy, conditions will emerge for the formation of new parties and factions. Then the political process will come to resemble to an open political struggle between political parties, not a Byzantine "bulldog fight under a rug" within the government circles.

The temporary preservation of political stability under single-party dominance is very much plausible, though not through the establishment of an authoritarian regime, but rather through factional rivalry within the government party.

9.

In this section I will touch upon the mechanisms through which the international environment has influenced Georgia and the consequences of this influence.

Three broad and basic aspects have determined the influence of the international environment on Georgia. First, the new wave of democratization after the dissolution of the Soviet Union largely determined Georgia's ideological climate. Secondly, the process of globalization increased the pace of Georgia's inclusion into the world economy (of course, with its positive and negative effects). And thirdly, the contemporary international milieu created friendlier conditions for the survival of weak states like Georgia than had been the case any time during or before the 20th century.

However, it should also be said that the foreign factor (as in the case of many other countries) did not play a crucial part for Georgia in the last 15 years. The readiness of society for change and domestic political shifts were the leading forces in the development efforts.

Apart from the purposive policies of foreign countries (and, first of all, the West), historical contingencies influenced Georgia too. Such historical contingencies were the attacks of September 11 and the increased American interest in Central Asia and the Middle East, historic opportunities for transporting Central Asian oil resources through the Caucasus, and political changes in Russia and Turkey.

In recent years, the influence of foreign countries (again, mostly of the West) on Georgia has manifested itself in the following forms: the imposition of conditionality by international financial institutions (IFIs), which hastened radical reforms of the economy and finances; assistance to Georgian civil society; the implementation of educational programs; support for communications development; providing humanitarian and other relief (which partially filled the gap created by the absence of a social security net, allowing the government to concentrate on strategic and development issues); direct military, infrastructural, and financial aid; political support in international organizations and other international forums; participation in conflict resolution efforts and investments in the economy.

The issue of Russia must be dealt with separately. It is evident that Russian involvement in Georgia's domestic affairs has considerably hindered its economic development, but, at the same time, Russian political pressure substantially contributed to the establishment of Georgia as an independent state and towards the formation of the Georgians as a political nation as well as the formulation of Georgian foreign policy.

The consequences of these various kinds of influences may be summarized in the following way: the image of Georgia has significantly improved (from the “failed state” in the early 1990s to “beacon of democracy” in the mid-2000s); Georgia's strategic importance has grown on the world political map (which gives the country a historically unique chance to retain independence); a certain number of young men and women acquired management and governance skills and proved to be ready to assume leadership in crisis conditions; due to the involvement of international financial institutions, the economy underwent a certain degree of liberalization, which may bring long-term dividends (without liberalization, the Georgian economy would never rise again); the level of protection of human rights grew significantly; democracy spread its roots and acquired signs of irreversibility; political culture developed – a method of political discussions has emerged, the level of political and ideological tolerance increased, as well as the level of the citizens' participation in political processes.

At the same time, external influence has proved to be not so benign for Georgia (at least in the short run): First of all, the existence of unresolved conflicts on Georgian territory and their manipulation by external powers (e.g. Russia) gravely diminished the likelihood of foreign investment flow. Secondly, the process of globalization left a controversial mark on Georgia – with diminished state control over financial flows, friendly foreign governments have been unable to influence the direction of investments to Georgia. These two aspects create grave problems for the economy (at least in the short run).

It may be argued that foreign influence on Georgia has been important but not decisive. Ultimately, this influence has had many more positive sides than negative ones.

10.

Given that Georgia's state-building process is far from complete, ensuring national and human security must remain the priority of the government. In the first place, this security is associated with membership of NATO, which would guarantee Georgia's independence, after which the other priorities would emerge on Georgia's agenda.

On the other hand, however, it is becoming clear that international alliances would not be sufficient to ensure Georgia's security (including territorial integrity and political independence). Georgia, like Israel, must create an effective system of defense and security. In this endeavor, institutions of military education must assume a priority role and serve as the main objectives behind the development of defense and education systems.

The development of the economy is an undisputed priority, and it would be desirable if Saakashvili's government broadened its minimalist approach (which is currently based solely on privatization) and worked out a certain economic policy – for instance, prioritizing the branches of economy and actively searching for a niche in the international distribution of labor (and not merely declaring that the market will determine the priorities – which is an outdated doctrine in even most liberal market economies).

In terms of long-term programs, the authorities must provide for the development of economic infrastructure (especially communications – which is happening) and make efforts to form a societal consensus over the priorities of development and ideology (which is not happening). The growing gap between the winners and losers may endanger not only the political stability of the country but also its unity (Georgia remains a rather vulnerable country – therefore, unequal development, e.g. in terms of the regions, may develop into a threat).

The consolidation of democracy, the restoration of territorial integrity and the creation of a professional (not politicized) bureaucracy may be named as the remaining priorities.

Notes:

¹ As a measure of evaluating these “achievements”, I will use the major indicators of development of Georgia that were consensually recognized by the majority of the population and the intellectual elite of Georgia in the second half of the 1980s. These indicators included political independence within the existing borders of the then-Georgian SSR, integration into the international community, development of liberal economy, and sustaining indigenous culture.

² “South Ossetia” for short

³ The role of nationalism in choosing a pro-Western orientation has been a revival of the peculiarities of Georgian national identity (such as mythologization of the Christian past of Georgia).

⁴ This feature of Georgian nationalism has been explicated and aptly described by Professor Stephen Jones. See Stephen Jones, “Georgian Nationalism: A Reassessment”, *Analysis of Current Events* (Slavic and East European Studies, Baylor University), Vol. 12, No. 5-6, September 2000.

⁵ By “political stability” I mean the avoidance of Georgia’s democratic system being replaced, either by the government itself, through an opposition-inspired coup or by external intervention.

1.

The answer to the question “What has Georgia *failed* to achieve during its independence period?” refers more to the respondent’s thoughts and feelings than to the actual social or political situation. And because even the Christian Church abandoned the practice of public confessions a number of years ago, I will only discuss the changes in Georgia’s social life and culture...

It has to be said that over the last 15 years there have been several changes affecting not so much society and culture as the direction of their development. At the same time, our society has not gone far enough in any of these directions to make the reality around us tangibly different. Another important aspect is that the changes in the directions of cultural development effectively coincide with the changes of government. It seems that this is a reflection of some fundamental characteristics of our society. And now we can begin the description of the directions themselves.

The first direction can be described as the period of naïve eclecticism. During Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s presidency, the collective consciousness of society was a patchwork of different and often mutually exclusive views, moods and sentiments, none of which was completely formed and all of which chaotically floated on the turbulent surface of historical processes. Naturally, the process of building a state of any kind could not take place in this land, as the required discourses were not separated from one another or clearly formulated.

The second period (Eduard Shevardnadze’s presidency) is much more resistant to unequivocal description. The formulation and development of Georgia’s foreign policy took place mostly in that period. Georgia entered the international arena as a state, but the state institutions in the country were very weak. The rapid development of the civil sector and the fact that the establishment of oligarchic structures

did not succeed in Georgia were positive side effects of this situation. The liberal democratic discourse, which began to spread across the broad masses of the population, also developed noticeably during the Shevardnadze period, though its spread ended later on.

After the Rose Revolution, the Georgian government consciously set about correcting the flaws of the Shevardnadze period. The slogan: "Georgia without Shevardnadze", which became one of the mottos of the National Movement, as well as the frequency of comparisons with the Shevardnadze era are made in Mikheil Saakashvili's speeches, attest to this. There is a paradoxical situation here: as a result of the unswerving course toward the strengthening of state institutions, the liberal democratic discourse which initially gained a substantial foothold among the broad masses of the population is gradually being drowned out by nationalist discourse, which is acquiring an increasingly religious hue. This is especially noticeable in the younger generation.

This change is likely to acquire a decisive importance for the near future in Georgia's social life.

2.

In my opinion, Zviad Gamsakhurdia had no political program or set of beliefs at all. At any rate, despite his numerous slogans, he never expressed his program in a rational form. Furthermore, the steps taken during his presidential tenure also indicate that there was no such program.

Both the main achievement and main failure paradoxically overlap: it is instilling ideological criteria quite firmly in the Georgian population. In time, these criteria lost their relevance in the area of political choice, but they are still quite established in everyday consciousness and determine the social schizophrenia which is characteristic of the Georgians: people who freely express their will during the elections do not possess the values which correspond to this will.

The Gamsakhurdia period was different from the Soviet regime mostly in the emotional aspect: universal indifferent hypocrisy was substituted by an unhealthy excitement that was just as universal. From an economic standpoint, the Gamsakhurdia regime did not

introduce anything that would have been fundamentally different from those superficial innovations that were ushered in by Gorbachev's perestroika. But one thing has to be noted: none of the governments after the independence can boast such a charisma. Gamsakhurdia's was the only government whose leader proved capable of creating a situation in which Georgians were ready to sacrifice their personal security, prosperity, freedom and sometimes even life for an idea. Of course, the idea itself did not stand up to scrutiny, but its effectiveness can still be a very worthy object for profound reflections.

The main characteristics of the social and political situation of that period were accounted for by two factors:

- 1) The extreme polarization of social consciousness in terms of the "struggle between good and evil". Everything that was banned or undesirable during the period of domination of the Soviet ideology was viewed as useful for building an independent state. It turned out that society did not have any positive resources apart from the dissident or mythological discourse which was good only for Soviet-era social gatherings of the "intelligentsia". An almost complete transplantation of the Soviet-period hushed-up soirees to the session hall of the Supreme Council took place;
- 2) A complete inability to properly assess one's own potential.

As for the developments of the winter 1991-1992, which resulted in the ouster of the Gamsakhurdia government, the realization of its causes is definitely not a worthy object for profound reflections. The Gamsakhurdia government was doomed, and every social stratum and group contributed to its demise, including the so-called "Zviadists."

3.

The period of Eduard Shevardnadze's leadership cannot be described as a period of implementation of some political program or system of views. It was more like perpetual bickering with the participation of the political leader's boundless belief in his own skills, inborn or acquired in the Soviet period, on the one hand, and the groups which emerged spontaneously within his immediate entourage

on the other. Hence the hackneyed assessments which describe Shevardnadze as “balancer.”

The key word which describes the Shevardnadze regime is “corruption.” Precisely the negative sentiments related to this word (phenomenon) became the best reason for the spread of democratic values in society. In addition, violations of human rights took place which bore two conspicuous characteristics: 1) they were visible and easily identifiable; and 2) there existed no cogent argument to justify or at least alleviate them.

Because of all this, the Shevardnadze period can be considered an era of propitious conditions for the so-called “third sector” (non-governmental organizations). These conditions were made even easier and more favorable by many nongovernmental organizations’ direct links with the opposition wing of the government. The direct consequence of this tactic was that perception of liberal democratic values in the mind of the public did not result from the realization of their meaning; rather, they were rather seen as a handy weapon which could be of use in overcoming the social displeasure which was associated with the Shevardnadze regime. The events, known as the Rose Revolution, were the highest expression of the precisely these views. They were correct for the purposes of that particular situation, but superficial in general.

Finally, one more positive aspect can be highlighted, and I will use a dramaturgic metaphor to describe it. The Gamsakhurdia period can be compared to a Greek tragedy in which one man is the formal ruler and the protagonist of the action at the same time. He personally confronts hostile forces and is defeated in the fight against them. This period can be described as “Zviad Gamsakhurdia” without hesitation. When discussing the Shevardnadze period, we cannot talk any more about the combination of the formal ruler and actual protagonist as the same person. This would be tantamount to choosing “Claudius” instead of “Hamlet” as the title for Shakespeare’s famous tragedy. In the Shevardnadze period, others were the protagonists, for example, Zurab Zhvania. His contribution to Georgian politics was decisive. The introduction of multiple centers to the social situation is associated with the Shevardnadze period.

4.

Mikheil Saakashvili's presidential tenure, which is not over yet, is the only one in recent Georgian history which can be associated with a political program. The goal of the program can be expressed in quite a brief phrase: strengthening state institutions.

The implementation of the program has had two flaws: 1) The program is not clearly formulated; and 2) Its implementation is hindered.

Both flaws have both external (objective) and internal (subjective) causes. Among the objective causes are foreign political factors, the country's economic situation, the scarcity of human resources, the lack of civic education and the legacy of the previous regimes, among others. However, it is internal (subjective) causes which are of interest.

The Saakashvili government has two similarities with the Gamsakhurdia period: the existence of a charismatic leader (whose influence on the realities in the country gradually diminishes) and the possibility of using psychoanalysis to explain the Georgian political and social situation. Two opposing trends attest to this: the obvious falling of the average age of officials at all levels of state governance and in the majority of the social institutions on the one hand and the frequency of resorting to the historical past on the other.

Despite this, the Saakashvili period stands out for its hitherto unseen diversity of political and social developments. Compared to the previous periods, it is immeasurably more difficult now to draw the "front line" of confrontations. It is difficult for civil society to operate in this situation, because the old "propitious conditions" no longer exist, and the old civil leaders (at least the majority of them) encounter difficulties maneuvering their way through the complexities of the new reality due to their lack of qualification and experience.

Quite a dangerous situation is taking shape now: on the one hand, violations of human rights no longer take on the old obvious and easily identifiable forms, and on the other hand, there is a value which is actively establishing itself and in whose name these violations become justifiable – the idea of strengthening of state.

In my view, the oddest and most dangerous trend of the Saakashvili period is the view that the state should become strong first, and only

then can democracy be established. It has to be noted, however, that this trend was clearly noticeable only in the period immediately following the Rose Revolution. Euphoria is gradually subsiding and today it is no longer possible to affirm unequivocally that the aforementioned trend is indeed relevant.

5.

Whether or not the government uses repressions is not of a decisive importance because this cannot be the main reason for the incapacity of the opposition. Neither can the objective successes of the government be cited as the reason for the opposition's inefficiency, because those "objective successes" exist only because the criteria of their assessments are so low. Some of the main reasons for this are given below:

- 1) Diversification of the social and political reality: opposition parties are in the same situation as civil society – old methods do not work any more, and new ones have not been developed yet. This is why the leaders of political parties use the strategy of participating in reality shows (appearing in traditional Georgian costumes, lighting candles before icons, etc.).
- 2) Underdevelopment of society: opposition parties do not express the interests of large social groups. Being in the majority in Georgia is the only incentive for capable people to join the organization because loyalty to political principles and the affiliation of the intellectual elite with the abovementioned social groups have not established themselves in Georgia yet.
- 3) Faulty tactics: the opposition predicates its political struggle on the government's weaknesses or, to be more precise, on the negative phenomena, which it tries to exaggerate. This process exposes the fact that the opposition is not interested in anything but seizing power.

6.

The meaning of the future slogan will not be related to the government's "mistakes" – this is how it was in the past, which can be considered the main flaw of the changes of government in Georgia.

But the worsening of the social and political circumstances does not make such situations possible any more. The strengthening of the state institutions might result in the creation in Georgia of a large social group that has its interests. The slogan of the new “strengthened” opposition will be determined precisely by the specific interests of that social group.

What kind of a social group could it be? One possible option is that the interests of the medium-sized businesses will enlist the intellectual support of the new academic elite.

7.

I have already partially supplied an answer to this question above. Let me reiterate that the most probable, and perhaps most desirable, combination would be an association of medium-sized business and the new academic elite (high remuneration guaranteed by the state system, ties stemming from the conditions of the labor market and other factors will shape such an alliance, its goals and motivation). If this happens, the very process of establishing relations will be interesting. First and foremost, both parties of the alliance should grow stronger and acquire a strong social identity.

From the cultural standpoint too, these two participants have quite bright prospects, although overcoming the mental barrier is important. The new academic elite should bring up people for whom the stereotypes which gained currency in society, and especially in business circles, will be irrelevant. For instance, the point of view that expenses on personnel training and business development will have a much greater influence on the improvement of living standards than transfers to the bank account of a diocese cleric should prevail.

8.

The determinant of political stability is the existence of large social groups with clearly formulated and intellectually or politically formalized interests. If the state hinders the creation of such groups, it will be self-detrimental. In that case, the specific scenario of developments will not matter any more because in Georgia, the dominant party system will not be similar to either those systems in place in Mexico and Japan, or to the revolutionary cycles typical of Latin America.

From the cultural standpoint, conditions in Georgia for the development of liberal democratic pluralism do exist, but there is a need for the people who are in a position to influence the process of molding public opinion to develop better tastes.

In addition, the stability of the political system is a boon which society should achieve not only through economic growth or thanks to favorable foreign factors, but also by developing more advanced views. In this respect, the changes which “force” people into making fair decisions and assuming responsibilities seem very important to me. Specific examples which are of utmost importance are the introduction of trial by jury and self-governance in public schools. Both of these new institutions carry a strong social potential whose development and realization are much more important than possible initial failures.

9.

Two channels can be identified in the influence of foreign factors on Georgia's political evolution: 1) The international political situation; 2) Sentiments within Georgian society itself.

The influence of the factors which exert their effects using the first channel will strengthen in time, as Georgia increasingly integrates into the international community. Accordingly, the prospect of isolationism is increasingly dimmer. If we look in retrospect at the influences which were exerted through this channel, we see that there were several stages:

- a) Passive: the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its political repercussions took Georgian society completely by surprise. The opinion that the “national liberation movement” presumably took any active part in these processes seems debatable to me. The slogans at the rallies were more a result of the general loosening of controls than a manifestation of any effective political will;
- b) Formal: in the Shevardnadze period, the direct influence of the Western models on Georgian law-making was noticeable. Despite the fact that administration of the laws was by no means stringent, a substantial formal foundation was nonetheless laid for Georgian statehood, which determined the country's real course;

- c) Partnership: Although foreign policy was considered Georgia's strongest, or rather, least weak, point from as early as the Shevardnadze period, it still is to be noted that there is significant progress in this sphere too. Georgia already not only reacts to changes in the international situation, but also takes some steps itself. In this respect, the most important event lately was the arrest of Russian military officers on spying charges in September 2006. Despite numerous negative results, the positive effect is evident: Georgia is quite successful at using diplomatic means for changing the situation to its benefit. Georgia's recent entry into the international arena is not only the most successful part of the activities of the Georgian state, but it has also started to look like what the rest of the world calls policy.

The second channel is much more difficult to notice, although the foreign factor here is confined to Russia's influence alone. The relevance of those social strata and individuals which culturally and economically depend on Russia is gradually diminishing. On the other hand, there remains one extremely important social institution – the Georgian Orthodox Church – whose relations with the Moscow Patriarchate and accordingly, Russia's political interests, call for a close scrutiny.

10.

In my opinion, the main policy priority should be the radical reform of the secondary education system in Georgia. The most effective step in this direction lately has been the introduction of self-governance in secondary schools. However, close public control is required here to make certain that the school boards do not attach priority by using democratic methods to everything that hinders the development of the modern society and promotes isolationism.

Of course, monitoring should not be direct and straightforward. But the social prestige of liberal values must increase. The role of the media in this is hard to overestimate. Today, victory goes to those who preach democracy, not those who "fight" for democracy.

David Losaberidze

More than 15 years have passed since Georgia declared its independence. The country has gone through a number of major upheavals and crises during this period. The following is an analysis of the progress Georgia has made and an attempt to make forecasts for the future.

New questions arose against the backdrop of new challenges, and we must supply answers to them if we truly want to react properly if not to all, then at least to the most important demands of modern times.

However, answering the questions asked is both easy and difficult.

It is easy because we have all thought about these issues and formed our opinions on them (unverified and reflexive though these opinions may be).

It is difficult because it is impossible to supply exhaustive answers and compile all the arguments in support of our views under the limitations of this format.

Given that the questionnaire is intended as a catalyst to spark a discussion, I have tried to present the fundamental postulates in the form of theses.

1.

Main achievements:

- National sovereignty. To Georgian society, this meant the restoration of Georgian statehood, to the international community – the emergence of a new entity recognized under international law;
- An establishment which is necessary for the functioning of an independent state has been created during the period of independence. Although the Georgian political elite pays great (sometimes excessive) attention to the interests and demands of large countries,

still it is no longer a local administration of this or that superpower. In short, the Georgian authorities (I mean all three branches of power) now know the taste of real power and, regardless of whether the state is strong, weak, or altogether unaccomplished, the Georgian political elite is unlikely to let go of its privileges.

Main failures:

- None of the independence-period governments have proposed to society a comprehensive development strategy. The governments either did not have any cohesive vision in this respect (Gamsakhurdia), or there were generalized views, but no clear-cut action plans and no strategic decision making in the normal working mode (Saakashvili);
- Widespread political naivety and wishful thinking and a low level of social activity (accounted for by a number of reasons: economic, psychological, political) ruled out the possibility of a strong and pragmatic public demand. At the same time, it has to be noted that there is progress, albeit slow, in terms of creating civil society.

What exerted the greatest influence on the above processes:

- For the most part, the Georgian statehood was being established (or restored) against the backdrop of worldwide geopolitical changes (upset of the bipolar balance of power and establishment of a new world order). The domestic factors played a relatively minor part in this; the countries which did not “fight” for independence (Central Asia) became just as independent as those who did (the Baltic countries, the Caucasus). At the same time, domestic factors are increasingly important because the government system and the transformation of a number of sectors (education, social security, etc.) are much less dependent on foreign factors.

2.

The main change:

- The idea of restoring Georgian statehood became extremely popular in Georgian society in the second half of the 1980s and later,

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during Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency. Although the project had a mythical aura to it, was tinged with ethnocentric nationalism and had little to do with political realities, Georgians' desire to build their own state spread beyond narrow intellectual and dissident circles and became popular.

Gamsakhurdia's achievements:

- Declaration of national independence, which was predicated on the results of the nationwide referendum;
- More intense (if infantile) social activity and achievement of a high level of social capital.

Gamsakhurdia's failures:

- The beginning and strengthening of the process of infantile and excessive politicization in society and the newly formed political elite;
- The lack or absence of experience in state governance;
- Dramatic growth of confrontation among social and ethnic groups and clans and between these and the government, which was often encouraged by the government.

New developments:

- Shift in the public mind in favor of independent statehood. The syndrome of fear of independence disappeared in society. What was considered just a dream 10 years before had become an achievable reality in the public eye.

Reasons for the fall of the Gamsakhurdia government:

- The authorities "inspired" all domestic and foreign parties opposed to it (Russia, Soviet intelligentsia, criminal world, youth and most of Soviet nomenclature business circles) to unite against it. This in conditions where other actors remained neutral (the West) or were rapidly growing disenfranchised (wide public masses);
- Shortage of internal resources (first and foremost, human resources).

3.

Most important changes brought on by the Shevardnadze government:

- The new government came to power with the idea of building a democratic and modernized state, confronting its predecessor's ethnocentric and isolationist course. Although the state was weak, it consolidated real political power and achieved international recognition, but maintaining the resulting status quo became an end unto itself.

Shevardnadze's achievements:

- The changes in foreign policy were the main achievement: Georgia achieved international recognition;
- Political romanticism gave way to the primacy of real interests, which was achieved by balancing foreign and domestic forces;
- The major economic and political projects were launched (the Eurasian corridor, oil and gas pipelines, etc.).

Shevardnadze's failures:

- The policy of balancing both foreign and, especially, domestic factors served to intensify the confrontation between political (international orientation), social (dramatic rise of the proportion of marginalized population) and civil (segments of civil society and old party nomenclature) interest groups;
- Shevardnadze's desire for a super-presidential model made him the overseer of all confrontations, so all of the negative energy was directed against him;
- The coup, civil war and lost ethnic conflicts caused – aside from economic collapse – public frustration, mistrust and a nihilistic attitude toward the state.

The novelties:

- In contrast to the Gamsakhurdia-era idealism, realism and pragmatic views started to dominate the process of state governance.

Moreover, it was the period of prevalence of exceedingly mercantile (in the worst meaning of the word) views; the political elite viewed the state as a means of deriving their private material or other benefits.

The reasons for the fall of the Shevardnadze government:

- Despite authoritarian methods of governance, Georgia did not (and still does not) have the resources that are required for the establishment of dictatorship (existence of natural resources, strong punitive mechanisms and foreign support). Unlike Belarus, Azerbaijan and the Central Asian regimes, Shevardnadze was forced to implement a semi-liberal policy in the country;
- A new balance of power was established in the country. With support of the displeased masses and new social groups (civil society, bureaucracy and part of the business sector), “the Young Reformers” who split off from the Shevardnadze team made him follow in Cronos’ footsteps.
- In foreign policy, the existing balance was also preserved. The more and more influential West was no longer pleased with Georgia’s policy of frequent changes of tack and started to look for a more pro-Western successor to Shevardnadze.

4.

The main change brought on by Saakashvili’s government:

- We see an attempt to create a stronger and more efficient state compared to the previous regime. The changes are effected with slogans of accelerated westernization and the complete renewal of systems. Despite successes in some areas and the existence of a strategic vision (idea), there is no action plan or tactic to implement this idea.

Saakashvili’s achievements:

- Greater social activity is characteristic of post-Shevardnadze Georgia. The Rose Revolution awakened a frustrated public from its lethargy. Although disenchantment followed quite soon, the desire

to protect one's rights and do something that can make a real difference gradually transforms from euphoric sentiments into pragmatic actions;

- Major successes towards creating a single common civil area (developments in Achara) and the administration of the state system (the national budget increased 6-7 times in three years) should be considered the government's undisputable achievements;
- Positive changes are taking place in some sectors (implementation of a number of programs in the education and social protection systems), although the results of these changes will manifest themselves many years later.

Saakashvili's failures:

- With the dramatic reduction of widespread corruption, corruption at higher levels has become more likely;
- Despite ceaseless propaganda (which is often of mediocre quality and is waged with gross violations of the principle of supremacy of law), the approval ratings of the government are falling rapidly;
- There is a lack of strategic planning and an absence of tactical solutions. If under Shevardnadze, the government formally received advice from expert circles but failed to act on it, now they do not even listen for formality's sake and, at best, limit themselves to calls on the expert community to support the process of implementing the decisions they make;
- There is a tendency toward super-centralization of power. Instead of strengthening local governments, even the minimal powers of the local governments of the Shevardnadze period were further trimmed. At the national level, the balance between the branches of powers is upset. In effect, decisions are made by only a small group of people.

New developments:

- The strength of the PR efforts distinguishes the incumbent government from its predecessors. At the same time, we see clearly

wrong assessments of the situation. There are instances of the existence of “Potemkin villages” as well.

5.

Reasons for the opposition's weakness:

- Despite the dramatic fall of its approval ratings, the government is still much more popular than the entire opposition spectrum put together;
- There are indirect, and often direct, government repressions against the opposition (especially in the pre-election periods and especially in the provinces);
- The opposition does not have a charismatic leader of the Saakashvili level, which is very important in Georgia. The government's desire to prevent the emergence of such a leader is also evident (the release of footage of opposition Tbilisi city councilman Koba Davitashvili taking money from a man in exchange for a spot on his electoral bloc's party list);
- The middle class, which is necessary for political diversification, is very small in Georgia, whereas the business sector fears the real or imaginary compromising materials which the government might possess against them;
- The post-totalitarian mentality, which makes people always support the incumbent government (“if not they, then who?”), also works against the opposition (despite their diametrically opposite views, the vast majority of the population supported Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze and Saakashvili at the time of their coming to power);
- The opposition parties (at least most of them) are not political parties in a strict sense (perhaps with the exception of the Labor Party). They have no permanent constituency with its own interests and no democratic party structure;
- All the opposition's activities are focused on criticism of the government. No attention is paid to presenting their own programs and views (if they have any).

6.

The opposition ought to appeal to those values (the supremacy of law, human rights, social issues, radical and isolationist nationalism) to which the government pays little attention or which it opposes.

Considering the Central and Eastern European experience, the following lines of action seem promising:

- Mobilizing a substantial number of people under social (and to some extent, even social-revanchist) slogans, especially given the acuteness of the economic problems and economic hyper-polarization of society;
- Kindling nationalist and, partly, isolationist sentiments is increasingly frequent in the lower-income strata, which comprise the absolute majority of the population;
- Seeking the establishment of the principle of supremacy of law in light of the mistakes or transgressions of the incumbent authorities, citing as the reason the need for speedy reforms.

The opposition's prospects in the following areas are relatively dim:

- Advocacy of human rights, which is viewed as an alternative to building a strong state and perceived as protection of the rights of minorities (especially religious and sexual) at the cost of the majority (Orthodox Christian, "indigenous" Georgians);
- Struggle against corruption, which fell into much discredit because of scandalous "PR arrests" and gross violations of the presumption of innocence;
- Primacy of democratic principles, especially liberal values, which is associated with the current economic and political difficulties. This is precisely why these ideas are undergoing serious devaluation in the public eye.

At any rate, decisive importance in the process of raising the opposition's approval ratings should be given to clear-cut programs that will be understandable to the general public.

7.

With different probabilities, it is possible to assign the function of the effective opposition to political forces of different origins:

- The existing opposition parties will likely die out unless they radically change their strategies. At best, they stand to become parts of other political entities (it is possible that the names of the new political entities will be borrowed from the old vocabulary);
- A breakup of the United National Movement is inevitable. Usually, the approval ratings of the parties which are closely integrated into the structure of government (the Round Table, Citizens' Union) falls rapidly and disappears altogether after the latest political crisis or change in the "engine's" (head of government's) policy. At the same time, the future opposition usually comes precisely from the ranks of the ruling party, disclaims its association with the previous government and especially with the political course of its leader, no matter what the political views or capabilities of the new leader might be (Sigua and Kitovani were ex-Round Table members, Zhvania and Saakashvili – ex-Citizens' Union members);
- It is very likely that new political forces will be created, combining both the groups which split off from the National Movement and parts of today's opposition. Although, if this happens, the new parties will have new names, but they will still be staffed with "old faces", who already have held some government posts, are familiar with the intrigues in the government corridors and, in the opinion of a substantial part of the public, "know their business".

In this situation, government reshuffles give rise to many questions, suspicions and predictions. The development of the Georgian political spectrum depends in large part on the incumbent government's policy.

Despite numerous declarations of unity, there are groups within the Saakashvili team, which often confront one another. The president himself tacks pretty neatly among his own entourage, which notionally can be divided into three types of political figures:

- Representatives of the ruling National Movement's departments, who form the president's support base both in parliament and middle- and lower-tier echelons of power;

- High-level officials from the executive branch, ministers, most of whom are not leaders of the ruling party and do not have any strong political force or public image to back them. Accordingly, they are entirely dependent on the president;
- A narrow circle of individuals, a *camarilla* if you will, whose members usually do not hold any important positions of power but wield great influence on the process of setting the country's political course.

8.

Assessing the stability of the incumbent regime, not to mention making predictions for it, is quite a difficult task which hinges on many factors, although it is still possible to highlight several fundamental premises:

- Compared to its predecessor, the incumbent government is less stable, and compared to the Gamsakhurdia government – more stable;
- The Saakashvili government is different from the first government of independent Georgia in that Saakashvili has although small (app. 5%), but really existing interest groups/social strata which support him;
- The Shevardnadze government was more stable for two reasons: First, more people were pleased thanks to the mechanisms of corruption, and second, there were no reforms, which now are often painful (the “swamp is always stable” principle was at work).

Recent developments clearly demonstrated the process of diminution of several political figures. After the weakening, or rather, disappearance, of Okruashvili's and Arveladze's positions, the only real force at the current stage is so-called Bokeria-Merabishvili wing. This situation makes possible three scenarios of further developments:

1. The latter group wields control of the situation and eventually gains strong influence over the president;

2. President Saakashvili fails to discern the potential threat of upsetting the balance within the team and thinks that this group will be loyal to him at all times;
3. In time, this group will be weakened and replaced by other, less well known and less politically weighty persons.

Presumably, the latter two forecasts (especially the last one) sound more realistic.

Prognoses:

- The backdrop of instability will become even more accentuated in the future. The ongoing changes foster new interests and groups that have these interests, which will tend to associate and eventually confront one another and/or the government;
- In the opinion of intellectual representatives of the authorities and their ideological supporters, a Mexican or Japanese model will be established in Georgia, with years-long domination of the ruling party, economic growth and gradual development of guided democracy. Only the timeframe (10 or 30 years) is moot for them. In my opinion, this scenario is unlikely given the fragility of the National Movement as a political force;
- It is more likely that two trends, liberal and revanchist, will clash in the political arena and that representatives of both sides (the ruling party and the opposition) will join the ranks of each faction more or less proportionately.
- Accordingly, Georgia must choose between two paths of development: the liberal progressive one (emergence of modern or post-modern Westernized society through reforms), or the one of *pronunciamentos* (frequent Latin American- or African-style coups against the backdrop of growing influence of military and economic elites);
- Naturally, both paths individually have slim chances of succeeding if domestic factors alone are considered. How events will unfold will depend in large part on foreign factors: accession to NATO and, particularly, integration into Europe would increase the prob-

ability of the former option, whereas growing Russian political influence would favor the latter (in this case, I am more an optimist than anything else and deem the decrease of Russia's political weight in the future an inevitable necessity).

9.

The foreign factor has been, and still remains, an extremely important (although not the only) factor. Looking back at the dynamic of Georgia's development in the last 15 years and extrapolating it into the future, several phases can be identified:

- Stage I (1991-1995): Strong prevalence of the Russian vector. Gamsakhurdia's "rebellion" resulted in the end in the loss of two autonomous regions and accession to the CIS. Russia controlled both the Georgian economy and Georgia's foreign and domestic policy;
- Stage II (1995-2003): Weakening of Russia's positions in the Caucasus and beginning of its replacement by the West. Implementation of the Western projects (TRACECA, etc., which were labeled economic but were in effect political) begins against the backdrop of the Yeltsin-period democracy and chaos in Russia and relative stability in Georgia;
- Stage III (2003- present): Balancing of the Western and northern vectors, although the West is already an equal competitor to Russia. The balancing-oriented Shevardnadze government is replaced by unequivocally pro-Western forces;
- Stage IV (near-future prospect): Beginning of Western domination. Russia's influence will be minimized by strengthening international institutions (first and foremost, NATO);
- Stage V (long-term prospect): Georgia will be completely integrated into the West.

How long will this process take depends on:

- World market prices of oil and other fossil fuels;
- Anticipated changes in Russia's domestic policy (a political crisis due to social and nationalist perturbations) because radicalization of

the Russian political spectrum is likely to intensify confrontation with the West and correspondingly, the process of weakening Russia;

- Public readiness – how successful Georgia will be in resolving its problems, at least partially.

What has to be said is that as time passes, the influence of foreign factors is gradually diminishing, and the influence of domestic factors on the country's political life are increasing accordingly.

10.

A thorough revision of the state system will be required if developments are to follow the ideal scenario. We discussed the foreign factors in the previous section. It is a fact that the international environment is increasingly favorable for Georgia. This, of course, does not mean that old threats will disappear and new ones cannot emerge (strengthening of etatist policy-backed radical nationalism in Russia, growth of radical Islam in Turkey, delays or suspension of the process of accession to the EU, slowing down of the economic growth rate, social problems resulting from ageing of the population, etc.), but effectiveness in reacting to new challenges can be achieved by choosing optimal directions of state development.

Five main priority areas can be highlighted with respect to the required changes:

1. Government system: Georgia should be a parliamentary system. Arguments in support:
 - This will reduce the threat of authoritarianism inherent to the presidential system, which is one of the demands of the post-totalitarian society.
 - Because of Georgia's limited resources and strong foreign interference, authoritarianism will never become dictatorship here and will cause new revolutionary waves (to great disappointment of Pinochet apologists);
 - Political diversification (growing importance of the groups within Parliament) – although it will slow down the reforms, but this

is inevitable under the presidential model too: the emergence of new groups within the ruling elite and intra-party strife make this scenario the only possible one.

2. Real independence of the judiciary. Arguments in support:

- Introduction of a real mediator and balancer (even if somewhat incompetent, but more or less impartial) between the government and society will increase the Georgian state's political capital and rid the government of its public image of a gendarme and executioner.

3. Decentralization (simultaneously with de-concentration) and regionalism. Arguments in support:

- Closeness to the population will enhance the degree of civil participation in decision making and take away from state the image of the only institution which resolves political and social tensions.
- Improvements in the provision of social services at the local level will free the state from extra concerns and enable it to use available resources more efficiently for implementing government policy.
- The creation of regions (not constituent parts of a federation!) will promote the process of the establishment of local political elites, which will replace the existing clannish and criminal entities.
- Real decentralization will oppose the disintegration processes because local problems will be resolved at the local level and the center (Tbilisi) will not be the object of public criticism anymore (including from ethnic enclaves).

4. The improvement of the business environment through development of a carefully designed macro- and microeconomic development strategy. Arguments in support:

- Development and prognostication by the state of a competitive economic strategy (rather than attempts to manage the economy).

10 questions on Georgia's political development

At present, we see the opposite picture: the government's economic policy is entrusted to people who are categorical opponents of the idea of development of a government strategy, whereas practice shows routine gross, populist and sometimes illegal intervention of government departments in private businesses' affairs (Kakha Bendukidze's ideas vs. the activities of the Financial Police).

5. The social and education sectors should be on the list of the country's top priorities. Arguments in support:
 - In the decades to come, while the economy is gaining strength and fundamental changes are under way in social psychology, it is unlikely that purely market-oriented systems of education, healthcare and guarantees of social security that might be created will be able to truly meet the growing demands of the ageing society.

Action plan:

The main directions of the vision for the country's development should be defined with maximum transparency and civil co-participation in order to enlist maximum public support for difficult and often unpopular reforms.

Any action must entail the following phases:

- I. Development by the state of strategic blueprints for different sectors with participation of local and foreign experts;
- II. Disseminating the formulated strategies and blueprints among the public, sharing ideas to make appropriate amendments; priming the public by reaching nationwide consensus (if this proves impossible, then reaching consensus at least among the most important actors);
- III. Designing strategy-based action plans (which should be accompanied by a simplified, easily comprehensible and clearly formulated list of procedures);
- IV. Involving society in the implementation process and boosting its motivation to guarantee success (selection of staff in a democratic and transparent manner, etc.)

Nani Macharashvili

Assessment of the current developments by contemporaries is an interesting though not very simple task. It is interesting insofar as the contemporaries' reflections create an excellent opportunity for a better retrospective analysis of the social and political phenomena of the past from the more distant perspective of the future; and it is difficult if only because observations of the recent history may be based on biased views that lack awareness of the broader context. This political forum aimed at appraising Georgia's recent history confronts us precisely with this difficult task. The present article lays no claims to being a piece of scientific research – and neither do the objectives of the project require it to be one. The views and ideas which are expressed here are but an attempt to give assessments to the recent Georgian history and make prognoses for the future, and they are presented more as separate postulates and hypotheses than as assertions. However, it would be better if answers to each of the questions that were asked here were based on proper case studies and research data. We hope that precisely the intensification of research efforts in these particular areas in our society will be one of the results of the forum.

Introduction

On the whole, the 15 years of national independence have amounted to just a pool of attempts to build statehood, which in Georgia, with its record of three changes of government, had to begin from scratch after each disturbance. Accordingly, Georgia's political development can be envisioned as a model of spiral of development with three distinct cycles.

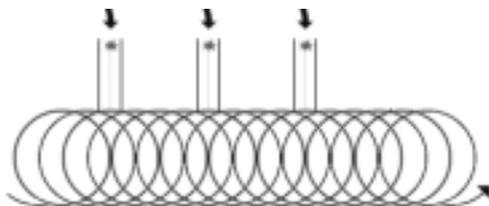


Figure 1. The spiral model of Georgia's development in the last 15 years.

The first cycle coincides with Z. Gamsakhurdia's presidency, the second – with E. Shevardnadze's, and the third – with Mikheil Saakashvili's. Each cycle is marked by major social transformations, which played the role of a solution to the crisis of the legitimacy of the previous government on the one hand and a vehicle of entering the next cycle on another. Accordingly, entering each new cycle is linked with critical episodes of the country's recent history: in the first case, it is the April 1989 events, in the second – the December 1991-January 1992 coup, and in the third case – the 2003 Rose Revolution. Starting the process of building statehood all over again is what all of these cycles had in common, although the starting positions in which they were implemented were different each time and depended on the results of the preceding cycle. To a certain extent, they are determinants of how successful the development processes of the following cycle are, although the new governments have not always taken this into account and tried to draw a dividing line between themselves and their predecessors.

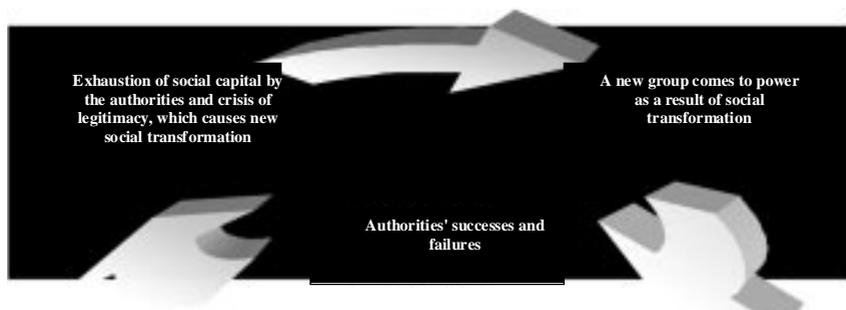


Figure 2. Cyclical development model

Our overview provides a general description of Georgia's cyclical development and outlines prospects for the future. It has to be noted here that we consider it the top priority when discussing the country's prospects to overcome the spiraling development of this sort and establish a straight-line pattern in the process of state development.

1.

The spiral pattern of development and the consequent "going around in circles" has prolonged the process of achieving the kinds of successes reached by the Baltic States, which have been the most successful in the former Soviet Union¹. For quite some time, Georgia was a glaring example of what a country should not do if it aspires to be independent and build a democracy.²

In this report, the assessment of the last 15 years of the country's development is given in the form of general trends, with greater detail provided in the discussion of individual cycles. It also has to be taken into account that none of the trends should be viewed as an accomplished process yet, for they still remain unattained objectives, although progress is obvious according to all the parameters.

Getting rid of the "failed state" label. Overall, the recent history of Georgia has been nothing but the incumbent authorities' consistent attempts to tackle the failed state syndrome, which was rooted partly in the civil strife of the 1990s and partly in the clan rule which took shape during the Shevardnadze period.

Growing recognizability of Georgia and in general, more interest toward Georgia in the international arena. Georgia's international image is improving. Once a part of the USSR, the obscure Georgia is transforming into an independent sovereign state and a legitimate member of the international community.

Transition from ethnic nationalism to civic nationalism. The radically nationalist statements which were made at the beginning of the 15 years of development are gradually changing and being conclusively replaced by so-called civic nationalism. However, the degree of territorial and civil fragmentation still remains high. Georgia's territorial integrity has yet to be restored and the civil integration of ethnic minorities residing in Georgia's borderlands still remains a problem.

Transition from violent to non-violent methods of changing government. In this respect, the difference between the 1991-1992 coup and the 2003 Rose Revolution was remarkable. Despite the fact that Shevardnadze's decision to step down in itself played a significant role in the bloodless outcome of the transition, it can in large part also be attributed to the Georgian population's having experience of changing government by bloodshed, which acted as a deterrent factor. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the political awareness of the Georgian population has also risen.

Weakening of Russia's influence in favor of Western influence. In the first years of Georgia's independence, Russia dominated the center stage of the Georgian foreign policy. Eventually, and after the Rose Revolution almost completely, it was replaced by the West.³ In the early 1990s, Georgia started its transition from a passive actor in international politics to playing an active role. Post-revolution Georgia strives to be a regional actor in the Black Sea region and fosters the idea of starting a new wave of democratic transformations in other countries of the former Soviet Union.

Despite the above positive changes, the elections in Georgia are unable yet to be the instrument of change of government, so **Georgia cannot qualify as a country of so-called electoral democracy.** This is precisely why governments in Georgia are changed in an unconstitutional manner. The only exception was the 28 October 1990 parliamentary elections, in which the transformation of the old regime and establishment of the new one took place within the constitutional framework⁴. Accordingly, the 28 October 1990 elections set the first precedent of changing government through elections. In the period that followed, the institution of elections was assigned somewhat of a façade function and, in both the 31 October 1992 parliamentary and the 2004 parliamentary and presidential elections, played the symbolic role of crowning the winner who was established in the process of social transformation with the triumphal wreath. The elections became not the instrument of change of government, but a means of formalization of the victory of the winning side during the social transformation.⁵

The practice of overcoming the legitimacy crisis by resorting to electoral irregularities has not been uprooted yet either. The

Shevardnadze authorities were actively trying to derive benefits for themselves from the elections and to ignore voters' preferences, especially in the last few years of his rule, when the discrepancy between the negative public attitudes toward the authorities and the election results was glaring. This phenomenon reached its peak in the 2 November 2003 elections. The incumbent authorities are exposed to the same temptation. In conditions of the existing imbalance in terms of distribution of power, they may be tempted to wield administrative resources to rig the elections. It is therefore a major challenge of the incumbent authorities to hold fair elections.

As for the questions of how the Georgian society and culture changed in the 15 years of independence and which societal characteristics affected the political processes the most, it has to be said that the **negative activity of the Georgian population** has the greatest impact on social and political processes.⁶ The importance of this factor is particularly high during major upheavals as compared to periods of social development at a regular pace. The Georgian population stands out for its participatory culture and high degree of involvement in the political processes only during social transformations, but not in the periods between those transformations. This is accounted for by the high degree of fragmentation, which is why the possibility of the nation's consolidation and accordingly, the success of social and political movements in conditions of the nation's steady development are limited. On the other hand, the authorities do not feel the obligation to take into account the small groups' demands. Uniting the nation when the level of disunity is so high requires slogans which would appeal to and unite the most people possible. But in Georgia, as it has already been proven more than once, it is easier to rally the people under negative slogans, such as, for instance, "Georgia without the USSR!" (Russia was implied), "Georgia without Gamsakhurdia!", "Georgia without Eduard Shevardnadze!", "Achara without Aslan Abashidze!" and so forth. As a consequence, protest sentiments which cannot find constitutional channels of expression through the election process, for example, are manifested in street protests and give rise to a new cycle of social transformation.

A look back at the political processes of the last 15 years in Georgia shows that this period is best described as the “**era of charismatic leaders**”. The very fact that the history of independent Georgia is usually divided into the periods of heads of state and not by some other criterion attests to the high demand for charismatic leaders in our society. Some of the explanations are the Soviet-era cultivation of the belief in the leader and the country's numerous crises, which generate demand for charismatic leaders.

The social capital of charisma and the legitimacy which it confers are not permanent. As soon as disappointment with the charismatic leader's capabilities and success sets in, demand for a new leader is created. The dramatic change of charismatic leaders demonstrates this most illustratively. However, it should be admitted that, in contrast to Zviad Gamsakhurdia's, Eduard Shevardnadze's trial period proved to be longer. It is possible that in Saakashvili's case too, excessive support for the charismatic leader against the backdrop of revolutionary euphoria will plummet dramatically. That three years after the revolution, Mikheil Saakashvili lost a substantial number of supporters according to opinion polls may constitute evidence in support of this scenario. But the most important thing is that the authorities themselves should not fall victim to this patrimonial political culture by trying to keep up the dizzying support for them which initially existed through election rigging.

In general, Georgia's political ethos is personalized. Today it is predicated more on the person than on the system, more on the leader than on the institution. This is characteristic both for the public service, governance, and a variety of systems, including those of political parties, both at the national and local level. Therefore, **fostering the development of systems and institutions** remains the main task and one of the major problems to be resolved in the process of state development.

Naturally, while analyzing the successes of the 15 years of development and the existing problems, the starting positions and objective conditions in which each cycle took shape should be taken into account. However, the main question which should be asked is which way the country is headed. Successes that were achieved both in the

establishment of systems and institutions of democratic governance and in integration into Western structures should serve as the criteria here. To answer this question, we will try to assemble a general picture of the last 15 years of Georgia's development piece by piece, by discussing the successes and failures of each cycle individually.

2.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency was the most controversial period of the last 15 years of Georgian history. During his presidential tenure, every success turned out to be a failure in a very short time. Just a few examples would suffice to prove this. Despite the fact that Zviad Gamsakhurdia managed to unite the nation⁷ to the extent which in Georgia's modern history was emulated only during the Rose Revolution, the unity soon passed into oblivion and the country became completely fragmented.⁸ Under his government, the country was divided into two camps – Zviadists and anti-Zviadists, which resulted in a bloody civil strife and the 1991-1992 coup. The late 1980s phenomenon of the nation standing united as one was forgotten until the Rose Revolution.

The credit for paving the road for restoration of the national sovereignty, which was abolished in 1921, should also go to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, as the conditions in which he achieved this were not particularly favorable.⁹ Despite the fact that the country's de-jure recognition coincided with the putsch against Gamsakhurdia, he managed to bring about the country's recognition during his brief rule. Moreover, Georgia was the first republic in the post-Soviet area where universal democratic elections were held. Together with the Baltic States, the Georgia of that period spearheaded the struggle for restoration of national sovereignty. It also has to be taken into account that Zviad Gamsakhurdia strenuously objected to Georgia's accession to the CIS because he considered it an attempt at resurrecting the USSR.¹⁰ The 1991-1992 coup and 1992-1995 civil strife put Georgia's statehood in severe jeopardy.

Among the failures of the Gamsakhurdia period were the authorities' nationalist rhetoric, which, although it proved effective during the struggle for independence and was the main weapon in the battle

against the USSR, turned out to be inappropriate for Georgia's multiethnic social context. Zviad Gamsakhurdia failed to put nationalist discourse into the right foreign and domestic context; *he proved unable to carry out an appropriate personnel policy and accordingly, created an apparatus that was unfit for governance* and unable to resolve social problems.¹¹ Zviad Gamsakhurdia proved unable to part with the era of the pro-independence protest rallies of the 1990s. He had neither experience nor enough intuition for this.¹² *Mistakes were made in relations with the opposition parties: Zviad Gamsakhurdia's policy for the opposition parties lacked pragmatism. The accusation that the Gamsakhurdia government banished them from politics should probably be considered as legitimate. Gamsakhurdia proved to lack the talent for changing tack, which is so necessary for the regulation of crisis situations; his campaign against the so-called Red intelligentsia was ill-thought-out* as he issued threats that he would publish black lists and information about their disreputable activities in the Soviet period. *Georgia did not completely leave Russia's orbit: in August 1991, when the State Emergency Committee in Moscow tried to stop perestroika and restore order, the Georgian president, who at that time was engaged in the South Ossetia conflict, did not actively speak against the conspirators; the Gamsakhurdia government took the bait in South Ossetia and got embroiled in the conflict. Of course, using foreign military units during a civil strife, being guided by personal ambitions, and taking part in stirring the Abkhazia conflict should all be viewed as mistakes.*

The main reason for the premature end of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency was the lack of democratic political culture and statesmanship. This can explain the mistakes that were made both by the rival political groups of the period (the authorities and the opposition) and by society at large. The unwillingness to compromise, tendency to solve problems solely by confrontational methods, heightening of tensions until crisis is created – all these are characteristic of that period. Radicalism and acrimony, which were weapons of choice in political opponents' rivalry, resulted in the use of force against the legitimately elected government. The intensity of the political process of the period can be accounted for in several ways:

The specific nature of the transition period itself can be considered the first reason. That is to say, after winning independence and coming to power, the Gamsakhurdia government ran afoul of great public expectations. The public expected rapid economic growth and significant improvement of social and economic conditions. However, the government had neither the resources nor sufficient experience to live up to these expectations. The wide gap between the public expectations and the actual government actions gave rise to the population's extremely negative attitude toward the authorities of the day. In addition, the public also had excessive expectations that democracy would be established in the country, which resulted in extremely negative assessments of any deviation from the democratic procedure. The opposition camp often called Gamsakhurdia another Ceausescu. The rhetorical questions of the period was what was more important – democratic development or sorting the country out, which should come first or whether it was possible to achieve both objectives at the same time. Initially, Zviad Gamsakhurdia too was more inclined toward development and consolidation of the independent state, but the radical opposition and the Russian media saw to creating the image of a dictator for him.

The Georgian society of that period did not really think about the possible results owing to their lack of experience of civil strife and therefore was making demands in the most pressing manner. Later, the fear of reliving the chaos and lawlessness of the past played an important role in the bloodless conduct of the Rose Revolution. In other words, having effectively acquiesced use of force, a substantial segment of the Georgian society of the period did not fully realize what the potential outcome would be.

When discussing the causes of the coup in Georgia, we also have to take into account the Kremlin's position: Moscow was interested in the extreme escalation of the situation in the country. The point is that from the moment of declaration of independence through early 1993, Russia's prospects in Georgia seemed quite unclear. Georgia, like Azerbaijan, did not join the Commonwealth of Independent States and was trying its best to rid itself of Russia's influence. To Russia, on the other hand, maintaining its influence on Georgia, with its Black

Sea ports and common border with Turkey became a strategic goal. When the Georgian government headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia failed to find an ally in the West, Russian interference in the country's domestic affairs and conflicts became inevitable. Russia actively employed for this purpose the Transcaucasus Military District, both in the December 1991-January 1992 developments and for escalation of the situation in the hotbeds of ethnic separatism. The occurrence of events which were similar to the coup in Georgia in other countries of the post-Soviet area support the argument about the Kremlin's participation in the coup.¹³ The first failure of the state thus became evident.

3.

The 11-year period of Eduard Shevardnadze, former Soviet foreign minister who had earned enormous political capital in the eyes of the West and returned to the Georgian political stage, can be described as a road from criminal to clan governance.

On his return to Georgia, Shevardnadze had to rebuild the state over again because the only thing Georgia had at that time was de jure recognition by the international community following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and hope that a country headed by Eduard Shevardnadze would start receiving international assistance. Judging by other parameters, the country's development was under serious threat. Society was divided into two camps, Zviadists and Shevardnadzists; Kitovani and Sigua, participants in the December 1991-January 1992 coup who were backed by some of the National Guard units and criminal kingpins, were on one side of the civil strife barricades, and supporters of the former president with part of the National Guard were on the other. The dire social and economic situation in the country was added to this.

Shevardnadze spent three years from 1992 to 1995 on implementing stabilization programs, and this should be considered the most important success of his presidency. However, in the same period most of Abkhazia's territory was lost, military units (Admiral Baltin's troops) of a foreign country, Russia, were used to consolidate his power,¹⁴ disadvantageous peace agreements were signed on the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts, Georgia joined the CIS, and the pres-

ence of the Russian military bases in Georgia was extended for another 25 years.

Striking a balance between the conflicting parties should be considered one of Shevardnadze's achievements, especially in the first few years after his return to Georgia. Eduard Shevardnadze acted as a mediator between the opponents. He rallied around himself and temporary groups, which he would later dismiss after using them for one purpose or another. It was thanks to Shevardnadze's talent for political flexibility that Jaba Ioseliani's paramilitary units were dismissed painlessly and Igor Giorgadze was removed from power.

Shevardnadze achieved considerable success in the establishment of state institutions and, in general, the country's institutional development. Despite the fact that the institutions that were established in his period were largely artificial and played the role of a façade, they should still be considered a major step ahead in conditions of the dysfunctional state apparatus of the early 1990s. It also has to be taken into account that precisely during the Shevardnadze period, the Soviet-era legal framework underwent a major transformation and was brought closer to the Western values. The adoption of the new constitution and abolition of capital punishment also merit mention.¹⁵ Paving the way for the development of the free media and nongovernmental sector is also associated with Shevardnadze's name. It has to be said that even the harshest critics of Shevardnadze cannot avoid admitting these achievements.

Eduard Shevardnadze's voluntary resignation was also to his credit. Although this was done under pressure from the Rose Revolution, the revolution might have ended in bloodshed had it not been for Shevardnadze's position. It also has to be said that no division has taken place in society along the Shevardnadzist-anti-Shevardnadzist line. The entire society became an anti-Shevardnadze camp, in other words, after the Rose Revolution, society was not as factionalized before entering a new cycle of state development as it was the case before the second transformation, after Shevardnadze's return; instead, this happened on the basis of the consolidation of the nation. Strange though this might sound, it has to be said that Shevardnadze, who returned in the early 1990s to a divided society, managed to unite the nation against himself.

The gradual transition of Georgia to the pro-Western orientation and the beginning of the process of Georgia's integration into the European structures, which manifested itself in Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe in 1999, the laying of the groundwork for the closure of the Russian military bases, paving the way for Georgia's accession to NATO, as evidenced by the Georgian army's participation in the US-led Train and Equip Program, were also among Shevardnadze's achievements.

As a result, the explicitly pro-Russian orientation of 1993-1995 gave way to a bipolar foreign political orientation when hopes of restoration of all the country's territorial integrity with Russia's help were dashed. Although Shevardnadze was trying to the end to find the golden medium in the foreign politics and implement a policy of balance between Russia and the West, it has to be said that his policy proved to be ineffective because Russia could not reconcile itself with the idea of appearance of the West in the geopolitical area it considered its own, whereas the West has never been given a *carte blanche* in Georgia given Russia's presence.

As for the mistakes and failures of the Shevardnadze period, besides the already mentioned ones, his retrogressive style of governance and the tendency to resolve the problems facing society through minor improvements (incrementally) have to be mentioned, which looked more like stagnation than progress. Ultimately, this style of work of the public administration and countless problems on the agenda which required strategic solutions rather than minor improvements dissolved the system. During his presidency, attempts to improve the grave economic situation, worsened by the energy crisis, failed. Public displeasure was growing daily, and the degree of the authorities' legitimacy was falling.

Among the characteristics of the Shevardnadze rule were clannish and corrupt government, nepotism, government officials' shares in private business, chronic budget deficit, permanent problems with the collection of budget revenues and an unenviable investment climate which precluded foreign investment and made economic development impossible. Precisely these were the reasons why discontent with and the crisis of the Shevardnadze government evolved, and the Rose Revolution found a way out of the situation.

4.

With the Rose Revolution and Saakashvili's coming to power, for the third time in modern Georgian history, yet another process of building the Georgian state started, one which qualitatively and quantitatively is very different from the preceding cycles. The political arena in post-revolution Georgia has become much more dynamic and target-oriented, and discussions on value systems have been substituted with finding practical solutions to social problems. In contrast to the previous regime, the public can see the results of the authorities' activity (whether these are positive or negative is another matter), which proves that they are working.¹⁶ In contrast to the Shevardnadze government, the Saakashvili authorities declare as their mission implementing systemic changes and carrying out reforms at an accelerated pace. Accordingly, if we should consider Zviad Gamsakhurdia the founder of the country's statehood and Eduard Shevardnadze – its institutional designer, Mikheil Saakashvili is the person who rendered it more systemic and made it functional. In contrast to the preceding periods, the Saakashvili authorities are building state according to Western standards, which is no small task and quite painful a process because it requires the authorities to take many unpopular decisions and put them into practice¹⁷, which in a post-Soviet society, or rather, a society which is used to the Shevardnadze-era primacy of clan, corporate and individual interests, is associated with the difficult task of changing the popular mindset. This is why, in order to enlist public support and maintain legitimacy, the incumbent Georgian authorities give a wide publicity to their successes.¹⁸ and sometimes even make concessions and offer the public populist alternative solutions. So, the dualism which exists between state building and populism is evident, and the Saakashvili government often seems to be its captive.

Among the successes of Saakashvili and his government, the first and foremost to be mentioned is that the Rose Revolution was carried out bloodlessly, breaking with the tradition of bloody transformations and creating a precedent of peaceful, albeit unconstitutional, transfer of power. The restoration of Georgian jurisdiction in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazeti, which significantly reduced the degree of territorial disunity of Georgia, also has to be mentioned.

From the point of view of state development, the incumbent government's indisputable successes include the establishment of a culture of public love and respect toward the national symbols (anthem, flag, coat-of-arms), and from the point of view of civil integration – promotion of multiethnic unity on the basis of civic nationalism, which has more than once been specifically emphasized by Mikheil Saakashvili himself in his public speeches and reports.¹⁹ Among the results of the incumbent government's three years' work, tackling the problems of permanent budget deficit and collection of budget revenues, as well as annually improving economic indicators merit special emphasis. Despite the fact that collection of budget revenues in Georgia is often associated with "state racketeering" by the authorities, it has to be taken into account that the established practice of the Shevardnadze period, tax evasion, can only be ended through strict enforcement, which is naturally identified with state racket in the critics' eyes.²⁰ The incumbent Georgian authorities also have to work on improvement of the investment environment, which was unenviable under Shevardnadze, although the criteria of selection of property for privatization, impartiality of the authorities in these matters, and the issue of participation or otherwise of government officials in this process still remain disputable. It is a fact that the incumbent authorities are faced with the same challenge as the Shevardnadze government was – not to fall under the influence of private business and play the role of a mediator between the government and private sectors to the end.

Taking a firm position in relations with Russia and forcing Russia to admit the Georgian statehood not only *de jure*, but also *de facto* is also among the successes of the Saakashvili government.²¹ Another noteworthy achievement is the withdrawal of the Russian military bases from the country's territory; Georgia started to openly call Russia a party to the Georgia-Abkhazia and Georgia-South Ossetia conflicts, which would not have happened under Shevardnadze. There are visible efforts to replace the Russian peacekeepers deployed in the conflict zones under the CIS aegis with some other peacekeeping contingent. When talking about the conflicts, we must mention the establishment of the alternative to the separatist Tskhinvali authorities

in the form of the pro-Georgian provisional authority under the leadership of Dmitriy Sanakoyev, which is considered an outpost for the peaceful restoration of Georgian jurisdiction in South Ossetia, just like the Kodori Gorge authority in Abkhazia.

It was precisely during Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency that the practical implementation of Georgia's integration with NATO and, more generally, into European structures, began, whereas before it remained just an instance of wishful thinking. The Patrol Police and standardized national university entrance exams are also on the list of Mikheil Saakashvili's successful initiatives.

When talking about the negative aspects of Mikheil Saakashvili's rule, what has to be mentioned first and foremost is the heavy shift in separation of powers toward the executive branch even compared to the Shevardnadze period and the weakening of the role and functions of the legislative branch, which gives grounds to some researchers to talk about the "super-presidential" system of governance. The authorities cite the need for and necessity of rapid reforms as an explanation.

The same explanation is given to the repeated practice of the incumbent Georgian authorities of tailoring the law to suit their needs on the one hand,²² and to the top down process of policymaking and disregard in the process of reaching public political decisions for the opinions of the nongovernmental sector and the public even at the initial consideration stage. It is known that achieving this goal (carrying out the reforms) using democratic methods is very difficult and that it is relatively easy to use autocratic methods. It also has to be taken into account that there is quite a great demand among the Georgian public today for a tight rein, which makes the Saakashvili government's slant toward autocratic decisions acceptable to the public and obviates the need for the authorities themselves to think about self-restraint. Gross legal violations in the process of confiscation of property of former high-level officials during the anti-corruption reform, as well as the acceptance of inadequate evidence when political opponents were arrested, seem to attest to this. And all this indicates that the supremacy of law is not yet the supreme principle for our society.

The social environment has not improved in the three years of Saakashvili's presidency. The social situation still remains one of the

most painful and most dangerous factors to the stability of government. The 10-lari (about 6 USD) pension raise cannot change the situation in conditions of chronically high inflation and unemployment rates. The social safety networks are still based on subsidized social assistance and intended only for the most impoverished families, whereas building the social security system on the basis of redistributive justice would have been more efficient. Among the noteworthy failures of the incumbent authorities are also the summer 2004 military operation in South Ossetia, the grave situation in the penitentiary system, the limiting of freedom of speech and dependence of the judiciary on other branches of power.

Overall, Mikheil Saakashvili's three years in power can be described as the process of revival after the two failures to become an accomplished state, which seems to be based on the radical etatist ideology. In effect, however, what is happening is the restoration of statehood and the beginning of proper functioning of state compared to the preceding periods. Precisely this creates the impression of active participation of the state. However, it is also true that, as the experience of the last 15 years shows, the days of autocratic governance are unlikely to last long, and the Saakashvili government will sooner or later have to think hard about transforming itself if it wants to remain in power.

5.

The opposition's weakness has been one of the most conspicuous phenomena of the last 15 years of Georgia's political development. The periods of Zviad Gamsakhurdia's, Eduard Shevardnadze's and Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency are not very different in this respect. It has to be taken into account that, when talking about the weakness of the opposition, the criterion is the likelihood of the opposition parties' coming to power, which, with the exception of the parties which split from the ruling party in the past, is effectively equal to zero. The point is that the succession of ruling parties in Georgia has been taking place not through the replacement of the ruling party by the opposition, but through the coming to power of an opposition wing that emerges from within the ruling party headed by a charismatic

leader. Accordingly, changes of government is associated with internal discords and rifts within the ruling party, which in the last 15 years of Georgian history has become an established spiraling pattern, not a feature of any individual cycle. The replacement of the seemingly unrivalled Gamsakhurdia government became possible through the efforts of Tengiz Kitovani and Tengiz Sigua, who had left the ranks of his supporters, on the one hand, and the former Soviet nomenclature on the other²³. Eduard Shevardnadze was also replaced by the opposition groups who had in the past split off from his party, the Georgian Citizens' Union.²⁴ The likelihood of continuation of the same trend at present is often pointed out when forecasts are made about the future of the United National Movement. Currently, the probability of some opposition party's coming to power in Georgia (at any rate, from among the present-day political spectrum) does not merit consideration. The absence of corresponding rise in the approval ratings of any of the opposition parties despite the falling approval ratings of the ruling party attests to this.²⁵ The more likely scenario is the one in which the next ruling political force has some connection with the United National Movement. It is therefore appropriate to draw a line between the opposition with and without the record of belonging to the ruling party (internal and external opposition) when we discuss the possibility of the political opposition's coming to power in Georgia: The former denotes opposition groups which split off from the ruling party (not from a coalition), whereas the latter refers to the part of the political spectrum without this type of link with the ruling party.

When we discuss the weaknesses of the external opposition parties, we should perhaps take into account objective systemic problems and specifics of the Georgian political culture of the last 15 years, which was heavily prone to supporting political parties that were created around charismatic leaders. What factors cause such a high support for political parties that are created around charismatic leaders is a subject for a separate piece of research. It is a fact, however, that support is given not so much to the party as to its leader. The landslide victories of Gamsakhurdia's *Round Table-Free Georgia*, Shevardnadze's *Georgian Citizens' Union*, and Saakashvili's *United*

National Movement attest to this. Precisely this specific quality of the political culture should serve as an explanation for putting the ruling party in a monopolistic situation of sorts and sidelining the external opposition spectrum. This situation gives the opposition parties the impression of being left out of the political process and grounds to talk about an exclusive political environment and a high degree of political verticalization. The feeling that the ruling party is beyond the competitors' reach is, in the final analysis, quite disadvantageous to the ruling party itself because governments who came to power with overwhelming popular support usually consider public trust a static resource which will never get exhausted. But the point is that the feeling of matchlessness of the ruling party remains only as long as the leader's charisma makes this possible.²⁶ Questioning the charismatic leader's abilities and disappointment with him automatically result in the change of attitudes toward the ruling party, although the Georgian population may have to continue to formally acknowledge that the former charismatic leader has no alternative for a long time, until the emergence of the new charismatic leader, as was the case after the public disappointment in Eduard Shevardnadze.²⁷

What other factors may underlie the weakness of the external political opposition?

Ineffective party system and structure: One of the main shortcomings of the opposition political parties is the paucity of their structural units and absence of real local branches. The latter are mostly active only during election campaigns. The lack of qualified staff may be one of the explanations. Another indicator of ineffective party system and structure is that the opposition does not know its own voters. The opposition is not familiar with the situation on the political market and therefore cannot work out an appropriate strategy to attract more voters. This ability can only evolve through the growth and qualitative improvement of the analytical component. The ruling party seems to have a better situation with respect to the party structure, although in general the institution of the political party is still at the initial stage of development in Georgia.

Lack of credibility of the party as a political institution in Georgia, compared to other social institutions like the media or the

church²⁸, is a characteristic of modern-day public sentiments. Strong support for a ruling party which has grown around a charismatic leader, especially soon after its coming to power, is one thing, and lack of support for the political parties which do not have a charismatic leader is quite another.

The “Shamatava syndrome”²⁹ – lacking long-term strategy and counting only on the authorities’ mistakes: The opposition parties do not propose to the public any alternatives to the authorities’ solutions to problems of society or policy options. This undermines both public trust in them and their image as capable political entities and molds the opinion that if the opposition cannot propose alternative models now, it will not be able to propose them when it comes to power either. Accordingly, the external opposition spectrum acts only as a mouthpiece, a conduit for articulating the problems, not as a mechanism for solving them.³⁰ In these conditions, the opposition can only count on the authorities’ mistakes and failures. Reiterating old controversies and looking into the past, not the future, to which the opposition often resorts, is yet further proof of the absence of policy analysis and long-term strategy of dealing with the country’s problems. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the ordinary citizen prefers to go to the authorities and the media instead of some political group to get some private or public problem resolved. At a time when the authorities’ successes are obvious, especially against the backdrop of nonfeasance of the Shevardnadze government, this sort of passive activity is disadvantageous to the opposition.

The absence of charismatic opposition leaders at the current stage: Disappointed with the authorities, the protest vote awaits the emergence of a new charismatic leader and new political party, which was clearly manifest for a brief period after Salome Zourabichvili crossed over to the opposition camp.

Lack of coordination between the parties: The rivalry for the status of the “main opposition force” is apparent, especially between the parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition, which hinders creation of an opposition alliance. However, it also has to be taken into account that unity is the only way for the opposition parties to win over a higher number of supporters and come to power. At the

same time, the authorities would be more likely to reckon with the political weight of the united opposition.

The absence of an opposition-controlled regional center of political power: Just like the central government, the local self-governments are also entirely under the ruling parties' control. Accordingly, the Georgian opposition spectrum today lacks the lever which during Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency existed in the form of Acharan leader Aslan Abashidze's *Revival* party.

Limited fundraising opportunities for the opposition political parties in the electoral marathon, where, given the common practices of toll-gating and macing, the use of government levers is highly likely³¹.

The weakness of the opposition spectrum can also be accounted for by factors like government pressure, i.e. irregularities and unfairness of the electoral process and use of administrative resources,³² as well as by introduction of the high election threshold.

6.

Any failure or mistake by the incumbent authorities may serve as a slogan. To supply answer to this question, two factors have to be taken into account. First, the last 15 years of Georgia's development show that the legitimacy of any government depends in large part on its fulfillment of its campaign promises. An International Republican Institute study in which respondents put giving false promises at the top of the list of unacceptable qualities of a politician,³³ also attests to this. This quality was found equally unacceptable for the respondents in both the incumbent ruling party and the opposition, although it is clear that this test is applicable today more to the authorities than to the opposition, if only because the authorities are responsible for today's public policy. Therefore, failure to keep all the promises of the political force which came to power after the Rose Revolution may presumably be wielded against the government by the opposition in the future. Despite the fact that this is precisely what the opposition is doing and that it is putting an emphasis precisely on the authorities' mistakes and unfulfilled promises, there is no rise in the opposition parties' approval ratings. The only result of disappointment in the government for now is the falling government approval rating, which

in itself does not cause rising opposition ratings. What we see is part of the population which is displeased with the incumbent government but does not deem the opposition – which it knows very well – an alternative either. The opposition sentiments are wasted purposelessly. A conclusion follows that the launch of any serious movement against the Saakashvili government is unlikely in the near future.³⁴ Precisely this makes it possible to predict that the incumbent president will stay for a second term, although another consideration has to be factored in when talking about this issue, in particular, that disappointment and discontent with the ruling party might easily transform into support for a political group which will rally around the new charismatic leader should such a leader emerge. Accordingly, if a new charismatic opposition leader enters the Georgian political arena, it is quite possible that the brewing sentiments of displeasure with the authorities might be put to use against the government.

As for the values, slogans and messages which might lay foundation for an anti-Saakashvili social or political movement, these might be infringement of property rights, violations of human rights, persistence of the grave social and economic situation, failure to resolve the unemployment problems, rising prices and utility fees, and inflation, although it is clear that slogans against radical privatization and in support of the national economy will have a greater potential for mobilization of supporters. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the commitment which Georgia made as early as during Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency to repatriate the Muslim Meskhetians as a precondition for accession to the Council of Europe and which Mikheil Saakashvili will have to fulfill might encounter stiff resistance, although in this case Saakashvili will probably parry the campaign against him by pointing at Shevardnadze.³⁵

The discussion on the opposition's slogans requires taking into account that in the future, the focus of political rivalry will move on to discussions and debates on alternative solutions to public problems and individual issues, and debating how the given problem should be resolved will become much more important.

As for the niche which today exists in the Georgian political spectrum, it has to be said that despite the current dire social situation

and popularity of social slogans, the left wing is relatively free. This is precisely why the new opposition party should try to occupy precisely that niche and take advantage of the dire social situation.

7.

From today's standpoint, it is unlikely that any strong opposition of the future in Georgia will develop from the existing opposition political spectrum. Today's Georgian opposition spectrum does not have sufficient political capital for this.³⁶ Of course, it is possible that a new political party will rise from among the ranks of today's opposition, but it clearly will need to muster its forces around the new charismatic leader because political preferences in Georgia are still leader-centered and this will not change in the foreseeable future. However, even if such a party emerges, it is hard to imagine that the incumbent government will give it a free leash. The problem is that success of the new party is possible only so far as the ruling party's failures and breaking of promises allow it.³⁷

The scenario of change of government by employment of the well-established and proven practice which is built around discord and rift within the ruling party seems much more plausible today. The next ruling parties emerged from within the political force in power, rather than from some external opposition party both in Zviad Gamsakhurdia's *Round Table-Free Georgia* and Eduard Shevardnadze's *Citizens' Union* examples, which shows that the ruling parties have strong immunity and automatically favors the above scenario. However, unlike the previous transformations, this process is more likely to unfold like a self-incubation or mock rift than originate from a real rift within the *United National Movement*. The main argument in support of this is that to extend its political life cycle, the Saakashvili government will prefer receiving fresh blood to following in Shevardnadze's footsteps and rigging the elections. Accordingly, the more likely scenario is the one which envisages the emergence of the new ruling political force via the incorporation of new successful persons in the *United National Movement*. It is possible that this process will be launched with the slogan of purging the party ranks and optimizing the ruling party. The creation of a new opposition party on the basis of the former

National Movement members is also possible, but the incumbent government will perhaps not want to cede its symbolic revolutionary assets and opt for internal reorganization.

8.

It is hard to talk about the stability of today's political system, especially given Georgia's experience of unconstitutional changes of government, which, if extrapolated, speaks in favor of deliberating about the feasibility of the Latin American-style revolutionary cycles in Georgia. However, as proven many times under previous governments, whether or not such forecasts will become a reality depends in large part on the government itself and on its success at keeping its promises to the public, remaining legitimate, and carrying out the reforms. However, even if the developments follow the most pessimistic scenario, it is hard to predict whether any opposition political force will be able to persuade Georgian society of the necessity of yet another transformation through revolution. Despite the diversity of the groups that are aggrieved by the incumbent government's activities (unemployed former civil servants, some of the university teachers, displeased street vendors, citizens whose property was confiscated, etc.) and quite intense revanchist sentiments among them, it has to be admitted that their negative activities are unlikely to escalate into a revolutionary movement due to their limited extent. As for the abovementioned slogans against the radical privatization and in support of the national manufacturing sector, they are much more likely to mobilize the people, although they are much more likely to boost the number of opposition supporters than change government through revolution. At the same time, the incumbent authorities still control the levers that would enable them to alleviate social discontent, for instance, raising the 1990s issue of bank deposits. However, in the long term, neither can this scenario be ruled out as improbable.³⁸

As for the possibility of the transformation by the *United National Movement* of the Georgian party system into a dominant-party system, this scenario should fall into the category of the possible but hardly feasible because to emulate the Mexican or Japanese model in Geor-

gia, the current Georgian ruling party should meet at least the minimum requirements for a properly functioning institutional party, and the National Movement, as a party which was created around the person of charismatic leader, has a lot of work to do to achieve that. In addition, it has to be taken into account that neither the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party nor the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party stands out for its loyalty to liberal democratic values, so the establishment of this type of an institution in Georgia would be a step backward in terms of the country's democratic development, even though by moving in this direction, the incumbent government will create a stable environment that is needed for carrying through the reforms it has initiated. The possibility cannot be ruled out that, to justify and compensate for backsliding in democratic development and deviation of the political system from the principles of liberal democratic pluralism, the government might opt for the Japanese model, because like in Japan, the Georgian political culture also tends to favor the dominant position of a single party organization. The incumbent Georgian authorities' discourse on the issue of new constitution and prognoses about transition from the presidential to parliamentary governance also indicate a tendency toward the establishment of the Japanese-style dominant-party system. In addition, the Rose Revolution government will go down in history as the initiator of the historic decision to adopt the parliamentary model and abolish the presidential system, which in Georgia has always been viewed as an institutional basis for autocratic governance. At the same time, under the parliamentary system, it will be much easier for the incumbent ruling party to approve the candidates for the post of prime minister.³⁹

9.

As in any small country, the foreign factor in Georgia's political development can be described as one of the most important influences because the country's domestic political success mostly hinges precisely on the degree of support for our country in the international political arena.

Foreign political support is one of the guarantors of the stability of government. Zviad Gamsakhurdia was often criticized for his failure

to bring about the country's international recognition during his presidential tenure. Despite the existence of objective reasons for this,⁴⁰ the lack of foreign political support was a major determinant of unacceptability of the Zviad Gamsakhurdia government for contemporary Georgian society and, on the contrary, the recognition of a political persona like Eduard Shevardnadze, for he was expected to enlist foreign political support. And, one might say, Eduard Shevardnadze lived up to expectations. The most important success of the initial period of his presidency was precisely enlisting foreign political support, which the country desperately lacked under Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

The attitude toward the Mikheil Saakashvili government is similar. The president undertook the mission of improving Georgia's image, which was tarnished by corrupt and clannish governance, and allaying the West's disappointment with Georgia in the final period of Shevardnadze's presidency.

The West is an influence that promotes the country's development toward democracy. An important trend is noticeable in the context of foreign political influence on Georgia: like in the Shevardnadze period, failures in domestic policy become increasingly conspicuous against the backdrop of foreign political successes, and many people predict that Saakashvili will share his predecessor's fate. However, the incumbent authorities are trying to merge these two areas and deal with the flaws of the previous government by viewing the foreign political successes as a precondition for a successful domestic policy and vice versa, as Georgia's accession to any European organization requires the implementation of specific action plans, all of which stipulate achieving progress in domestic political parameters and drawing nearer to Western values. In the past, the abolition of capital punishment and implementation of reforms to achieve the liberalization of the economy became prerequisites for Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe, the World Trade Organization, etc. Today, the West is the factor which promotes the country's democratic development and curbs authoritarian tendencies. In conditions of the absence of checks and balances in Georgia, the West plays the role of external monitor of establishment of democracy in the country. Accordingly, Georgia's democratic development is taking place either because of the Western

recommendations and assistance or because it is a prerequisite for integration into Western systems.

It is important to note when we discuss the influence of foreign political factors on Georgia's development that this influence is not uniform. In particular, effects of foreign political factors are noticeable in different aspects of the country's political development. Several levels of influence of foreign political factors can be identified: political, economic and social.

At the political level, the influence of the foreign political factors is somewhat dualistic and can be reduced to confrontation between Russia and the West for influence over the Caucasus region. Despite the fact that the dualism in this case boils down to quite a simple equation, it has been vital in the modern Georgian history. Looking back at the last 15 years leads us to conclude that the independence period has been a process of looking for an ally in this confrontation and movement toward the complete replacement of the pro-Russian orientation with pro-Western one⁴¹. It is noteworthy that while there has been difference of opinion regarding relations with Russia from the very day of restoration of national sovereignty, there is much more unanimity about the West in Georgian society. One might say that the Georgian political class, opposition and society in general have never once in the last 15 years of development questioned Western political support. This is precisely why integration into Western structures is considered an important factor of national consensus. As for the pro-Russian orientation, in the current confrontational model of Georgian-Russian relations, when Russia does not want to lose control of the process of restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity, the groups of pro-Russian orientation stand to become part of the political fringe in Georgia.⁴²

The influence of the foreign political factor at the economic level has manifested itself in the implementation of projects of different kinds and in economic assistance to the Georgian authorities. It also has to be taken into account that putting into operation the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum gas pipeline, and the TRACECA project had both economic and political significance, promoting Georgia's integration into the Western political and economic area and eliminating its economic dependence on Russia.

As for the social dimension of the foreign factors' influence, both the nongovernmental sector and political institutions of government developed with Western assistance.

And in answer to the question of how the foreign political factors have been changing over the last 15 years, this can be divided into the following periods: The stagnation period – 1991-December 1992. From the time of declaration of Georgia's independence till the dissolution of the USSR and de jure recognition of Georgia's independence by the international community, the country had no support of any type from the West⁴³. Precisely this determined development of Russia's scenario: toppling of the Gamsakhurdia government and escalation of the situation in the hotbeds of ethnic separatism. The de jure recognition period – 1992-1993. In this period, Georgia won international political economic support, but owing to the great importance of Russia as a foreign political factor for the regulation of the ethnic conflicts, a pro-Russian orientation was chosen. (1993-1995). After a period of self-deluding expectations regarding Russia and the failure of the project of restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity with Russia's help, Georgia pursued for a long time (1995-2003) the policy of balancing between Russia and the West. The coming to power of the Saakashvili government in the wake of the Rose Revolution was followed by a widening in the gap between Russia and Georgia and a clear-cut pro-Western orientation. This might result in Georgia's accession to NATO in the near future, with the long-term prospect of becoming a candidate for EU membership.

10.

The incumbent Georgian authorities are charged with the historic mission of overcoming the spiral model of the country's development. Establishing a precedent of constitutional change of government would be seen as their greatest success. This is why it is crucial how change of government will be effected under the incumbent authorities. There are high expectations that the government which came to power on the wave of the Rose Revolution and which attaches great importance to the opinion of the international community in general and the leading Western countries in particular will not stoop to electoral

irregularities, although there is a threat – and this was confirmed to some extent in the 2006 local elections too – that the Saakashvili government will try to direct the electoral process in its favor by tailoring the law to suit its needs and using administrative levers. Accordingly, holding fair elections remains one of the most important tasks of the incumbent Georgian government.

Besides the above historic mission, the following have to become the incumbent government's priorities:

Improving social conditions through liberalization of the economy: The incumbent Georgian authorities have to put the social security system improvement program on the agenda as their top priority and offer a better social protection service to the population. This will both earn them support of the socially vulnerable strata and deprive the opposition of the grounds to criticize them about this issue. How the improved service will be implemented in practice given the infeasibility of economic miracles is another matter; the main emphasis should still be placed on indirect methods of improvement of the social background. And this is possible only through a radical liberalization of the economic sector. In that case, the social security system will be able to meet the demands of the socially vulnerable strata. Despite their election campaign promises, the incumbent authorities have yet to take real steps toward economic liberalization and support for the local medium-size and small businesses.

Creating fair environment for political rivalry. No government has made any real effort to create equal conditions for political rivalry in the 15 years of Georgia's independence. The parties have failed to agree on the most basic rules of the game. In contrast to many other countries, including Spain, during the transition to democracy the political parties had not reached consensus prior to the adoption of the country's constitution.⁴⁴ This can even be considered one of the reasons for the spiraling development of the modern Georgian history: there exists no consensus on procedural issues of political struggle, and in some cases, when they are ignored, the potential elite have no other option but unconstitutional to come to power. Accordingly, creating equal conditions for all political players and setting rules of the game should be in the incumbent authorities' interests. Although strengthen-

ing the opposition should not be the government's task, creating a fair environment for political rivalry in the country certainly is. This ensures inclusiveness in the political arena and rules out exclusivity.⁴⁵ The authorities should lower the election threshold and carry out other initiatives as well, e.g. greater participation of and cooperation with the parliamentary opposition in making laws. The opposition should not have the impression that persuading the government to make compromises during parliamentary or other discussions is only possible with the participation of representatives of the Western international organizations.

Ensuring success of government initiatives. For the authorities to achieve success in any field, they should permanently monitor how the government policy for that field is implemented and assess the results. When a government initiative is carried out, funds should be allocated to increase the conformity between the expected and actual results of the project.

Ensuring civil participation in political decision making. The majority of government decisions are made within a narrow political circle or, at best, with the participation of non-governmental organizations close to the government. Accordingly, the modern-day Georgian political system leaves the impression of an extremely closed system which is not open enough to take into account the opinions of those people whom the decision will directly affect. The incumbent Georgian authorities are not particularly considerate of the opinions of representatives of the civil sector and conduct public policy from the top down. This gives to the public a sound reason to talk about the directive-based style of governance of the incumbent authorities and causes great displeasure. This is precisely why it would be better for the incumbent government to make its public policy more open and transparent, although the nongovernmental sector itself will need to be more proactive and strong and become a force to be reckoned with in this process.

Amid the fast transformation and reforms, the main concern of the incumbent government should still be avoiding deviations from the path of democratic development and the use of autocratic methods of government, especially when it is quite likely that the security issue

might jeopardize the country's democratic development and create a half-democratic military-style state.

In conclusion, one might say that the main threat of the latest phase of Georgia's political development is precisely authoritarianism, justified by the need for fast reforms. In the context of modern-day Georgia, the only counterweight to that and guarantor of the establishment of democracy in Georgia is the West. The point is that, like during the last 15 years of development, precisely the Western institutions and European organizations are permanently monitoring the country's democratic development, and they will try to make certain that the processes in the country will unfold precisely in the democratic direction. And the negative thing about counting on them is that there is not enough will within the Georgian establishment itself, so it becomes necessary to resort to foreign influence to ensure democratic development in the country.

Notes:

¹ Debate on whether or not it is warranted to draw parallels between Georgia and the Baltic States of 1990s continues to this day, although it is increasingly evident that in terms of development of its statehood, Georgia ought to follow in the Baltic States' footsteps.

² Malkhaz Matsaberidze (2006), *Georgian Politics: Authorities and Political Process*. Social sciences series. Tbilisi, Center for Social Sciences, p. 12.

³ Time will tell how advantageous to Georgia unilateralism in foreign political orientation and building of relations with Russia according to the confrontational model are, but the incumbent Georgian authorities should try to improve relations with Russia.

⁴ Although the 28 October 1990 elections were held under the Constitution of the Georgian SSR, it has to be taken into account that major amendments were made to it to allow multi-party ballot.

⁵ No one argues that after the Rose Revolution, Saakashvili would win even without using administrative resources, but what made his coming to power possible was not so much the elections as the Rose Revolution. Therefore, the rotation of governments in Georgia is governed more by street demonstrations rather than by elections.

⁶ The positive means of being active still remain unused by the Georgian population.

⁷ When discussing the nation's unity during the Gamsakhurdia rule, the ethnic Georgian population is implied, although it also has to be taken into account that 98%

of the Georgian population, including ethnic minorities, expressed their support for Georgia's national sovereignty at the 31 March 1991 nation-wide referendum.

⁸ In our opinion, describing the two-week-long December 1991-January 1992 developments as a popular uprising is an exaggeration because it was more of a military coup, although the classification of participants as Zviadists and anti-Zviadists is accurate. It was indeed a true civil confrontation, when even families were divided by the member's attitudes toward Zviad Gamsakhurdia's persona.

⁹ The restoration of Georgian state was taking place when the USSR still existed, so surprising as this may sound, Gamsakhurdia, a former dissident who had fought against the Soviet regime, had to combat the USSR using the means that were available under that regime. The restructuring which was required to resume suspended sovereignty was taking place in the old system environment, and the 28 October 1990 parliamentary elections, in which Zviad Gamsakhurdia's electoral bloc *Round Table-Free Georgia* won a landslide victory, were held in compliance with the Soviet Constitution. These factors must be considered when talking about Zviad Gamsakhurdia as an inflexible politician, although it is also clear that his abrasive personality gave the opposition the grounds to have reservations about trusting him and to talk about his links with the Soviet leadership. Holding the first parliamentary elections on the basis of the Soviet Constitution was the first watershed for the united opposition. Some of the opposition parties which grew away from Gamsakhurdia in the National Forum criticized the future president precisely for this.

¹⁰ According to one version, precisely his stiff resistance was the reason why the Kremlin got rid of him. By the same version, the Kremlin was trying to keep the Caucasus under its influence and supported the coming to power of Eduard Shevardnadze, who in Kremlin's view was a politically loyal player.

¹¹ Zviad Gamsakhurdia failed to rise up to any of the challenges of the period.

¹² Gamsakhurdia cannot qualify as a politician, he could not stop playing the role of a dissident, which may be one of the explanations for his permanent fear and obsession with searching for secret service agents. Ultimately, Zviad Gamsakhurdia's lack of political prowess and dissident personality proved detrimental for his career.

¹³ Reference to the developments in Tajikistan and Azerbaijan.

¹⁴ This was included in the document signed in 2004 after the Rose Revolution in Tbilisi' Kashveti church, which condemned the attempt to involve foreign troops for their interference in the country's domestic affairs.

¹⁵ Although they were certainly a step ahead in terms of modernization of Georgia's legal framework, the initiatives of this type were mostly implemented on the West's recommendations and requests.

¹⁶ The Shevardnadze-era tendency to choose the method of minor gradual improvements in resolving problems is over. Besides that method, which is currently used for initial quick response to the problem, the authorities prefer revolutionary, not evolutionary solutions and, for the first time in the last 15 years of the Georgian history, offer systems of strategic solution of problems to the public.

¹⁷ This gives rise to extremely negative sentiments and attitudes among some strata of society. The displeasure with the authorities has its objective grounds too, for in conditions of fast-paced reforms, upholding procedural justice is often difficult.

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¹⁸ The description of Georgia as a “TV state” can be accounted for precisely by this factor.

¹⁹ However, there remains a gap between the declarations and practical actions, and a lot of work remains to be done to bring about full integration of minorities into society.

²⁰ The possibility cannot be ruled out that there are cases when the critics are right. The money that the government extorts from the private sector is often spent during the election campaign, to sponsor the ruling party.

²¹ This irritated Russia and made the incumbent Georgian authorities unacceptable for it, although Russia is gradually coerced into making concessions and restraining its imperialist ambitions. The resumption in January 2007 of diplomatic relations, which were suspended in the fall 2006, attests to this.

²² The introduction of the institution of Prime Minister, initiative to schedule the presidential and parliamentary elections for the same day, and many other things are examples of this.

²³ In this particular case, it is possible to talk about the double rotation of government. The new government was formed by both former Gamsakhurdia supporters and former Soviet officials, who harbored revanchist attitudes toward Gamsakhurdia for the dismantling of the Soviet regime

²⁴ During the Rose Revolution, the opposition wing of his former party members was reinforced by some of the Zviadists, namely, Zviad Dzidziguri and Guram Absnadze, who declared it their duty to fight against Shevardnadze for the injustices that he did to Gamsakhurdia's supporters. Therefore, similarly to the second transition, here too it is possible to talk about the double rotation. In contrast to the second transition and former Soviet officials' long period of ruling, however, Zviadists remained in power only briefly.

²⁵ This may be caused by the little likelihood of growth of the existing opposition parties' recognizability or support base. The chance of success of the opposition parties is further reduced by the fact that the voters know them well, so rapid growth of positive sentiments toward them is not expected.

²⁶ The idea of matchlessness of the ruling party is also associated with the party leader's charisma.

²⁷ A high proportion of protesting voters and absenteeism enable the authorities to rig the elections and serve as an additional argument in support of formal acknowledgement.

²⁸ See Ghia Nodia, Alvaro Pinto Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia. Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects* – Tbilisi; The Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development, 2006, p. 115.

²⁹ The Shamatava case is linked with illegal sale of land through corrupt deals by the Tbilisi mayor's office back during Shevardnadze's presidency. The incumbent authorities are renationalizing that property and handing it back to the mayor's office. The opposition political spectrum helped the private owner of one of the lots, Shamatava, articulate the problem, although when the details of the deal were established and it transpired that there were no legal grounds for the land to remain Shamatava's

property, the opposition temporarily desisted from defending Shamatava's position because they were unable to propose an alternative to the authorities' solution of this problem

³⁰ This explains the opposition's readiness to join any, even completely unjustified, protest action against the authorities.

³¹ Macing is when a public employee is forced, as a condition of employment or career growth, to give money that will be used for funding a party, in this case, the ruling party. Toll-gating is the practice of demanding donations for the party in return for issued licenses or permits.

³² In a markedly radical political culture, there are few complaints about a landslide victory in the first presidential or parliamentary elections, but the objectivity of the next elections raises reasonable doubts because the authorities have to resist quite a strong temptation to demonstrate another overwhelming victory to society and rig the opposition's results. In the conditions of the Shevardnadze-era proven practice of "direct casting" of ballot sheets into boxes and total election rigging, any opposition group seemed uncompetitive, although this, of course, was far from reality.

³³ See Ghia Nodia, Alvaro Pinto Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia. Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects* – Tbilisi; The Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development, 2006, p. 115.

³⁴ Of course, this is true only if the opposition spectrum remains the same, although it is unlikely that any serious opposition movement will be created in the short run.

³⁵ A heated polemic might begin on Georgia's constitutional system (presidential or parliamentary) too.

³⁶ It was lost during the Rose Revolution: Some of today's oppositionists refused to side with the Georgian people back then.

³⁷ Besides, the Saakashvili government might resort to the Shevardnadze-style practice of election irregularities.

³⁸ The method of long-term forecasting is not very accurate but is a widely used method for averting potential threats and planning preventive measures. Accordingly, the very possibility of such a scenario should be a sign of sorts for the incumbent authorities to start correcting their mistakes.

³⁹ Should the presidential system remain, the party will find itself faced with the difficult task of finding a Saakashvili-like charismatic leader.

⁴⁰ The reason why Georgia was not recognized as independent state in the Gamsakhurdia period was that the USSR had not yet dissolved at that time, and the country was still seen as part of the Soviet political area.

⁴¹ In discussion on pro-Russian orientation, it is important to take into consideration the fact that Georgia has never had a downright pro-Russian foreign political course. As for the declaration of Russia as a strategic partner in 1993-1994 by the Shevardnadze government, this was more of a necessary step by the country's leadership of that period, which they made counting on Russia's assistance in and quick regulation of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts.

⁴² Russia refused to take into account Georgia's national interests and keeps implementing this policy to this day. Its policy has done heavy damage to Georgia, but,

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contrary to Russia's expectations, it has not resulted in the restoration of Russia's influence over Georgia. On the contrary, the Georgia is trying harder to stay at a distance from Russia. Accordingly, the only alternative which will make improvement of Georgian-Russian relations possible is Russia's giving up on its imperialist ambitions and recognizing Georgia's independence de facto.

⁴³ The West did not interfere because the Soviet institutional design still existed and because the West did not have any contingency plan for the dissolution of the USSR.

⁴⁴ The incumbent authorities might seize this opportunity and spend the time which remains until adoption of the new constitution precisely on creating a fair environment for political rivalry.

⁴⁵President Mikheil Saakashvili's proposal to the opposition to start a dialogue and designate opposition members to be included in the Security Council was made precisely for the purpose of addressing the current inequality between the parties and verticalization, but obviously, unless procedural issues are agreed, no such initiative can be successful.

1.

Answering this question requires formulating the goal or goals that independent Georgia *was supposed to* attain. We may ascribe these goals to the Georgia of fifteen years ago in retrospect, irrespective of how they were actually understood by the Georgian elites of that period. I would define two such goals: one is stateness, the other – social modernization. They may also be combined: Georgia was supposed to become a modern country, which involves both being a modern state and a modern society.

Saying this implies that fifteen years ago Georgia not only was not a modern state (this would be commonplace), but that it could not be called a modern society either. To be sure, during two centuries of co-existence with Russia, Georgia did become modernized in quite a few dimensions: it became urbanized, literacy became universal and it became normal for women to be publicly active, to name but a few. But thanks to seventy years of Communism, Georgia's social and political institutions and values instead moved away from the model of modernity represented by western countries.

A brief assessment of the road traversed up to this point may be formulated as follows: during the fifteen years that have passed so far, Georgia has come closer to ideal types of modern state and society but it is not where it wants to be in either of these categories.

Let us start with stateness: is Georgia a state now? Obviously the question is not just about the formal status of its statehood – something we had in mind when we were happy because “Ukraine recognized us”.¹ This stage is truly behind us. But this status can hardly be called an “achievement”, if only because Kyrgyzstan or Turkmenistan, which had been in the same starting position, did not need any efforts to get the same. Do people who live on the territory which is defined on the map as “Georgia” have state governance? If the answer is negative,

than our condition is that of a “failed state” or a “quasi-state”. This story continues to be central to the drama entitled “The history of post-Soviet Georgia”. Georgia was a classic “failed state” in the early 1990s and in the twilight years of Eduard Shevardnadze’s presidency the stateness started to erode again. Now we see the light in the end of the tunnel at last, but the “happy ending” is yet to come.

The most obvious deficit happens to be the most basic: territorial control. Georgia has yet to define what its territory really is, how far its jurisdiction extends. What is the country the Abkhaz of Gagra and the Ossetes of Java, or ethnic Georgians of Gali² and Kurta³ reside in? This is not a problem of romantic nationalism that is nostalgic of the ideal of “sacred Georgian land” – if we go in the latter direction we may start lamenting the loss of Tao-Klarjeti.⁴ This is an existential problem of stateness: it cannot exist without having defined the borders of its jurisdiction. In that sense, even finally legitimizing the loss of those territories – a deep psychological trauma as it would certainly be – would be a decisive step towards consolidating stateness.

For the sake of argument, let us forget about Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Do we have a state on the remaining 85 or 90 percent of Georgia’s territory? My answer would be: mainly yes, but not fully. Most importantly, the state now has a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Twelve or 15 years ago the state did not enjoy such a monopoly even in Tbilisi, five years ago it still could not enforce it everywhere, but now it can. Today there are no armed groups that openly challenge the state’s right to use force for controlling any part of the country or any segment of public life. This is an enormous achievement. As to how lasting it will prove to be, this is another question.

Why am I not sure about sustainability of this accomplishment? Not only due to the external (Russian) factor. I do not think this one is so important. One of the main indicators of sustainability is the consensus about the political regime. If we believe public opinion polls, almost everybody in Georgia is for democracy. But this is a general normative statement. Now, let us ask our citizens: “How would you define the political system in which you live today?” If I encounter such a question in a questionnaire, I would go for the “Do

not know/No answer” option. The issue is not how free the media is or how easy is it to register NGOs; the main feature of political regimes is how political power is acquired and kept. The regime is consolidated when all the principal players know what is the way to obtain political power in a given country. Let us pose a simple question to check this: “How will power change hands in Georgia next time?” If we do not know the answer (and I think we do not), this means we do not know what our political regime is.

To sum up, apart from the failure to achieve full territorial control, Georgia has also failed to stabilize the political regime, or the rules of the political game. I want to make a corollary here: I do not *a priori* contend that the political regime in question should only be a constitutional democracy. I happen to believe that constitutional democracy is the best political regime available, and also that the only chance for Georgia to consolidate any political regime is through stabilizing democratic rules of the game. Accordingly, any efforts towards stateness should imply strengthening the foundations of constitutional democracy. In theory, though, an undemocratic regime can also be stable and consolidated. Whether I personally like it or not is another matter.

Georgia’s main problem is not that its democracy is not consolidated yet. The problem is that no political regime of any kind has been established. If this is so, stateness is yet to be achieved.

Let us set aside the ways of gaining political power as well. One more feature of stateness is the sustainability and efficacy of the governance process. The question is: Is there a system of state governance institutions that could serve as an efficacious instrument for implementing certain policies?

This question is linked to another one: *Whose is the state?* Does the state apparatus serve the political leadership or does it attend to needs of other societal players? In Georgia we often call these other actors “clans”, in lieu of a better term. “Organized crime” or “criminal underworld” may be considered a particular kind of such a “clan”. In any case, what one has in mind here are social organizations or networks that define loyalty and trust in opposition to formal state institutions and compete with the latter for areas of social control. If we focus on this second version of the question, the problem may be

reformulated as that of “corruption” or “state capture” (how precise these terms are is another question).

This is the key issue for many postcolonial and developing countries (to whom Georgia is typologically close). This is also where the dividing line between modern and pre-modern societies runs: state bureaucracy is controlled either through formal institutions or through “clans” and similar entities. Some level of competition between these players may be under way in any country, but if the contestants of the state become too powerful, we find ourselves in the territory of “failed” or structurally “weak” states. How does Georgia look in this regard? I will come back to this topic when analyzing Shevardnadze’s and Saakashvili’s presidencies, but I will give a short summary here: there has been progress in the past few years, but we are still far from making it. The point is that whatever was accomplished has yet to be institutionalized.

In the end, there is one more important dimension: identity and recognition. These are two sides of the same coin. Has Georgia as a nation found its place in the modern world? For this to happen, Georgia needs to know what that place should be (this is “identity”), but others should also agree to positioning Georgia in such a way (this is the “recognition” side). In this regard we may be somewhat more advanced. One could say more: fairly stable general orientation and foreign support are among most important resources we have for succeeding in political development. Obviously, this concerns our famous “pro-Western orientation”. I admit that this orientation may be somewhat superficial and opportunistic and that the social institutions and values that embody “western-ness” do not have deep roots in Georgia. The fact of the matter is, however, that in recent years this orientation towards the West has proved stable and firm. We can speculate a lot as to what this or that politician *really* aspires to and what he would do under other circumstances, but we cannot refute that as of today, no player of any political weight (however modest the criterion of “weight” may be) openly challenges the validity of the choice in favor of the West. If somebody does oppose this choice (in our situation, this means being “pro-Russian”), this opposition is not expressed in public.

In that sense, the fact that our pro-western orientation (however superficial we may consider it) has become firm, has turned into a dominant political tradition and constitutes an *accomplishment* of these fifteen years. Georgia sees the direction of her political development in coming closer to Europe (naturally, under Europe I also imply North America). On the other hand, even though Georgia is not universally recognized as a Western country, within Western elites the number of people who take Georgia's European aspirations seriously has sharply grown. The Louises⁵ of today at least politely listen to Georgian envoys and sometimes even give them substantive support. Georgia has developed a rather solid *national project* that has a reasonable chance – even if not a guarantee – of success. This may be Georgia's chief accomplishment of the past fifteen years.

Now about social modernization. Here there are even more dimensions and success or failure is more difficult to measure. I will briefly dwell on two topics alone: the political elite and the institutions of civil society. The blatant lack of competence of the new elite was the most conspicuous feature of the national movement of the late 1980s. Both its political discourse and practices were fully divorced from the modern context. If that is taken as a reference point, today the progress is striking. I do not want to be misunderstood here: I recognize that fifteen years ago we had excellent mathematicians and film directors. On those accounts we look much worse today. What I have in mind is competence in political action. Today we have a social milieu (consisting mostly of young people) whose members speak and act as modern people. This layer is very thin. This is why the deficit of human resources is the most acute problem of Georgia today. But if we compare this with what we had fifteen years ago, the change is vast.

Civil society is a completely new sphere which fifteen years ago was only taking its first steps. Media, interest groups and associations of different kinds exist but are weakly developed. Now is the time when we focus on the underdevelopment of this area; but within the larger picture, the progress is considerable. We take for granted that we can talk about anything we think is worth discussing, that we can associate ourselves around our values and interests and advocate them,

if we come up with adequate ways to do so. These new social competences and practices have encompassed a small amount of people so far (short outbreaks of revolutionary euphoria do not count), but new paradigms do exist.

2.

The brief rule by Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his Round Table can be seen as the conclusion of “the national movement period”, therefore I will consider them as one. This dramatic episode can be called the false start of democracy and stateness in Georgia. This is the time when society became genuinely active and developed heartfelt democratic enthusiasm based on a consensus around a specific and legitimate goal – creating a nation-state. By itself, this shift in public attitudes constitutes the most important achievement of this period. The result, however, was a national catastrophe which hampered Georgia's political development for at least a decade. Those responsible for this disaster are our national movement in general, and Gamsakhurdia with his political team in particular. Pointing the finger at Russia as the main culprit in this fundamental defeat is an attempt at self-deception and a denial of reality.

If we focus more narrowly on Gamsakhurdia's rule or his political regime it is difficult to discern any tangible achievement. If attaining the status of an independent country is seen as the goal, it was logical to set out to declaring independence on April 9, 1991. In the context of the time, however, this was a purely symbolic gesture signifying political impotence. Not many people remember now that this happened in response to military defeat in South Ossetia and was just about putting on a brave face amidst failure. Otherwise one cannot understand why Georgia would proclaim independence at that particular moment. It was both ironic and contained a kernel of historical justice that the real advent of independence (which coincided with the break-up of the Soviet Union) happened at a time when Gamsakhurdia's ouster from Georgia was getting under way.

The episode of declaring independence can be seen as another illustration of the general mythopoeic nature of the discourse and practice of Gamsakhurdia's rule (and of the national movement in

general). It replaced real actions with symbolic ones: “Did we suffer defeat? We will express our anger by declaring independence!” Political action was reduced to declaration and mobilization: thou shall “speak the truth” and mobilize as many people as possible around it. Gamsakhurdia hardly took any steps aimed at building state institutions. The main innovation under his rule was the changing of names: for instance, *militia* was renamed *police*. Creating a Georgian army was supposed to be the most notable exception – the result, however, was a caricature that even failed to stage a decent coup.

In politics, mythopoeic thinking finds its closest expression in fascism. The label attached to Gamsakhurdia by Shevardnadze ideologues, “parochial fascism”, was partly fair, but it would be more precise to call it “failed fascism”. The ochlocratic, neurotic, and romanticist character of political mobilization was typologically close to fascist movements (the most recent analogies may be found in the Balkans), but it fell short of developing into a fascist dictatorship. One reason for this was the international context. In the 1990s, fascism was too much out of vogue. Therefore, the national movement and Gamsakhurdia in particular tried to preserve a democratic façade (the leaders may have sincerely believed they were true democrats). But the real reason for the breakdown lay in political incompetence: while Mussolini and Hitler were successful at strengthening their states at least temporarily, the Georgian quasi-fascism became associated with tearing the state down.

The so-called ethnic conflicts as well as the Tbilisi war⁶ are the most patent expressions of the disastrous outcome of the national movement. It would be unfair to blame the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts only on Gamsakhurdia or on Georgian nationalism in general. It is the beloved cliché of western liberals to say that minority nationalisms constituted a natural defensive reaction against Georgian nationalism. In fact, minority elites were under the spell of romantic mythopoeic nationalisms, much as their Georgian counterparts. Moreover, they – and, especially, their patrons in Kremlin – had a vested interest in pushing the conflicts to the military stage, as this was what gave them better chances of success. The incompetence of the Georgian leadership showed itself in the fact that they helped the conflicts to develop

according to a military scenario which was the most unfavorable for Georgia, thus helping the opponents to legitimize their programs.

This incompetence linked to mythopoesis may be defined as political idiocy typical for the Georgian national movement in general. I use the word “idiocy” here as a term and do not imply any assessment of intellectual capacity of the leaders of that time (some of them may have had a reasonably high IQ). Even the smartest people of the period, however, were characterized by an incapacity for thinking politically. Moreover, they were hostile to political discourse as such. On that account, Gamsakhurdia may even deserve less criticism than others. One should not forget that many people voted for him⁷ because “at least, he was better than Tsereteli and Chanturia”:⁸ This happened to be a correct assessment. Other frequently mentioned alternatives to his leadership were Nodar Natadze and Akaki Bakradze. Admittedly, Gamsakhurdia’s approaches were much more adequate than theirs as well.

Against this background it becomes understandable that despite his declared anti-Communist agenda, Gamsakhurdia failed to replace the Communist elite (nomenclatura) in power. Many key positions in his government were occupied by former Communist bureaucrats of the high and middle levels. It would be unfair to hold only him responsible for that, however, as few people competent to govern were to be found in other social groups. But even so, Gamsakhurdia could probably have achieved much more. He failed even to lay foundation for a new ruling elite.

If I wish to single out specific accomplishment of Gamsakhurdia, it would be an agreement with the Abkhaz reached in the fall of 1990 that led to elections to Abkhazia’s Supreme Council based on effective ethnic quotas. From today’s perspective such an assessment looks rather strange and the subsequent Georgian government called these “apartheid elections”, while the fight for the actual division of power led to a war afterwards. But so far this is the only precedent of an agreement between the Georgians and the Abkhaz that took into account the interests of the both sides. If not for the way events developed in Tbilisi later, this agreement had a chance to become the foundation of a historical compromise.

From today's perspective, the most significant achievement of Gamsakhurdia's rule is a negative one. Through him the Georgians relatively swiftly (but painfully) acquired immunity from a virus which was probably impossible to avoid altogether – that of political romanticism and its natural inference – quasi-fascism. I am very far from entertaining the illusion that Georgian society has been cured of xenophobia (does such a society exist anywhere?), but ethnic nationalism will probably not become the dominant motive of the Georgian politics any more. At least for some period, the immunity keeps working. To compare, Russian society is going through a similar stage now. The civil war that signified the end of the Gamsakhurdia era left behind economic breakdown, deep societal divisions, the advent of criminal warlordism and territorial disintegration. One can find something positive even in such a tragedy, however. For a nation, a civil war can be a coming-of-age experience. The civil war served as our version of “shock therapy”. It forced Georgians to face the political reality. Another of its results is the emergence of distance between nationalist and liberal-democratic agendas, something that had been neglected until then.

3.

Eduard Shevardnadze's rule was an important transitional period. Compared with the catastrophic stage that preceded it, it can be considered a success. But it can also be seen as a series of fatal failures. Both assessments contain a kernel of truth.

The most important achievement was that Shevardnadze legitimized political thinking and behavior. The art of declaration and mobilization based on mythopoeic romantic discourse, typical for the national movement, had in essence been anti-political. For this mode of thought *politics* is a dirty word. In practice, it was Shevardnadze who taught Georgians that politics is an arena where real interests clash and come to an accommodation. This seems commonplace – but many people still find it difficult to accept. At the time, however, that was a turning point when collective madness gave way to common sense.

This is linked to the fact that Shevardnadze took the first steps towards creating state institutions. The national movement's attitude towards institutions inherited from the Communist era was parasitic:

they continued by inertia until the “Christmas coup” and then collapsed. When Shevardnadze came back, he encountered a situation close to what Hobbes called a “state of nature”, which contemporary political science calls a “failed state”. This was a state whose only real attribute and resource was international recognition but that was not able to perform any functions within its formally designated borders. First of all, it did not enjoy a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Shevardnadze failed to fully solve this problem (I will expand on his failures later), but a set of brilliant Machiavellian moves allowed him to establish a minimal mode of stateness on the larger part of Georgia’s territory. He turned state power into the principal, though not the only, instrument for regulating and balancing conflicting interests. Compared to his starting point, this was an immense achievement.

He also accomplished this in such a way that allowed some space for liberal pluralism. It was under Shevardnadze’s rule that people got used to the idea that expressing a variety of opinions (in post-Soviet conditions, this means the possibility to criticize government) is a routine matter. Although institutions of civil society – media, civic associations, political parties – first appeared in the period of the national movement, it was only under Shevardnadze’s rule that they were stabilized, gained legitimacy and developed to a certain level. Pluralism of business interests was no less important: a lot can be said about the business activities of Shevardnadze’s relatives, but even this family contained several centers of interest. All this made the Shevardnadze era a rather important period in Georgia’s social modernization.

To return to the political level, it was under Shevardnadze that Georgia’s pro-Western orientation was determined and stabilized. Shevardnadze’s pet project was the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. From Georgia’s perspective, its main purpose was to anchor the West’s strategic interests in Georgia. It was under him that Georgia expressed its wish to join NATO. Arguably, for Shevardnadze this choice might have been opportunistic. In 1993-94 he tried to forge a “strategic partnership” with Russia (which in practice meant turning Georgia into a Russian satellite), but after it became evident there was no benefit from this, he drifted towards the West. Even if his moves are so

interpreted, it was significant that his experiment proved that being oriented towards Russia does not make any sense.

Last but not least, Shevardnadze laid foundation for new political elite in Georgia. The national movement turned out to be rather unproductive in this regard. If any figures from that period are still on the political scene, they are marginalized failures. The only exception was the team of Zurab Zhvania, later called the Zhvania-Saakashvili team. They succeeded in learning the ABCs of modern politics while still staying under Shevardnadze's umbrella. It is too complicated to judge here what motivated Shevardnadze when he decided to launch these young people – who subsequently would become his future political grave-diggers – on a track towards political preeminence. The result is what counts here: by promoting “Zhvania's team”, he laid the groundwork for a new elite that mastered the contemporary political language and practice.

All these important achievements of Shevardnadze took place in the 1990s. My next statement may not be quite humane from the point of view of normal standards, so I will first excuse myself by saying that I wish long life to Eduard Shevardnadze as a human being. But Shevardnadze as a politician would have been extremely lucky had the attempt on his life in February 1998 succeeded. I do not think that would have been good for Georgia, but Shevardnadze would have gone down in history as a great hero, as a founder of stateness and democracy in Georgia. But as it happened, Shevardnadze's historical image ultimately came to be greatly tarnished.

His main failure was his inability to create modern state institutions. For him, the state was more an end in itself rather than an instrument for ensuring the public good. To be more precise, his state did secure a minimum of public benefit: stability and basic security. This, as I said, was an important success compared to the starting point he had. However, the methods he used for attaining that goal did not allow the state to be used for implementing specific policies. In a sense this was a state of a medieval type. To take a telling example, the salaries of the public servants were purely symbolic and a job in public service was essentially a license to extort money from common citizens (now we call this “corruption”). The top political

leadership was a kind of coordinator and arbiter for reconciling different corrupt pyramids.

Such political regimes may last – look at some of our immediate neighbors – but for it to do so, the political leadership must not be timid about using harsh autocratic methods, and it should not claim to be part of Europe. At the very least, the boss should be able to carry out demonstrative purges among his own followers. Shevardnadze, however, overdid it with democracy, and he recognized this as his major mistake. To put it another way, Shevardnadze fell short of finding a proper formula for his political regime. It was a liberal oligarchy that tried to preserve a democratic façade. This was where Shevardnadze, commonly called the master of the politics of balancing, did not succeed in maintaining balance (if that was possible at all).

That's why in the last years of his rule even his model of the state started to erode. He was overpowered by the plurality of interests within the ruling elite as well as outside it. Non-state actors such as organized crime and popular militias returned to the public arena. If turning Georgia from a failed into a weak state was Shevardnadze's main achievement, after 1998 the trend was reversed. The situation in the Pankisi Gorge⁹ and events surrounding it were the most evident symptom of this.

Another legacy of Shevardnadze's regime that led to his disgraceful exit was moral nihilism and cynicism – another aspect of what we call “corruption”. The problem of façade democracies is that they are based on fraud and their stable functioning requires widespread cynicism. Shevardnadze underestimated the necessity of moral legitimacy for his regime – this was a resource that he exhausted in the end. It seems that the reason for this might have been his personal lack of confidence in Georgia and the very idea of the Georgian state. Shevardnadze appeared not to believe that it was possible for Georgia to become a “normal” state and create a modern order based on the supremacy of law.

4.

Answering this question is most risky because the period under question is continuing and there is no historical distance separating it

from the present. But major trends, achievements and challenges have already been formed.

Saakashvili's government has achieved obvious, visible (in a literal sense), rather impressive successes which may be summed up by a simple formula: effective stateness. One cannot say that Saakashvili has managed to finally remove the shadow of failure or hollowness from Georgian statehood. Until situations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia are stabilized, even the formal criteria of an effective state will not be met. But qualitative advances have been made over the previous stage. There are quite a few indicators for that. The most popular are the most conspicuous: paved roads, painted facades of buildings, well-lit streets and supplied electricity (among others). These things demonstrate that the state has learned how to produce public goods. What underpins all this is a more fundamental accomplishment – the creation of a governable state apparatus. Such a seemingly trivial step as appointing salaries to public servants (one of the first steps of Saakashvili's government) was in fact a vital innovation, as it denoted a transition from a medieval to modern type of state, one in which public servants are supposed to be reimbursed from public treasury rather than directly collecting money from people. The same can be said about the more stringent tax administration. This is important not only because the state has more money to pave roads and such, but because it reinforces the idea that citizens and businesses should pay taxes to the state treasury rather than give bribes to individual bureaucrats (the latter is also a way to finance the state, but a much less efficient one).

Another aspect of strengthening the state is destroying or weakening those social players that challenge the state in its function of social control. In this sense, efforts aimed at fighting organized crime (“the thieves’ world”) is not only about defending citizens from criminals (obviously, this is rather important in itself), but it is also crucial in the fight for stateness. There would be nothing new in saying that mafias emerge where states fail to fulfill their principal functions, first of all, that of creating and enforcing rules.

This is linked to one of most important features of Saakashvili government: the advent of the new elite. One can argue whether or

not the Rose Revolution was a “real” revolution according to criteria shared in political science (I do not think it can be called a revolution in a classical sense). But it conformed to at least one meaning of a revolution – let us call it “Pareto criterion”. It was an elite change. It essentially led to the full ouster of the Communist-Komsomol nomenclatura from the government structures, which, unlike in Eastern European countries, does not yet show any signs of a comeback. This is more than a symbolic act: the new generation brought with it a new, more modern political discourse.

The *junocracy* brought by Saakashvili (this term may be used in opposition to Brezhnevian gerontocracy or “the rule of the old”) is in some ways controversial, as the whole older generation came to feel marginalized. Ministers under thirty may be the butt of many jokes – evidently, under conditions of normal development of the public system, that should be considered an aberration. But in our specific context this is preferable to whatever alternatives are available.

Achievements in the area of foreign policy are also striking. Since the Rose Revolution, Georgia’s claims to be a European country have been taken much more seriously. But this does not mean they are fully accepted. The issue of Georgia’s membership of NATO is yet to be resolved. But today’s Georgia is no longer just another recipient of humanitarian aid. It has become a player in European politics, albeit a marginal one.

Relations with Russia are to be considered in this context. Contrary to one widespread view, I do not think that relations with Russia constitute a liability for the new government. Those who reproach it for that should also propose some idea of how these relations could be successful. I sympathize with the travails of winemakers in Kakheti,¹⁰ but the crisis in relations with Russia involved a strategic gain: basically, Georgia called Russia’s bluff, which was based on the assumption that it “feeds” Georgia and can strangle it economically if it so chooses. I do not know when and how Russian-Georgian relations will be normalized, but this experiment appears to have been a necessary step towards this end.

As to the issue of territorial control, establishing effective control over Achara and, later, the Kodori Valley, were historical achieve-

ments. But after three years in office, Abkhazia and South Ossetia constitute the most pressing problems that Saakashvili's government faces. On that account, it is hard to assess the government's record in straightforward terms. On the one hand, the government promised to solve the problem quickly, while in reality not only is there no progress, but tensions have been further exacerbated as well. This makes the government policy look like an obvious failure. The South Ossetian campaign in summer 2004 has been the biggest fiasco of Saakashvili's government so far. It led to human casualties and also gained him the image of a politician prone to risky adventures.

But let us look at the issue in a more strategic way again. I do not know how these problems will be solved at the end of the day, but one thing is clear: the simulative "peace process", as it had proceeded before would never have led anywhere. Increased tensions have brought the issue back to the agenda. This does not mean a solution is imminent, but there is a somewhat greater chance of a solution coming sooner rather than later. Establishing genuine control in the Kodori Valley and creating the parallel government in South Ossetia have changed the format of the conflict situation and given the Georgian government greater room to maneuver.

The greatest weakness of the government is that mechanisms are yet to be created that will ensure the sustainability of its achievements. First of all, there is no consensus on the rules of political competition. This means that we cannot in a definitive way answer the question as to where Georgia is moving politically: towards the new revolution, towards a "Mexican"-style semi-autocratic consolidation, or towards a "normal" democracy. The country still has a "hybrid" system in place, that is, an inherently uncertain and unstabilized political regime that combines elements of democracy and autocracy. This still prevents Georgia from being called a "stable state".

This cannot be blamed on the government, at least, not only on the government. Saakashvili and the small group around him who define the agenda of his rule do display some elements of autocratic Jacobin ethos: this is a revolutionary avant-garde of the society that has a vision of the better future but does not necessarily consider itself obliged to take into account what the majority of the people

think. This allows one to define the style in which the government carries out its reforms as authoritarian modernization. One could probably find serious arguments in favor of this approach at this stage of development. Whether we like it or not, creating stateness logically precedes the development of democracy. Even if the political regime is not democratic, the state is still necessary, because order is better than anarchy. I will recall here a phrase by Walter Lippman that Samuel P. Huntington quotes in his book *Political Order in Changing Societies*: “I do know that there is no greater necessity for men who live in communities than that they be governed, self-governed if possible, well-governed if they are fortunate, but in any event, governed.”¹¹ A country that has developed an inferiority complex due to being a “failed state” will naturally give priority to strengthening the state. But when institutions of civil society are objectively weak, it is difficult to strengthen the state without causing some authoritarian tilt. The main thing here is not to indulge in self-deception and not to call the existing condition a “democracy”.

Saying this does not imply agreeing with the assessment that Saakashvili's government is more autocratic than that of Shevardnadze. It is just another kind of hybrid regime that constitutes a much better starting point for strengthening democratic institutions since the latter only make sense against the backdrop of effective state. The current government mainly adheres to democratic rules, at least it is not so easy to catch it openly breaking them. The February 2004 changes to the Constitution were an exception, however. They were also formally authoritarian as parliament was sharply weakened in comparison to the president's powers.

5.

First of all, this question – or rather the contention implied in it – does not only pertain to the first several years of Saakashvili's presidency. This is a general institutional problem typical for Georgia. One can sum up the record of the last fifteen years in Georgia by saying that, as a rule, the opposition does not perform, or that it does not create a credible alternative to the incumbent government. The only exceptions are pre-revolutionary periods that are caused by inter-

nal governmental crises. As long as the government is more or less strong and popular and as long as it can demonstrate to its people some achievements, the opposition looks inept. It only criticizes some aspects of the government's actions (how fairly – this is not of a decisive importance here), but does not propose any credible alternative. The situation only changes after the government weakens and loses popularity. After this, internal splits begin and the rebellious part of the government becomes the leading part of the opposition, while the “old” opposition turns into the junior partner of the latter.

Therefore, there is nothing new in the current weakness of the opposition. But what's the reason for this general regularity? The favorite argument of the oppositionists (especially today) is the “merger” of the ruling party with the state apparatus or the “abuse of administrative resources”. But this consideration is too abstract and describes the effect rather than the cause.

Problems appear to be more structural. One is the weakness of political parties as an institutional form, which, in its own turn, indicates the general weakness of civil society. Citizens find it difficult to create large associations, especially as such membership does not promise them any short-term gains. If we go further, one can speak of society being “infantile”: it still perceives the government as a parent, as the father who at the end of the day turns out to be a stepfather. Society is supposed to complain, to issue noises of discontent, just as a whimpering child hopes to secure more goodies from its parent. The opposition sees its main function in articulating such whimpering. But when people nod in agreement to criticism of the government, the opposition tends to overestimate the people's enthusiasm for them. If citizens welcome the eloquence with which the opposition leaders articulate their own complaints, this does not yet mean that they are keen to bring these same leaders to the helm of the state, as that is a wholly different function. As elections draw closer, the people start remembering that the opposition is “all talk and no walk” and chooses to vote for the “known evil”. As long as the father somehow provides for the needs of the family, nobody wants to get rid of him.

Under such conditions, why should citizens unite into political parties at all (or become their stable supporters – which is the

same)? Party pluralism is supposed to rest either on value pluralism or on differing interests of social groups. But so far there are no alternative political platforms in Georgia, and there are no distinct social groups either. As one opposition activist recently said (naturally, this was said in informal circumstances): “we all [meaning all political parties] have the same political platform, the issue is only how it is to be implemented”. If this is true (and it does seem to be the case), the real need for the opposition only emerges after an obvious breakdown in the government – which brings us back to what I have said above. Admittedly, the political party system in Georgia is artificially preserved by the proportionate electoral system, which allows small groups consolidated around one or several leaders to claim they are political parties.

The shortage of human resources may be another part of the problem. There are simply not too many people in Georgia who are capable and willing to act politically. It seems that there is not enough people to ensure the existence of a fully-fledged government and opposition parties (we will be lucky if there are enough reasonable people to staff the agencies of the executive). When a more-or-less capable political group comes to power, most sensible people support them until they fail.

For this reason, the executive becomes the place where much greater competence accumulates than in the opposition. If my answers to the previous questions were more or less fair, each new Georgian government was considerably superior to the previous one in terms of its political discourse and practices. In contrast, the competence of the opposition hardly grows: it does not appear to be able to go beyond tactical reactions to specific malfunctions of the government. Unfortunately, there are no signs of change in this area so far.

The above should not be interpreted as a call to ignore the opposition. Even the presence of the most negativistic and opportunistic opposition is much preferable to its absence, while instituting impediments against it would only lead to a decrease in its quality. Our not-so-distant history should also teach us that the political situation in Georgia may change very quickly. The government is not insured against making mistakes and failures. For one, the Girgvliani

case¹² demonstrated that when the opposition has something specific and clear to say, the protest tide may emerge quite soon and the opposition may become a tangible player. One also cannot rule out an economic crisis, which could make people listen more carefully to what the opposition says.

6.

In the twilight of Shevardnadze's rule the opposition had one single and clear key-word: "corruption". The government was further delegitimized by its inefficacy, and the ineptness of Shevardnadze personally which emasculated the power from within. The opposition of today has yet to define its main theme. But the government has several areas of vulnerability which, under certain circumstances, may help the opposition to consolidate and mobilize:

(a) *Rule of law*. Problems in this sphere include insufficient independence of the judiciary and human rights violations by law enforcement. The aforementioned Girgvliani case demonstrated that if the government makes serious blunders, this topic has a serious mobilizing potential. Admittedly, in the context of the Girgvliani case Saakashvili's opposition became most powerful and served society best. It would be best for the future development of democracy in Georgia for the opposition to make the rule of law its main theme.

The problem here is that in this case the opposition has to wait for specific missteps of the government. By making the "rule of law" its main theme, the opposition will not go up against the *leitmotif* of the Saakashvili government unless, of course, the latter descends into an open dictatorship. What will the opposition do if the government no longer evidently blunders as it did in the Girgvliani case? Relatively specific issues of developing the rule of law will stay on the level of elite discourse but will not suffice to "feed" the opposition movement, which requires broad support. In any democratic society there may be a debate on where exactly to draw the line between, on the one hand, measures necessary to ensure public safety, and, on the other hand, inalienable individual rights. No doubt that Georgia has much greater problems in this department than developed democracies, and any

improvement would require lots of attention and commitment. But the government generally accepts this predicament and – most importantly – it also can bring some evidence to the table when it claims to be making serious steps to achieve the genuine rule of law. The opposition should gather support by demonstrating that it is *more* motivated than the government is to defend the rule of law. This, however, is a hard sell.

(b) *The “Sorosian government” against national values.* Western-style modernization does truly dominate the agenda of the government. If this is the case, then it might be considered natural for the opposition to be led by anti-western, anti-liberal, anti-globalist, nativist forces. It is so logical that one may be amazed why this is not so. But the fact of the matter is that no such opposition has emerged yet. No serious force has even come forward to criticize the idea of joining NATO and the EU. One explanation may be that Georgians like Guram Sharadze¹³ or Elizbar Javelidze¹⁴ cannot master the technique of modern political action – that is, they are not sufficiently modernized themselves. One should remember here that leaders of Islamic radicalism are often those educated in the West. According to this logic, the future leader of Georgian nativistic anti-globalism should be a graduate of a western university. The smart tactics of the government are also important here, as they are aware of the nativist danger and balance it by promoting issues of state nationalism. In any case, there certainly is some mobilizing potential in this theme, but this does not yet mean that it will become the dominant idea of the opposition movement.

(c) *Defending workers' rights.* Although many people are not aware of this, the main direction of the economic policy of the government is rather right-wing (not to count some spontaneous moves by the president). Logically, this should create wide opportunities for the left-wing parties. In any European country, the new Georgian Labor Code¹⁵ would be met with mass demonstrations led by leftist parties and trade unions. But the logic based on western political experience does not work here. The president's frequent appearances

in free canteens for the poor are still enough to balance the right-wing tilt of his economic team. It seems so that the creation of a serious left-wing opposition will also require new leaders.

(d) *“Incompetent kids”*. The young age and the lack of experience of key government players, their being sometimes prone to chaotic and inconsistent moves is one more thing for which the government is often criticized. This is the favorite motive of old elites: if the failures of the new government are to be explained by its lack of experience, problems may be solved by involving old and experienced cadres. When reformed communists came back to replace the first post-communist governments in Eastern Europe, they sold themselves to voters not by the prospect of returning to communism, but by invoking competence in governance. If we keep in mind the age of our current government and the number of experienced cadres who lost their jobs, there should be important resources for the opposition. However, Shevardnadze’s government was so ineffective and inept in its last years, that there is not much to be nostalgic about.

(e) *Anti-corruption yet again*. Anti-corruption campaigns sometimes tend to increase temptations for being corrupt. Therefore, nobody can be sure that representatives of the new government, especially in the higher echelons of power, do not fall for it. Moreover, the weakness of the opposition reduces the accountability of the government, thus increasing opportunities for corruption. If the same group stays in the government for a long time, the problem is further exacerbated. Therefore, this government may also descend into corruption as its predecessor did. If this is the case, the opposition may find new strength around the anti-corruption theme, more so because this is an already trodden path.

Perhaps, but that will take time. The government has achieved conspicuous success in fighting mass corruption. Citizens are no longer subjected to extortion anywhere they go. This does not mean that elite corruption is also gone. But it is not enough to spread rumors about it. Until the opposition has any credible facts, corruption will not be the main theme for mobilizing mass protests.

Since none of these topics has developed into an effective instrument for political mobilization, what we hear from the opposition is an opportunistic mélange of all of them, which in itself is an important expression of its weakness. The government is aware of its potential vulnerabilities and has been quite adept at defending itself so far. The impression is that until the government makes some blunders, nothing will change.

7.

Apart from a theme to rally around, the opposition also lacks human resources. It is unlikely that it will achieve any meaningful success with its existing leaders. Most political faces that are around today are associated with failure, defeat and marginality, and it will be difficult for them to change this image. Presumably, society craves some innovation in this area. One can see that the opposition tacitly admits the necessity of new leaders from the fact that almost any famous government personality that breaks away gets a chance to become an important opposition figure for which the existing parties start competing. This was true of sacked Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili, and, some time later (to a lesser degree) – dismissed Minister for Conflict Settlement Goga Khaindrava. The increased activity on the opposition flank caused by Irakli Okruashvili's sudden resignation was somewhat comical, the opposition first got visible hopes but ended up frustrated.

Past experience reinforces these expectations: strong opposition has always come from the government. One cannot rule out this scenario repeating itself but so far we do not see any splits in the government or important figures that are likely to strengthen the opposition in a tangible way.

“New faces” may also come from outside of the government, for instance, from Georgian diasporas abroad. These people may bring with themselves more up-to-date political know-how which the government masters much better than the opposition at the moment.

8.

As I already said, we still have a hybrid system containing elements of both democracy and autocracy. This makes it inherently unstable from a structural standpoint. In such a system, the moment

of the change of power is the most problematic. This is confirmed in part by our historical experience – two unconstitutional changes of power, which has led to an expectation that the point of the political competition is to create a revolutionary situation (for the opposition) or to avoid it (for the government). This reduces chances for dialogue and cooperation between the opposing sides. Not only did political players get used to such a situation, they feel comfortable in it because it serves their short-term interests better. Both sides have a vested interest in maintaining the confrontational environment, even though they may occasionally make demonstrative gestures to show that they mean to be “constructive”. The opposition parties compete among each other to see who can be the most oppositional, that is the most irreconcilable towards the government. As for the government, the image of the opposition as a purely destructive, anti-systemic force suits it, as it makes it easier to ignore its opinions.

With regard to hybrid systems, one can talk about the short-term and long-term structural stabilization. Shevardnadze was a great master of achieving short-term stability. The methods he used to achieve this goal, however, only deepened the structural instability of the system. Long-term stabilization, however paradoxical it may sound, requires changing the system. Preservation of what we have, on the other hand, implies structural instability.

No threats to short-term stability (say, for the next 2-5 years) are visible at the moment and it is quite possible the situation is preserved for an even longer time. This short-term stability depends on the government’s capacity to demonstrate specific tangible achievements (it knows how to do it) as well as on the inability of the opposition to propose any credible alternative to the public. But there are also dormant roots of a crisis: narrow human resources of the government, its overdependence on a single person – the president, and a small group of people around him. Any serious mistake may lead to considerable tensions within this group. The probability of such a mistake is aggravated by the fact that this group is mainly self-sufficient and its contacts with outsiders are relatively limited. The function of the reality check is mainly performed by the system of international contacts. One also should not forget about factors that are largely

beyond the control of the government: economic crisis, new outbreak of tensions in separatist regions, possibly inspired from without.

If a change of power constitutes the point of vulnerability, such a potential moment of crisis will come towards the end of the president's second term (let's assume that, under the conditions of short-term stability, his re-election for a second term is secure). If today's tactical stability largely rests on a single person, the replacement of that person automatically implies the threat of instability. By this time, the system should have evolved either in a more democratic or a more autocratic direction. The second version may imply a rougher, let us say, Asian variant, when constitutional restrictions on the president's terms is removed and allows the still young Saakashvili to stay in his office for an indefinite future. This would transform Georgia's regime from a hybrid to an autocratic one.

The milder version would be what we sometimes hear from the people well-disposed towards the current government. This could be called the Mexican version. For that, the incumbent ruling group should be transformed from Mikheil Saakashvili's team into a real political party, which will guarantee the stability of the state institutions while the leader is replaced. So far, however, we do not see a trend towards the system being transformed into a sustainable structure independent of the personality of its leader. For this the power should undergo a systemic change from a Jacobin avant-garde group into a broader, clientelistic network that would probably be more open to corruption.

In the most optimistic scenario, while the incumbent government preserves stability based on the existing pro-Western consensus and its own effectiveness, there will be changes in society: economic success leads to the creation of a broader middle class and strengthens institutions of civil society, which supply human resources to a more competent political elite. Public dialogue then starts to focus on real policy options instead of personal bickering. In the meantime, constitutional reform makes general rules more democratic (no mention of specific models here). Nothing is impossible: let us wait.

9.

In the Georgian case, the main external factors are neatly divided into two: the Russian and the Western (although there also exist

regional countries whose role cannot be placed in either category). In these years, Russia was brilliant in her part of external enemy, thus providing much help to the Georgian political elite. It is always handy to have an external enemy, and Russia diligently delivered everything one could expect from such an enemy. In particular, (1) she encouraged trends towards disintegration wherever she could (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, until 2004 – Achara, and to some extent – Javakheti), (2) she helped to consolidate nationhood in the remaining part of the country's territory, and (3) she did not leave Georgia any alternative other than being oriented towards the West – that is, she killed any temptation Georgia could have had to be oriented towards Russia. Especially for this last point we should be deeply grateful to Russia.

The role of the West consists of (1) helping Georgia to maintain independent statehood in the moment when she was most vulnerable, (2) providing models of development which Georgia more or less follows; and (3) helping socializing and strengthening the new elites. The last is most notable: it is thanks to contacts with the West that the new elite is genuinely new and not just young. This socialization implied that many people – mostly but not necessarily young – got a chance to get knowledge and experience relevant to the current condition. This helped to replace romantic fantasies of the West (typical for the national movement) with competences related to specific practices. Moreover, in some critical moments the West contributed to fortifying key players such as independent media, civil society organizations and reformist politicians.

The capacity of the West to essentially change direction of the Georgian political elite is limited: nobody can be forced to do what he expressly does not want to. It would be a mistake to attribute the relative liberality of the rule of Shevardnadze or Saakashvili to Western influence alone. Why is the West not equally successful in other countries? But once general Western orientation had been chosen and Western opinion and assessments had significant influence on the political behavior of both leaders. It has considerably restricted their autocratic instincts, which are quite natural for Georgia's political culture. Today this influence has become even stronger, with NATO membership becoming a realistic option and the goal of membership

of the European Union defining the general direction of the country – however distant that goal might be. For a comparison, let us imagine that Europe of today resembles what it was in 1930s: what would the chances for democracy (or even a liberal hybrid regime) in Georgia be like?

Last but not least, about our neighboring countries. The greatest role of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Georgia's political life is to influence ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the country. This influence is mainly benevolent. The joint role of Azerbaijan and Turkey in the context of oil and gas pipelines is so often discussed that it does not make sense to go into detail here. In part, these projects give us greater energy independence from Russia and, at the same time, make us more interesting for the West. However, this factor is rather a starting capital that needs to be augmented. The strategic influence of Turkey mostly depends on whether this country becomes a member of the European Union. If it succeeds, our membership is all but guaranteed as well, if it does not, it becomes much less probable. As for Ukraine, after the "Orange Revolution" it seemed that on the way to both NATO and EU we had to walk together with Ukraine or, rather, get on her bandwagon. But the later defeat of the Orange coalition somewhat weakened this linkage, as well as the strategic importance of Ukraine for Georgia.

10.

I do not think that Georgia's policy should have a single dominant direction overriding anything else. It is a mistake to say: "Let us just get into NATO – that will solve everything else"; or: "Let's improve the investment climate and ensure economic growth – all other problems will take care of themselves"; or: "All resources should be directed towards solving the territorial integrity issue". The Georgian government cannot indulge itself by being so simplistic. It has to fight on several fronts.

Neither do I think that today's priorities need to be dramatically changed. One should develop and consolidate what has already been achieved, while in some areas priorities should be modified. I will sum these up in several points:

(a) *External threats.* This is naturally about Russia. Putin's government would be rather happy to do something nasty to us. But if we do not do something really stupid, it will be difficult for Russia to significantly harm Georgia. The government is tempted to exaggerate the importance of the Russian factor, which may be considered an expression of its own authoritarian instinct, and strengthen it. Being too obsessed about Russia may harm Georgia's credibility with the West and turn Russian aggression into a self-fulfilling prophecy. When we change our constitution because of Russian election cycles, the fear of Russia comes dangerously close to paranoia.

Naturally, orientation towards NATO membership should continue. I think – and this seems to be government's idea as well – that the road to better relations with Russia (which is important in itself) goes through NATO membership. The course towards Georgia's unilateral Europeanization (taking advantage of the resources of the European Neighborhood Policy) shall also continue. This way may even have some benefits as compared to Europeanization in the process of integration.

(b) *Territorial conflicts.* The belief that these conflicts can be solved rapidly turned out to be one of gravest mistakes of this government. This clearly was not true, but it would be wrong to reconcile ourselves to them being unsolvable either. Relying only on confidence-building measures and lengthy (quasi-)negotiations is in effect tantamount to giving up. Efforts should continue in two directions: on the one hand, working with the residents of conflict regions in order to gain their trust, and secondly, steps should be taken to keep the issue on the international agenda. Of course, while doing this all Georgia should beware of not letting the conflict descend into a new violent stage. Combining all these things is very difficult, but possible.

(c) *Developing democracy.* Whatever the public rhetoric of the government may be, it should recognize that there is serious deficit of democracy in the country. It is not only the authorities' fault: for

instance, one cannot blame the government for one of the most important manifestations of this deficit – the weakness of the opposition. But there are steps that it must take. First of all, this is about the constitutional system. It should be clearly said that work on a new Constitution is to begin, and the government encourages as broad a discussion on this subject as possible.

(d) *Institutionalization and stabilization of public service.* It is clear to everyone that dramatic changes in the state apparatus were necessary. But without a stable and non-political state bureaucracy, stateness will hardly stabilize either. One need not think of something original here – this is rather an issue of political will and a change of attitude.

(e) *Economic policy.* The direction of liberalization which is taken by the government is – as much as it is really taken – the only correct one. But making the tax and customs offices more civilized and creating more predictable conditions so that investors feel more confident continues to be a challenge. Anti-corruption zeal frequently comes into contradiction with ensuring the protection of property rights – at least at this point, nobody presents sufficient justifications when they are violated. The government should pursue a clear and consistent policy in this area.

(f) *Social policy.* Such a thing simply does not exist yet and has to be created – the first step should be recognizing that such a policy has never existed.

(g) *Education.* After all the unavoidable draconian measures taken in this area, some period of stabilization is needed so that one can evaluate what did work and what steps should be taken next. But further steps will have to be taken. Moreover, however commonplace it may be, a country that does not have oil or similar resources should spend a greater share of its public revenue on education and science. Otherwise, structural reforms alone will not bear fruit.

Notes:

¹ Ukraine recognized Georgia in December 1991, while the Soviet Union still existed and both countries were internationally considered to be its constituent parts. This act of recognition became a symbol of a politically futile symbolic gesture.

² A district in Abkhazia populated almost exclusively by ethnic Georgians.

³ A Georgian government-controlled village in South Ossetia.

⁴ Now part of Turkey.

⁵ According to some historical sources – and a popular Georgian poem of 1970s – Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani, a leading figure of the Georgian enlightenment, sought support from Louis XIV of France, and gained an audience, but the French monarch did not show any interest towards the misfortunes of this distant Christian nation. This story is used as a symbol of Europeans not caring about Georgia.

⁶ A stand-off in the center of Tbilisi between Gamsakhurdia's government and his opponents that lasted about 10 days and ended in Gamsakhurdia's ouster on January 6, 1992.

⁷ In the breakthrough elections of October 1990.

⁸ Irakli Tsereteli and Gia Chanturia were leaders of rival and more radical nationalist parties that called for a boycott of the elections.

⁹ A tiny region on the Chechen border which turned into a lawless enclave beyond any effective state control following the outbreak of the second war in Chechnya in 1999.

¹⁰ Following the Russian ban on Georgian wines in the spring of 2006: Kakheti is the main wine-making region in Georgia.

¹¹ New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1968, p. 2.

¹² In January 2006, Sandro Girgvliani, a young Tbilisi banker, was beaten to death by high-ranking officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, presumably settling personal scores. This case was widely publicized and caused numerous protest rallies.

¹³ A politician, MP in 1999-2003 and a founder of the Georgia First movement, famous for his ethno-nationalist statements. Was murdered, presumably on personal grounds, in May 2007.

¹⁴ Minister of education in Zviad Gamsakhurdia's government and outspoken defender of ethno-nationalist causes.

¹⁵ Adopted in 2005.

1.

From its inception in the late 1980s, the liberation movement demanded secession from the Soviet Union. This rendered the idea of remaining in the Soviet state even on a confederative basis to be considered heresy. The prevailing nationalist sentiments of that period, according to which Georgia's participation in democratic and modernization processes was a negative phenomenon, influenced this attitude. The most salient feature of the Georgian political reality in the early 1990s was the stubborn and uncompromising attitude toward the struggle for independence (by the end of Gamsakhurdia's presidential tenure this attitude softened a bit, but this could not influence the regime's viability any more). In addition, there were numerous slogans calling for independence that were tinged with nationalist emotions, did not express any clear-cut vision for national and long-term social development. Moreover, the struggle for national independence was in conflict even with the principles of democratization and liberalization which were introduced in the Soviet period. The "independence first, democracy afterwards" slogan of the ruling elite of the period was in line with that ethos. As a result, anti-modernism and neglect for liberal democratic values became a norm for both the political elite and for the majority of the nationalistically inclined society.

In this sense, changes started in the mid-1990s. They stemmed from the following factors:

- Ethnic strife and military and political failures in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts, aggravated by the prolonged economic crisis, led the ethno-nationalist ideology into a crisis;
- The relative political stability of the mid-1990s enabled the liberal part of society to establish itself as a civil sector;
- The openness of the country in crisis and its leadership to the influence of international actors facilitated the above process;

- The faster pace of economic development in the second half of the 1990s deepened social differentiation, which, in terms of cultural values, translated into the stratification of society as well. In this respect, differences emerged from the regional point of view as well. (The difference in modernization level and liberal values between the more and less economically developed regions also became noticeable.)

Each of these changes had its effect on political processes:

- The weakening of the ethno-nationalist ideology and the development of an ideological vacuum of sorts undermined the ability of the society in crisis to mobilize on the basis of anti-modernist nationalism, which created a favorable environment for launching the social and economic reforms based on Western values;
- The development of the civil sector paved the way for integration into the Western world. The discourse on the principles of modernization and democratization started within this sector. From the mid-1990s, this found support among the political elite, especially its younger representatives;
- The ruling core of the political regime realized full well that encouraging the younger generation of technocrats was a necessary prerequisite for development and therefore encouraged initiatives that envisaged modernization (however, later on, when the ruling elite realized that its role in the projects that were designed by the new generation was minimized, these attitudes changed. Precisely this caused the rift within the ruling political elite);
- In the wake of social economic development, orientation toward the liberal democratic values became more pronounced. This changed the basis for social mobilization (which was clearly manifest in the slogans expressing civil protest ahead of the Rose Revolution);
- The increasing support for democratic political processes among the elite won support among the public as well.

2.

From the early 1990s to this day, Georgia's development as an independent state has been accompanied by social and political trou-

mas. The project of sovereign Georgian statehood has been in conflict with internal and external political and domestic social and cultural factors from the very beginning. The reasons for this inherent conflict were first and foremost the lack and vagueness of the political strategy within the political group itself that assumed leadership of the national liberation movement (nationalists who supported Gamsakhurdia and rallied around the *Round Table-Free Georgia* bloc) and the amorphous political project which was based on ethnic nationalism. The principles of populist democracy, unitarianism and pseudo-socialism (the vague idea of so-called state capitalism), which lay in the foundation of this ideologem, ruled out the possibility of society's development into a social, political and economic actor and the involvement in the political process of a number of groups with certain ethnic, religious and political characteristics. As a result of all this, Georgia found itself embroiled in a number of domestic political crises.

The absence of a long-term political strategy was manifest, if nothing else, in the speed with which the doctrine of building the nation was changing in Gamsakhurdia's nationalist group as a result of either foreign political pressure or domestic criticism. Initially, the *Round Table* political elite took an irreconcilable position on the issue of Georgia's autonomous entities, which translated into the dissolution of the South Ossetian Autonomous District and, consequently, ethnic conflict.

Later on, as a consequence of the developments in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, this position changed. The attitude toward this region fostered the establishment of the anti-democratic regime of apartheid, which eventually turned into a factor that kindled the ethnic conflict. The views of Gamsakhurdia's political group on the place of Georgia in the former Soviet political space (at some point, the idea of Georgia's presence in the Soviet political and economic space was revisited, although this political position did not last long) and the role the ethnic minorities were to play in the new Georgian state (the rhetoric regarding this issue periodically alternated between extreme irreconcilability and the granting of cultural autonomy with government guarantees to ethnic and other enclaves) was swinging like a pendulum.

The main vector of the Gamsakhurdia government's economic policy was demonstrated in its attempts to weaken the newly estab-

lished group of property owners that was created during perestroika (the “cooperation sector”). The government was trying to tighten its control over the capital goods (perhaps this was the attempt by the new political elite to assume control over state-owned property and effect a new redistribution of property). Naturally, this was damaging to the interests of the aforementioned economic class. The declared desire to abandon the Soviet economic system – if, that is, we view the acts of “economic blockade” of the Soviet Union (blocking the trunk railroads) which Georgia implemented as attesting to that desire – widened the gap between the new regime and the cooperators as a class of ownership which arose under the Soviet economic system by exploiting state-owned property. Accordingly, the “gray” financial resources that were accumulated back in the Soviet period remained under the control of an economic class which was antagonistic toward the new regime and supported the political groups confronting it.

Foreign policy was unclear as well. The nonchalant attitude of the new regime toward protection of democratic and liberal values drew international criticism, and without international support, the country was destined to isolationism. This situation imparted some degree of legitimacy to the domestic opposition’s struggle against the quasi-Jacobin Gamsakhurdia regime and the foreign and domestic environment which had taken shape to the extent that even toppling the incumbent government by using extreme measures would be considered legitimate.

3.

Eduard Shevardnadze had an image of a fighter for change as early as the Soviet period. In the perestroika period, this image of his was further reinforced. Shevardnadze’s return to Georgia in 1992 was viewed precisely from this standpoint. Despite this, however, there existed no clearly-formulated program of Georgia’s democratic development that could become established as a system in the Georgia of the Shevardnadze period. Spontaneous successes in this field took place because of the regime’s internal weakness and the influence of foreign actors.

Shevardnadze adhered to the principles of multi-actor politics (which to some extent was accounted for by his experience of maneuvering in confrontations between factions and groups in the Soviet party nomen-

clature system and his familiarity with the “balancing” policy), which gave some leeway to democratic development. Of course, there was a trend toward monopolization of power too, but Shevardnadze also realized that relying on only one group would pose a threat to his power and that singling out a potential political successor might also result in his own early departure from the political arena. The negative aspect of this philosophy was the absence of the institutionalization of the political process. Despite its being multi-actor, the policy predicated on clandestine dealings and non-transparent rules of the game was undemocratic from the outset. Refraining from singling out a political successor – a particular group or individual – also posed a real threat to the creation of a strong opposition bloc against him. And it was created ahead of the Rose Revolution. Shevardnadze’s old political team took a passive position toward development. The reason was their confusion about the role they were playing in Shevardnadze’s calculations (perhaps Shevardnadze frightened them by inviting the formerly opposition groups of Irina Sarishvili and Vakhtang Rcheulishvili to his team, which undermined the sense of stability and demonstrated the possibility of their replacement).

The following can be highlighted from among the failures of the Shevardnadze regime:

- Hindering economic reforms and slowing down the pace of economic development while networks of corrupt clans grew more influential;
- Ignoring the necessity of institutional reforms;
- Reducing the notion of democracy to informal relations between different political groups.

Shevardnadze’s political regime was quasi-authoritarian and bureaucratic. It allowed some degree of democracy, but the extent of institutionalization was low. The state administrative system functioned with a pragmatism characteristic of the Soviet “apparatchiks” (administrative function – private material benefits) and property and power were not separated. Being in power made it possible to establish control over economic activities or manage the process of the redistribution of power (abuse of power to promote private economic interests).

Among the conditions antecedent to the Rose Revolution were social and cultural changes and changes in cultural and value systems. On the one hand, the growing civic consciousness contributed to establishment of value-based civic mechanisms of mobilization of public protest while on the other hand the weakly-structured but organized middle class, which adopted the aforementioned values, was coming into being over the preceding decade.

4.

Saakashvili's political program is a mix of sorts of political pragmatism and idealism. His team came to power under slogans of loyalty to democratic and liberal values (which is what earned it public support), but while consistently implementing a policy of reforms, it also often turns a blind eye to the violations of democratic norms and procedures that occur. It is precisely out of considerations of political pragmatism (ensuring the fast pace of the reforms) that the new political elite exceeded even the Shevardnadze regime in terms of the degree of monopolization of political power. The concentration of power through introduction of constitutional amendments, the growing degree of centralization (limitation of local governments' prerogatives), tighter control over the functions of the public service (the strict, centralized and systemic nature of the anti-corruption policy) – all these are trademarks of the Saakashvili period.

The main achievement of the early period of the Saakashvili government was greatly reducing the alienation between state and society. A decade of disappointment and skeptical attitude toward the state were replaced by trust toward the state and sense of stability. This was made possible by the quick and efficient resolution by the government of critical political situations (e.g. in Achara and the Kodori Gorge). Although the country's economy has not improved to any noticeable extent and rising prices are progressively undermining standards of living, well-calculated appeals strengthen public support for the government and neutralize the influence of economic factors against the backdrop of an unfavorable international environment (relations with Russia). Among the unquestionable achievements should be listed the ongoing structural reforms and the strengthening of the fundamental state institutions (the Interior Ministry, the Prosecutor General's

Office and the education system) and lower-tier administrative units (where contacts between state and society are direct thanks to the provision of state services), as well as a dramatic decrease in corruption. Yet another noteworthy achievement is reaching public consensus on the main priorities of the country's development and security policy (both imply integration into the Euro-Atlantic area). This, however, may be due not so much to the political program of Saakashvili's team specifically, as to the mobilization of public trust.

The worst failure of the Saakashvili period is, in my opinion, the extreme tension in relations with Russia. This affects both the country's economic security and the stability of the existing political order. The point is that implementing radical reforms will probably become more difficult against the background of the worsening social and economic situation (there will be less radicalism when social reality has to be taken into account); in addition, the reforms will inevitably encounter organized, if isolated and spontaneous, protests.

As for other failures (perhaps it would be more accurate to call them flaws), in my view these include the following:

- Inadequate institutionalization of official relations in the state governance system and confining the prerogative of decision making to a small group of technocrat reformers (this flaw can to some extent be accounted for by the lack of human resources, although neither can it be ruled out that the post-revolution elite does not trust the resources which *are* available);
- The decrease in the extent of participatory democracy and single party domination in parliamentary political processes;
- As a result of missionary revolutionary policy, many a political actor is being sidelined from the political arena, which increases the likelihood of the emergence of an opposition (as early as in the spring 2006, the prospect of a union of opposition groups with different ideological platforms emerging to counter a political system which was in the inception stage started to seem realistic); this makes political stability in Georgia fragile;
- The place of the judiciary in the political system is not determined, and this issue is considered to be of minor importance;

- The lack of clarity in setting the confines for the anti-corruption policy and limits of competence for the institutions which implement it (economic actors are afraid of the possible establishment of state racket in the name of anti-corruption policy).

In contrast to its predecessor, the political order of the Saakashvili period stands out for its higher degree of mobilization and promptness of action. This is a result of the introduction of the team spirit and leadership principle. As for the categorization of the regime, it is hard to describe it as mobilizing because the consistent liberalism of the political elite does not raise doubts, although there are some signs of its possessing the qualities of precisely that kind of a regime (growing interference of the government in the economic sectors of public life, centralization, strengthening of the control and repressive mechanisms). At the same time, the regime evinces signs of a populist political order (dominant political party and its ties with social organizations, weakening of the institutions which act as mediators between state and society, like the political parties, media, interest groups). However, it is hard to talk about authoritarianism either because democratic institutions do exist and function in Georgia. Taking all this into account, describing the incumbent regime as a delegative democracy (a term coined by Guillermo O'Donnell to describe the Latin American democracies) seems more acceptable (some degree of democracy plus the abovementioned mobilization and populist elements).

5.

The weakness of the opposition cannot be attributed to pressure on the part of the authorities, but it also has to be said that in some cases – take the elections as an example – the electoral system and the law put parties without access to administrative resources into a disadvantageous position compared to the ruling party. The gist of the problem should mostly be sought in the issues of the practice of civil consciousness and the political culture of society. The Rose Revolution demonstrated the civic values which took root in some parts of society in action, precisely because other channels of practicing them (the elections, media) were either prone to manipulation or obliterated. Even if the parliamentary and presidential elections were held freely and trans-

parently, it would be desirable to practice civic values using these kinds of channels more frequently, as this would make relations between the parties and society more systemic on the one hand and establish formal and informal rules for such relations on the other (ideological or financial support, membership, participation in campaigns, etc.)

6.

If the opposition grows stronger, the fundamental program of opposing the government will be based on demands for social rights and the supremacy of law. At present, the mechanisms of implementation of the modernizing and liberal reforms are not based on democratic principles; the tendency toward reducing the possibility of participation is also marked. Obviously, the latter factor serves as a fertile soil for implementing reforms with a shocking effect. In addition, it has to be taken into account that in the medium and long run, the results of the reform are bound to cause social, economic, and socio-cultural changes which will logically evolve into demands for the participation and establishment of new social groups in the political arena. Accordingly, the need will arise to broaden participatory opportunities, which might become a hindrance in the implementation of modernizing liberal reforms. Presumably, the existing political regime will misperceive the growing public demand for broader opportunities to participate. This is why the government should be able to stabilize the volatile social and economic situation. It should create a system to contain the growing protest. In this situation, the intensification of the opposition's efforts will be logical. Today, nationalism-etatism, rightist liberalism and social issues with leftist elements are represented in almost equal proportions in the ruling party's political program. In a possible crisis situation, it will have to reject its ideological eclecticism. The vacated niches will be occupied by other parties.

7.

None of the listed options are impossible, although the experience of changes of government in Georgia indicates that the leading political opposition groups always emerged after rifts within the ruling party. The Saakashvili team is trying to avert the rift. This is why leading politicians

are moved from one post to another instead of being dismissed. Exceptions in this regard were Salome Zourabichvili and Goga Khaindrava, who were outsiders in the governing team and had no support base in it. Irakli Okruashvili's case merits special attention because the above rule applied to him too, but he chose to step down out of personal considerations. This does not mean that the former defense minister will become an opposition leader, although neither can it be said with certainty what political position he will take should a crisis develop. Obviously, what calculations the foreign political actors (the West and Russia) will have for opposition politicians also has to be taken into account.

8.

The stability of the existing system in Georgia depends on successes of the political elite which governs it, in other words, on the efforts of a single political group. The political and administrative processes are insufficiently institutionalized and, should the ruling political team prove unsuccessful, the absence of institutional ways of settling crises will threaten to change the elite through strong-arm methods or the use of repressive mechanisms by the government to stay in power.

In the present-day Georgian reality, it is hard to find evidence of the establishment of a dictatorship or authoritarianism. But the absence of a system that would ensure political stability is also apparent, which creates a margin of probability for a change of the elites through revolutionary cycles. Ensuring long-term stability is one of the challenges of the incumbent political regime, as it is required for the continuation and completion of the reforms. At this stage, steps that were made in this direction were intended to strengthen and consolidate political power (see answer to question 4). This is probably an indicator that Georgia is on its way toward the establishment of a dominant political party system of the Mexican type (which, for its part, implies the weakening of democratic processes).

9.

The influence of foreign factors on Georgia's political development is certainly great. Since the 1990s, Georgia's fluctuations between democracy and the lack thereof, between poles of stable and unstable development, have stemmed from the prevailing trends in Western and Russian foreign policy and the balance of their power in the region.

If in the early 1990s, the destabilizing external factors in the Caucasus were the result of Russia's policy, it was the same Russia which played a major role in the establishment of stability in the mid-1990s (it established a form of stability which was to its advantage by creating mechanisms of military-political influence). The Western influence promoted deepening of the democratic processes from the very beginning, and the West has been consistently and successfully implementing its policy ever since.

Since the Rose Revolution, the balance between these two main sources of foreign factors has been changing. Russian influence will be aimed toward destabilizing the incipient system to maintain and further broaden its influence in the country and region while the West will step up its support for the policy of strengthening the state institutions (especially the state and economic security institutions). It is interesting to observe the attitude of these two foreign centers toward the aforementioned decrease in the extent of democracy. It might sound ironic, but criticism of the Georgian government for weakening of democracy is more likely to come from Russia than from the West because Russia is interested in bringing the legitimacy of the incumbent Georgian regime into question. This does not at all mean that the West will allow deviation from the democratic course.

10.

The government should consider as priorities the issues which will help mitigate the effects of the factors which threaten to undermine stability in the country:

- I. Settlement of political and economic relations with Russia;
- II. Deepening of the peaceful dialogue with the de facto authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia;
- III. Institutionalization of democratic processes and broadening of opportunities to participate in political processes;
- IV. Adherence to the principles of supremacy of law and separation of powers; if this happens, the effective interplay between the mechanisms of checks and balances will increase the legitimacy of the political order and thereby neutralize domestic destabilizing factors.

Overview

Georgia has had both successful and unsuccessful periods since the restoration of its national sovereignty, so we can discuss both successes and failures now that Georgia has been independent for 15 years. It has to be noted in discussion on failures that Georgia has been failing thus far to create **sustainable governance institutions**, and this term encompasses both government and nongovernmental or business organizations. In this respect, i.e. in terms of establishment of these institutions, the situation is roughly the same in all three sectors: organizations are for the most part structured to fit a particular individual and have to be readapted to the new manager when that individual leaves the organization. On the one hand, this allows for flexibility and maneuverability, which are necessary in the transitional period, but on the other hand, problems are likely to be created in the long run because of the consequent lack of the institutional framework and prerequisites for the stable and sustainable development. As already mentioned, this situation is normal for the initial period of transition, but certainly cannot be considered a sign of normal development a few years later. And here is where Georgia's second main problem is: to this day, replacement of the ruler by holding the election has not happened in Georgia. In other words, there is no **succession of leadership** whereby each next leader or party would pick up where his or her predecessor left off. When analyzing the post-socialist transformation of the Central and Eastern European countries, some experts noted a pendulum-like process of change in the pattern of change of government: rightist leaders (or parties) were replaced by leftists, often former members or sympathizers of the communist party. These changes caused some degree of change in society's attitudes toward the reforms, but left the overall direction of the reforms, as well as the strategic vector

of the country's development, intact. Unfortunately, this phenomenon has not taken place in Georgia. All the significant changes in Georgia have been of a revolutionary nature and resulted in radical changes in the balance of power in the political arena. I strongly believe that every form of governance was better than the preceding one, but none of them helped the citizens take the view of Georgia as a unified country and of themselves as participants in the process of developing a state.

And finally, what Georgia has failed to achieve: **Our society has failed to see itself as a single entity.** The integration/unification of different ethnic, religious and social groups into a cohesive society has yet to happen. Ethnic Armenians, Azeris and Ossetians who reside in Georgia do not view themselves as Georgian citizens. Worse yet, the dominant ethnic group, the Georgians, are constantly divided into friends and foes; the divisions may run between religious denominations, political views, province of origin, personal income or any other formal difference, but this does not reduce the extent of disunity. In my opinion, this phenomenon causes Georgia more headaches than the fourth major failure – the **loss of territories.** Even in the worst-case scenario of failure to bring the lost territories under Georgian jurisdiction, the remaining part of the country will have prospects of development into a Western-type state, but without the emergence of a society with a system of common fundamental values and the institution of the Georgian citizen, the country's development seems impossible to me.

The following can be considered the most important successes in the independence period:

- a) **Sustaining Georgia's independence and implementation of independent state policy.** In the last 15 years, Georgia has more than once been faced with the threat of losing its independence. However, by now the country has managed to avoid becoming a part or, more likely, a satellite or dependency of some other country. An analysis of development of post-Soviet countries provides plenty of examples when only the existence of the government and membership in international organizations remain from a country's independence.

- b) The second achievement that needs to be pointed out is **public participation in the country's development and its growing importance for this process**. Of course, the extent of public participation is substantially less than in Central and Eastern Europe, not to mention Western countries. But in the context of the post-Soviet area, Georgia can pride itself on its successes in the areas of development of independent media and the NGO and business sectors. Compared to neighboring countries, public participation in solving local and community-level problems is quite significant. In this respect, the period of 1991-1994 played an important role, when the state and state institutions almost disappeared. The generation which was raised during the Soviet period felt for the first time that the state no longer cared about them and was unable to resolve their (both society's in general and individual's) problems. As a result, the people started to think about their future themselves. This was often spontaneous, and sometimes uncivilized, but ultimately, precisely this attitude shaped the nongovernmental activity. In the Shevardnadze period, the state regained some of its strength and managed to start performing its functions and bringing some of its old spheres of influence back under its control, but failed to change the situation cardinally.
- c) The third major achievement is **clearly-formulated and well-developed foreign relations**. At the beginning of his presidential tenure, Shevardnadze brought Georgia into the focus of international attention by using his personal contacts. The country joined international organizations, and both investors and academic circles started to take interest in Georgia. From 1998, the initial interest subsided, and Georgia was referred to as a "failed state". The 2003 Rose Revolution once again brought Georgia to the center of the world's attention. The interest toward our country has grown again. In addition, Georgia has shaped a long-term foreign policy and vector of development. The new government has clearly stated that pro-Western policy and the country's integration into NATO and the EU are top priorities over the next few years. It has to be said that Georgia's foreign relations have been brought under a systemic institutional framework for the first time. Georgia's

first victories in the information war with Russia attest to this. The main thing now is to finalize the process of formulating a comprehensive foreign policy and its institutionalization.

Now let us move from the general assessment of the independence period to the assessments of individual governments. Since 1990, Georgia has had three leaders: Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1990-1992), Eduard Shevardnadze (1992-2003) and Mikheil Saakashvili (since 2003).

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency

Zviad Gamsakhurdia came to power as a result of the developments of late 1980s, on the wave of the national liberation movement. A significant part of the population viewed him as a leader who would be able to meet the main demands of Georgian society – winning independence and changing the communist regime. One might say that many Georgians associated their expectation of real changes with Gamsakhurdia. Gamsakhurdia had all the prerequisites for carrying out the reforms in the country. He enjoyed public confidence and accordingly, received a vast majority of the votes. In the Soviet period, Georgia was one of the most prosperous republics. The population was well-off and ready for a difficult start of the reforms, both morally and materially.

What happened next proved the validity of these assumptions. Gamsakhurdia's approval ratings were lower in 1992 than in 1990, but they still remained quite high. Let us assume theoretically that Gamsakhurdia accepted the opposition's initial demand and called early presidential and parliamentary elections. No-one can say with certainty that he would have lost those elections. Furthermore, analysis of the number of people who spent years in the fierce opposition and boycotted all the subsequent elections shows that maintaining status quo, i.e. Gamsakhurdia's staying in power, was quite possible.

In that period of economic downfall and total impoverishment of the population in Georgia, it was precisely material reserves from the Soviet-period that helped the people survive hard times. So, history proved the validity of both our assumptions. Unfortunately, those reserves were wasted, and today, 15 years later, we have to carry out the reforms which should have been implemented in the Gamsakhurdia

period and the following years and continue our struggle with much fewer resources. Relations with Russia are an example of this. The current tensions in Russo-Georgian relations are quite similar to what was going on between Russia and the Baltic states in the early 1990s.

Because of this wasted time and missed opportunities, the Gamsakhurdia period should be given a negative assessment. Formulating Gamsakhurdia's political views is difficult because they did not exist. Gamsakhurdia did not have an coherent program; it is difficult to describe his system of values and then find logic in his actions in reference to that system. The entire period of Gamsakhurdia's presidency was a chain of mutually contradictory actions, where each action was in conflict with the preceding one. Holding off privatization and suspending economic reforms were good examples of this. The Gamsakhurdia government was a team of people with different views and, to some extent, different values, so it could hardly be described as a team.

The declaration of Georgia's independence can be considered the greatest achievement of the Gamsakhurdia period. It has to be said, however, that the real independence did not come from where everyone expected it; independence was in effect an outcome of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In addition to Georgia, independence was achieved by the countries which did not at all strive to be independent (e.g. the Central Asian republics). Unfortunately, Gamsakhurdia failed to legitimize the independence which he won in 1991 and receive international recognition. To make a somewhat crude comparison, the actual status of Georgia's independence at that time was roughly similar to the current status of independence of self-styled republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In both cases, no one except those who declared independence recognized it (only Romania recognized Georgia's independence in 1991); state government bodies were established which were also recognized by no-one. At the same time, the central government's (Moscow in the former case and Tbilisi in the latter) influence on affairs in these regions was minimal.

Precisely the failure to achieve recognition and the beginning of disunity of society should be considered the main failures of the Gamsakhurdia government. The preconditions for the four main fail-

ures that were discussed at the beginning of this article can be demonstrated to have originated precisely in the Gamsakhurdia period.

At the same time there were several important new developments during Gamsakhurdia's presidency: a) elections and election campaigns were held, and political statements and debates took place for the first time in modern Georgian history; b) the first attempts were made to take political debates to the legislature and give them a more-or-less modern form; c) the first local elections were held.

Precisely the failures listed above were the reasons for the premature end of the Gamsakhurdia government: a) failure to achieve international recognition. In addition to the independence which he declared, his policy and his team also did not receive international recognition and support. Gamsakhurdia failed to find a common language with both Russia and the West; b) lack of comprehensive vision formulated by the Georgian government. As noted above, the entire Gamsakhurdia period can be described with one phrase: *a chain of mutually contradictory actions*. Owing to this, not only were there no reforms of the country's governance and the system in general, but no significant changes were effected in any sector. For instance, after holding the local elections, the institution of appointed prefects was introduced, which effectively took the reins of all local political power. To these two problems should be added the lack of qualified staff, mistakes in personnel policy, the division of society into "our supporters" and "others" and the drawing of a line of miscommunication between them, and discord within the ruling team. All this caused the end of the Gamsakhurdia regime in the 1991-1992 "Christmas coup".

Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency

Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency can be divided into several sub-periods: a) the period of establishment (1992-96); b) period of rise (1997-99); c) period of stagnation (1999-2003). During the first period, Eduard Shevardnadze had to share power with other leaders. Initially, it was the Military Council (Kitovani, Sigua, Ioseliani), then – the Mkhedrioni militia and its leader Jaba Ioseliani on the one hand and pro-Russian forces and their front man Igor Giorgadze on the other. When analyzing Shevardnadze's decisions in this period, we

should not overlook the factor of these people. Undoubtedly, the main achievement of the period of establishment was the stabilization of the country. Shevardnadze achieved this by sidelining his opponents. At the initial stage, he eliminated armed formations of Gamsakhurdia's supporters with Russia's help and reduced their influence on political developments to a minimum. Then, in alliance with Ioseliani, he sidelined Sigua and Kitovani, and later Ioseliani and his Mkhedrioni shared their fate. This ended the rampage of illegal armed units in the country, which, of course, should be considered the second major achievement of the Shevardnadze government. Later on, Kakha Targamadze and his Ministry of Internal Affairs occupied the paramilitary formations' vacant niche in the political arena and business sector. Shevardnadze started to slowly create a system which he was familiar with. The system was based on a strong and corrupt Internal Affairs Ministry, the existence of different small groups in the country, almost everyone's involvement in corruption and gaining of control over everyone in this manner. The beginnings of the ruling party, the Citizens' Union, which was to create a political support base for Shevardnadze, are also associated with this period. The main failures of the first period of the Shevardnadze presidency were the launch of combat operations in Abkhazia resulting in the loss of that region and accession to the CIS. It also has to be noted that it was precisely in that period that Aslan Abashidze and his clan tightened their grip on Achara. The international recognition of Georgia and the launch of several important programs by international organizations should also be counted as a success.

The period of establishment was followed by a period of rise, in which the economic indicators started to grow for the first time in the history of independent Georgia. In 1996, inflation edged down to only 2-3 percent a month; compared to the previous year, the country's GDP increased by 14 percent. In the same period, small-scale privatization was effectively completed. A real NGO and media boom started in the country. The international community deemed precisely the rapid growth of the civil sector Georgia's main achievement. Georgia got involved in important international projects (TRACECA, Baku-Ceyhan, etc.), which, in experts' opinion, could pave the way for stability and development.

International organizations' statistics provide good reasons to talk about the development of small and medium-size business in that period. For the first time in Georgian history, several major foreign investments were made in the country's economy. New people entered the political arena who were able to shape the Western vector for the country's development and make it stable.

But simultaneously with these achievements, the country was faced with grave problems which persisted throughout Shevardnadze's presidential tenure: a) corruption at all levels; b) the Internal Affairs Ministry's transformation effectively into a mafia-like punitive department; c) disunity of the country and society, of which the most obvious and flagrant manifestation were Aslan Abashidze and his rule in Achara; d) inconsistent foreign policy. Pro-Western actions alternated with needless concessions and wheedling overtures toward Russia.

If the period between 1996 and 1999 made it possible to talk about a balance of sorts between the positive and negative factors and outcomes, the years that followed can only be described as downright negative. The first clear signal of negative changes to come was the totally rigged 2000 presidential election. The election made it clear that the population deemed Shevardnadze's capabilities exhausted. Because of the lack of an attractive alternative, people simply did not go to polls. The failure to meet the quorum of voters posed a dilemma for Shevardnadze and his supporters: they had to either admit that the election had failed to take place, draw appropriate conclusions, and reschedule the vote, or meet the quorum by "throwing in" extra ballots. They chose the latter. Eventually it became clear that Shevardnadze's presidency no longer had any positive aspects. The positive changes which took place in the rise period diminished to the minimum: a) the new people disappeared from the government and Shevardnadze's team and were replaced by retrogrades; b) attacks against non-governmental organizations and the media became more frequent; c) economic growth ended. It was obvious that the international energy projects could only create a desirable economic climate, but without the development of business in the country, they could not make the economy stable. Businesses, however, found themselves in a plight. Small and medium-sized companies could not withstand

the pressure of monitoring bodies any more – they were either disappearing or shifting two thirds of their turnover into the gray sector. In different estimates, the gray sector of the economy was 50-60 percent of the total; d) the country's foreign political vector was increasingly leaning toward Russia.

As the positive factors were being offset, the negative ones moved to the fore: a) instead of combating crime, the Internal Affairs Ministry effectively acquired the function of perpetrating and abetting crime; b) Achara in effect seceded from Georgia's jurisdiction; c) corruption became Georgia's trademark. The international community again started to talk about Georgia as a failed state. Public trust toward the government, governmental institutions and officials plummeted. Precisely this was the environment in which the 2003 parliamentary elections were held, the elections which put an end to the Shevardnadze government. The fundamental causes of the Rose Revolution were the abovementioned problems and the people's attitude. It also has to be noted that the voters saw an alternative for the first time in the person of Mikheil Saakashvili and his team. This, together with the coordination between and good work of the non-governmental sector and the media, led the population to decide against forgiving the government which lost its popularity yet another rigged elections, whereas the international community not only did not support the Shevardnadze government, but even, one might say, drove a nail in his system's coffin.

Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency

Mikheil Saakashvili and his team came to power with huge vote of confidence. This makes Saakashvili similar to the first Georgian president indeed. But in contrast to the Gamsakhurdia government, Saakashvili uses his popularity and public trust to carry out reforms at an accelerated pace and make them irreversible. The incumbent authorities have introduced several novelties to Georgia's political life, of which team spirit, a common vision and transparency of the reforms should be noted. As mentioned above, under Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze, there was no consensus on what the country's ruling elite strived for. In addition, the ruling team itself was extremely disunited and diverse. It has to be said that the first steps have

already been made to address this problem. There are not so many discrepancies any more between the statements of the country's leaders as under the previous government. A team has taken shape within the ruling party, whose members have more or less the same fundamental principles and values and share the same vision for the country's development. At the same time, extensively preplanned, designed, and institutionally structured reforms are under way in a number of sectors. Most importantly, reforms in different sectors share the same pattern, vector, and have the same general objective. The incumbent authorities are trying to make both decision making and decision implementation as transparent as possible. Probably none of the previous governments has held so many news conferences, briefings and meetings with different social groups as the incumbent authorities have. It also has to be said that the number of "meetings for meeting's sake" has fallen dramatically; in other words, the meetings with no real significance, which used to be held only to please someone or just for the protocol, are not taking place any more. These sorts of meetings were very popular during Shevardnadze's presidency, but none of them yielded any important results.

Reforms in the following areas should be considered positive results of the new approach:

- a) Education. A fundamental reform at all levels has been launched in the education system. The secondary school reform is qualitatively changing school in Georgia as an institution. Giving the secondary schools the status of legal entities under civil law and handing over the budgetary instruments to them has increased their degree of organizational independence and flexibility as well as responsibility. Schools are getting more independent in planning and implementing curricular activities too. The introduction of Supervisory Boards should minimize the alienation which existed among the teachers, parents and students. Avoidance of responsibility and self-isolationism, which before were part of the schools' everyday life, will be uprooted. The functions of the director and director's administration are also changing. They will be a purely managerial unit, free of ideological or any other duties. The secondary school will be transformed into an institution for development at the grass-roots level

of the skills of the self-governance and governance – the skills which Georgian society needs so much.

The unified national exams have replaced the corrupt and defective university admissions system. Three years ago no one could have imagined that it was possible to defeat the old system. It is important to ensure that young people who join universities under this system find a new educational environment there. In this respect, Georgia has a lot of work to do, although the law has already outlined the legal and organizational framework which will promote this process. What was said above about the schools applies to higher education too. For the first time in the Georgian history, the country has a chance of getting involved in the European processes from the very beginning instead of integrating into the already established systems. The Bologna process is under way, and it promises to greatly benefit Georgian students and teachers.

The establishment of the Foundation for Scientific Development and the withdrawal of the research institutions from the system of the Academy of Sciences signaled the end of the first and most important phase of reforms of the Georgian scientific research system. The reform of vocational education was launched simultaneously. This has effectively created the framework for the modern Georgian education system, which is based on professionalism, transparency, market demand, Western values and the principle of continuous education. Precisely this education system should support Georgia's development into a successful nation.

b) Reform of the police. Together with the education system, the police was the most corrupt system in Georgia for years. By the end of Shevardnadze's presidency, the police effectively monopolized crime and violence. Not a single more-or-less significant crime was perpetrated without high-level Internal Affairs Ministry officials' direct involvement or tacit acquiescence. Petty bribery and extortion reigned at the lower tier. The reform has seriously undermined this system. To the public, the most conspicuous part of the reform is what they come into direct contact with, i.e. the patrol police. Today no one argues any more that the experiment proved successful and is already irreversible. Important changes

took place in other departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, although these may be less visible to the public.

- c) Military reform. For years, the Georgian Army used to be a bottomless pit in which budget allocations and foreign assistance would disappear. Despite years of funding, soldiers were hungry and badly-dressed, barracks and weapons were in poor condition, and officers did not receive their salaries. Discipline was lax and lawlessness rampant. The quality of leadership in the army would not have struck anyone for its high professionalism. The reforms of the recent years have either reduced or resolved these problems. The Georgian Army can be described as a combat-ready unit today. Major steps were made toward closer cooperation with NATO, of which the best example is the beginning of the Intensive Dialogue phase and recent statements by NATO officials.
- d) Foreign relations. Georgia's foreign policy has become consistent for the first time. Our country has clearly formulated a pro-Western vector and is implementing its policy accordingly. Georgia's first victories in the information war with Russia were manifestations of precisely this. The main thing now is to finalize the process of formulating the comprehensive foreign policy blueprint and setting the priority target areas for international assistance. For the first time in the Georgian history, the government turned down offers of international assistance on a number of occasions because they did not fall in with the above priorities.
- e) Infrastructure. For the first time since early 1980s, the Georgian government started to develop infrastructure. It is noteworthy that this process is under way in all spheres, including transport, education, tourism, utilities and finances.

Alongside achievements, we should also touch on problems. Despite the abovementioned team work, the progress of reforms is not equally fast in all areas. Furthermore, in some sectors (e.g. health care), the process has effectively not started yet. It is understandable that the government cannot do everything at the same time, but there are areas which will prevent the country's progress unless they develop. Judiciary reform is one these spheres. Despite changes, the

government's attempts to build a strong and independent judiciary system have not yet given results, which slows down progress and institutional development in other areas.

The opposition and state

In experts' opinion, the absence of a strong and competitive opposition is one of the major problems. The causes of this situation fall under three different groups: a) "historical": A strong political party has never existed in Georgia. In most cases, parties were clubs of like-minded people, their influence not going beyond their circle of friends and relatives. The only exception was the parties created around a charismatic leader. In that case, their underdeveloped party structure and absence of ideology were made up for by large numbers of the leader's supporters and, respectively, high approval ratings. The second exception were so-called government parties, which were head of state-centered and, accordingly, enjoyed extremely strong financial situation, large membership base and good organization. Add to these the possibility to use administrative resources and it will become clear that, unless there was internal rift, they were far ahead of their competitors. The present-day opposition has neither a charismatic leader nor supporters among the ruling team. So, almost every party is no more than a club. b) Another important reason is the **lack of new ideas**. The local elections demonstrated this well. The election campaigns of all the opposition parties were built around negativity. They criticized the ruling party but did not propose any alternative to the voters. When the ruling party and its leader enjoy strong and stable approval ratings, the opposition's critical election campaigns are destined to fail. Besides, endless indiscriminate criticism irritates the voters. A logical question arises: Is everything really being done in a wrong way, including things which the people like – development of infrastructure, education reform, patrol police, etc.? The opposition's failure to supply an answer causes alienation of the population. The validity of this assumption is further confirmed by the steadily low approval ratings of the opposition parties over the last three years despite periodic changes of the government's approval ratings (which fluctuate in both direc-

tions). Citizens leave the camp of government supporters when the authorities make mistakes or experience crises, but they do not join the opposition. Each success of the government brings these groups back to the pro-government camp. This process has been repeated several times since 2003. c) The third cause of the opposition's unpopularity is the **strong party in power**. The ruling party has managed to remain united throughout these years. Effectively, none of the leaders, with the exception of Irakli Okruashvili, has left the United National Movement or criticized it. This is why it would be fair to say that the National Movement has survived the three post-revolution years without losing their members.¹ Against the backdrop of their unity, the aforementioned successes seem even more attractive to the voters. The feeling of the government's strength and the opposition's weakness is further enhanced by the fact that the opposition proved unready for joining forces.

It also has to be said that, as the reforms continue, the number of displeased people will probably grow because the reforms cannot produce a sudden dramatic effect and economic and social issues will stand to move to the fore. Precisely this will give the opposition a chance of success. But I doubt that the opposition will be able to seize on this opportunity if its composition and the aforementioned *status quo* remain the same. It is more likely that a new group will be created from among the discontented leaders and activists of the United National Movement. As mentioned, the National Movement has managed to remain united thus far, and it is hard to imagine that their unity will come into question for the next 3-4 years.

It is theoretically possible that new leaders will emerge from the local government and self-governance bodies, school supervisory boards, or as a result of implementation of other local initiatives. However, I cannot imagine that they will manage to unite. It is more likely that they will join their preferred existing political forces, which leads us to where we started: the opposition is weak and it is hard to imagine that it will be of interest as a political springboard to anyone. So, unless some group splits off from the ruling team, the new faces in politics will join the ranks of the same National Movement.

System stability

Of course, the above discussion does not mean that Georgia has passed the point of no return.

The ongoing constitutional reforms demonstrate once again that the Georgian political system is still a long way from stability. The very fact that so many amendments have been introduced to the country's constitution in a short period of time already speaks of incompatibility between the old constitution and the new political system. The fundamental political and legal reforms should be continued to resolve the inconsistency, which eventually might result in the adoption of a qualitatively new constitution. In the absence of any indications in this regard, system stability is out of the question for now.

I would also add that the threat of destabilization is not inherent in the reforms or inevitable. This is more of an issue of bringing the system into line with the reality and improving it. It is also has to be said that the process of establishment of the local governance institutions has just begun and will probably be revised many times in the process of reforms. The judiciary reform is still under way. The introduction of trial by jury may result in radical changes not only in the judiciary system itself, but in Georgian society in general and consequently, in political institutions as well.

Georgia has not passed the point of no return yet. Moreover, the creation of strong institutional support has not been finalized yet for any of the reforms in any of the different sectors. At this stage, almost all the reforms are associated with the particular person in charge, and it is hard to say what will happen if that reformer is replaced by someone else. In order to ensure the stability of system, several "centers of gravity" should be created simultaneously with the institutionalization process, which will be autonomous enough on the one hand and have coinciding development vectors on the other. The greatest progress in this respect has been made in the education system, but, as noted, there too the process has not been finalized yet.

Foreign factors in Georgia's development

Foreign factors have always had influence on domestic processes in Georgia, and this trend is unlikely to change in the near future.

This can be accounted for in several ways: a) Russia's continuing attacks against Georgia should result in disclosure by the political spectrum of its true affiliations. The attitude toward Russia will serve as the dividing line which will cause redistribution of power in Georgia; b) Together with pressure from Russia, Georgia's pro-Western orientation will strengthen. From this standpoint, the West is a guarantee of stability and security for both politicians and society at large. It is important for Georgia to receive appropriate assistance from the West as the balance of power in the country hinges on the presence or absence of Western support; c) Statements by NATO officials on possible expansion of the alliance by 2008 has set the next two years' most important objective for the Georgian authorities. Integration into NATO will be the litmus test in the public's appraisal of the government in two years' time. If successful, integration into NATO might outweigh the existing or future economic and social problems of Georgia. At the same time, integration into NATO will be an indicator of the right direction of the reforms in Georgia, and not only in the military sector. The process of integration into NATO will be an acid test for the government's course.

If our assumptions are correct and the country stays its current course, Georgia will be able to gradually develop liberal democratic pluralism. The next 3-5 years will be important for the successful completion of the reforms that are underway in the country. In final analysis, the priorities of Georgia's policy should be the following:

1. Implementation of the judiciary reform;
2. Development of local self-governance;
3. Completion of the education reform;
4. Creation of a knowledge-based economy;
5. Completion of the military reform;
6. Integration into NATO.

Notes:

¹ With the exception of tragic deaths of Zurab Zhvania and Zhani Kalandia.

Gigi Tevzadze

Sociological view from the top of tree of sociological perspective

On skimming through the 10 questions put to me by Ghia Nodia for this project, I realized that I did not agree with the wording of some of the questions. First I decided to write a text which would deal with the subjects that the questions touched on, but I reconsidered, as in that case, my participation in the discussion might follow either of the two patterns: 1. My text might turn out to be so out of the general discourse that no-one would read it (which was more likely); or 2. My text would win over the participants in the discussion and no-one would answer the questions of the originators of the discourse (this is less likely, but still a possibility). This is why both intellectually and academically, the decision to get involved in this interesting project had to result in my unconditional acceptance of the rules of the process. Therefore, when reading my answers, the reader will discover both an analysis of the expediency of asking the questions in this manner and slight alterations of the formulations of the questions.

And finally, the pattern I follow when supplying answers is a sociological one. In other words, I do not discuss the motives or desires, I discuss only structures. Accordingly, the reader should not expect assessments of political developments or analysis of the international political situation from my answers; rather, they will find a lot of detail about the existing, non-existent and incipient structures of political social life.

1.

The form and intention of the question always indicate the form and intention of the answer. The intended answer to this question should be a list of achievements and failures. But at the same time, this question

implies that someone (or some groups) had some plan or vision (or a number of them) both at the moment of winning independence and at different moments and in different political situations throughout the last 15 years. The problem is that these plans and visions were different from one another and were not always clearly formulated, so if we try to find out which objectives of which plan have been achieved, we will lead ourselves to a quite complex typological labyrinth. If, however, we still make an attempt to develop a general typology of these plans or expectations, we will need to take into account the fact that expectations for Georgia's independence were, and still are, notches on a gauge which has political romanticism on one end and political pragmatism on the other. However, even this seemingly easy layout is not very informative either in terms of the identity of those people who have and design these expectations or the plans and their successfulness or otherwise: If we add political movements and politicians to the gauge, those who are on opposite ends of the gauge will turn out to be allies, whereas those who are on the same end – radical opponents.¹ This is why, when we discuss achievements of independent Georgia, we should opt for a what-did-not-exist-and-what-happened discourse.² Reaching some consensus to launch a discussion is easier with this approach.

Before independence, Georgia did not have:

1. A political system which allowed for the existence of many parties and free elections;
2. Ethnic conflicts and breakaway regions;
3. Free media;
4. Self-governance;
5. Its own fiscal and monetary policy;
6. Free enterprise;
7. Civic institutions independent of the state;
8. Its own armed forces;
9. Its own education system.

Accordingly, Georgian culture changed as these new elements were introduced into its system. Among the abovementioned new develop-

ments, perhaps the ones which were introduced to our cultural and social systems first, as soon as independence was declared – the multi-party system, free elections, ethnic conflicts and the free media – had the greatest effect. In their turn, and it seems that precisely for this reason, the political programs and reference points mainly concentrate – and confront one another – around these four systems (or subsystems) to this day.

2.

The Georgian political system of the last 15 years (at least until 2004) can be described as the struggle of the political governance system against those systems and structures which it itself fostered in the recent past. The so-called structural dilemma first emerged under Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Gamsakhurdia came to power through a free election, but the development of his government generated resistance precisely to the multi-party system and free elections. The same is true about the ethnic conflicts. Despite the negative connotations of the term “ethnic conflict”, it too, together with the multi-party system and free elections, fits into the “first create, then resist” pattern which I just proposed.

Another dilemma which caused the fiasco of the Gamsakhurdia government was the opposite of the Chinese syndrome: Gamsakhurdia’s entourage was trying to preserve and control the Soviet-style economy³ by replacing ideology with patriotic and nationalist romanticism.

3.

Structurally, the difference between the Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze governments was insignificant. The former created and the latter sustained the ethnic conflicts, and society was radically divided into feuding groups. The fundamental difference was the timeframe: Shevardnadze’s presidential tenure lasted more than 10 years, whereas Gamsakhurdia managed to stay in power only for a matter of months. The unconditional achievements of the Shevardnadze government are:

1. Independent fiscal and monetary policy;
2. Free enterprise;
3. Civic institutions independent of the state.

In addition, the Shevardnadze government preserved the structures which were created under Gamsakhurdia (including the ethnic conflicts) in a relatively stable condition, which should also be considered an achievement of his government.

If we compare the Shevardnadze and Gamsakhurdia governments in terms of effectiveness of their achievements, we will see that despite the 10-12 years of real political power, the systemic contribution of the Shevardnadze government to the Georgian social and political realities is the same as the Gamsakhurdia government's: both created three systems/subsystems each (or rather, these systems were created during their presidency), which eventually played an important role both in the civil sector and in everyday life. However, as noted above, the systems that were created under Gamsakhurdia (the democratic political system, free media and ethnic conflicts) are much more influential even today than those that were created under Shevardnadze. It has to be said that these three systems were so important that they had to be created and would have been created under any president in the domestic and foreign political situation of that period. The participation (positive and negative) of Gamsakhurdia personally and his team in the creation of the democratic political system (culture), free media and ethnic conflicts is undeniable.

4.

Compared to its predecessor governments (I would refrain from using the word "regime"), the Saakashvili government created the same number of new systems as did Shevardnadze and Gamsakhurdia. In particular:

1. Self-governance;
2. Armed forces;
3. Education system.

Saakashvili clearly leads in terms of the number of new systems created. He created the same number of new systems in 2003-2006⁴ as his predecessors did combined in 1991-2003. The difference between the creation/sustenance of the systems is that Saakashvili is clearly trying not only to create new systems (at which he is success-

ful), like his predecessors did, but also make amendments⁵ to the systems that were created by the previous governments, for example by putting an end to the ethnic conflicts. What changes this process will bring about and what assessments it will receive is a different matter, but Saakashvili is the first among the three presidents who rejected at least one system that was introduced by his predecessors.⁶

5.

Again, from the point of view of a sociologist and using the theory of introduction of new systems: The opposition is unable to offer to the public anything that would be different from these nine systems. It can only amend the existing systems and the systems proposed by the government. This is why there are even instances of opposition politicians supporting the other party to the ethnic conflict⁷ or hard-to-understand objections against the sound principles that are implemented in some systems. Even resistance to the settlement of the ethnic conflicts can be noticed in the opposition discourse.

6.

I think that the only way out for the opposition is finding and introducing a new system. This should be either radical protection of human rights – although it is doubtful that such behavior will rally the public around the opposition – or strong economic programs which, at the systemic level, will demonstrate to the public the benefits of a knowledge-based economy. However, the government might forestall the opposition regarding the latter.

7.

Considering the present-day opposition parties' actions and priorities, it is doubtful that they will agree on any long-term project aiming at the establishment of new systems. This is why it is more likely that the incumbent ruling party will not have a strong opposition for a long time to come. The emergence of a strong and efficient opposition hinges on two components: 1. The opposition political group should have a clear idea of which system it intends to destroy and 2. It should have sufficient time and political timeframe to achieve its goals,

in other words, they should agree to work long-term to achieve at the end of this work – as a conclusion of the job done – the coming to power. So, even if some existing opposition party has human and financial resources to become the initiator of new systems, the incumbent ruling party will still not have a serious rival capable of winning the majority in the elections for quite some time to come.

8.

It follows from the answer to the preceding question that, if the ruling party manages to maintain the liberal democratic balance and does not make its predecessors' mistake⁸, our political future can be envisioned as the rule of the dominant political party for some period of time (say, for the next two parliamentary elections) and then development of liberal democratic pluralism.⁹ Naturally, it is important to take into account economic development and foreign factors in these assumptions. Each of these factors might prove to either promote or hinder the implementation of this scenario.

9.

To answer this question, we should list the new social and political systems that were created during the last 15 years and assess the role of domestic and foreign factors in their creation and in creating obstacles for political governance:

1. The political system which allows a multi-party system and free elections would not have been created had it not been for the foreign factor, the dissolution of the Soviet Union;
2. Ethnic conflicts were initiated by foreign factors (the free media – by domestic and foreign factors, self-governance – by domestic and foreign factors);
3. Independent fiscal and monetary policy – foreign factors (strong intervention of international financial institutions);
4. Free enterprise – foreign factors;
5. Civic institutions independent of state – foreign factors;
6. Independent armed forces – domestic factors. Of course, the military sector is developing with foreign technical assistance, although our

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New systems	Foreign factor determining creation	Domestic factor determining creation	Resistance from the government which created the system	Remarks
<p>A political system which allows for the existence of many parties and free elections</p> <p>Ethnic conflicts and breakaway regions</p>				<p>There was resistance from both the Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze governments, which ultimately resulted in the forced termination of their powers.</p> <p>There were no serious or significant attempts to settle the conflicts before 2004</p>
<p>Free media</p> <p>Self-governance</p>				<p>Hindering the free media also played an important role in premature termination of the Gamsakhurdia rule.</p> <p>Introduction of local governance started under the Saakashvili government. For now, there are no noticeable government attempts to impede local self-governance</p>
<p>Independent fiscal and monetary policy</p> <p>Free enterprise</p> <p>Civic institutions independent of state</p>				<p>The fiasco of the voucher system resulted in the need to involve international financial institutions and improve the situation</p> <p>The Shevardnadze government established this system on the one hand and fought against it on the other, through the creation of clannish business entities.</p> <p>The existence of civic institutions can be entirely attributed to foreign influences. At the same time, the Shevardnadze government viewed this as an important threat</p>
<p>Armed forces</p> <p>Education system</p>				<p>The development of these systems was based entirely on the government's political will. Neither a strong armed forces nor a successful education system have yet been unconditionally recognized as guarantors of democracy and stability in the international arena. Thus foreign influence on the development of these two systems was minimal.</p>

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political allies have always been ambivalent to the strengthening of this system and responsibility always lies at the government's door;

7. Independent education system – domestic factors.

This list can be presented as table with a column added for actions by the creators of these systems that were aimed at destroying these systems (see Figure 1).

As we can see, despite the growing international awareness of Georgia, the influence of foreign factors on the creation of new systems was much greater under the previous two governments. In other words, foreign factors were decisive in the creation of the democratic political system, ethnic conflicts, free media, independent fiscal and monetary policy, free enterprise, and independent civic institutions; whereas the impulses and activities which paved the way for the creation of the local governance, military development and education reform can be considered to be domestic factors. However, this premise may be moot concerning local governance.

The table allows for one more hypothesis: The government is ousted with employment of strong-arm methods after it starts to struggle against the systems which it established (or which were established with its help). It seems that we are dealing with strong opponents at the systemic level here. In other words, what confronts the government is the people or the side which created the particular system against which the authorities, willingly or otherwise, are waging a struggle. In other words, the pattern is simple: First the government starts to create a system, creates the infrastructure, human resources, human and social capital of the system, and then it starts a struggle against it. If the establishment of the system was successful, the government has no chance in its struggle.

Here is the pattern which demonstrates this situation (Figure 2):

Government system	Systems which they introduced and then tried to abolish	Outcome
Gamsakhurdia	Democratic political system, free media, ethnic conflict and breakaway region	Overthrown
Shevardnadze	Free enterprise, civic organizations, ethnic conflict and breakaway region	Forced resignation
Saakashvili	Armed forces, education system, self-governance	

This is what this hypothesis translates into when applied to Saakashvili: Unless the ruling party initiates activities against the armed forces, the education system and self-governance, its peaceful replacement and relatively long stay in power until then are guaranteed.

10.

The logic of developments shows that in the years to follow, the independent judiciary system (1) and knowledge-based economy (2) should be established in Georgia.

Setting out a comprehensive large-scale program which will be able to unite society around liberal democratic values is possible. Time will tell who will implement this program or its constituent parts. The country's political future will depend on this (who and how).

Notes:

¹ For example, Gamsakhurdia and his ideology were a manifestation of extreme political romanticism, but his team members, who effectively managed to revive the Soviet system, were clearly guided by pragmatic plans. The same discrepancy is encountered when we seek to describe Shevardnadze's and Saakashvili's ideologies: both fall under the description of radical pragmatism. At the same time, Saakashvili's pragmatism of 2004-2005 is in synch with Koba Davitashvili's and Zviad Dzidziguri's (allies of Saakashvili during the Rose Revolution and the following one-year period, now members of different opposition parties) political romanticism of the same period.

² The vague discourse of achievements is theoretically unstable: in that case, the author should choose some system (say, liberal democratic) and start measuring which of the benchmarks have been achieved and which have not. However, a heated (and perhaps endless) discussion is likely – first on the system that has or should have been chosen and then on those benchmarks.

³ Gamsakhurdia's refusal to privatize land is an illustrative example of this, although that time around, the explanation why it should not be sold was not the Soviet argument of people's common property, but the nationalist argument that it should not go to foreigners.

⁴ In the three years from December 2003 to December 2006. [He took office in January 2004]

⁵ Which in itself is an innovation already at the cultural level for Georgia. As the most recent studies show, the traditional social structures are still strong, and accordingly, the creations of predecessors are still culturally untouchable. Saakashvili's ac-

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tions at the level of political activity set the precedent – and create a prospect – of breaking with the untouchability.

⁶ Although after the relatively unsuccessful military campaign in South Ossetia in 2004, Saakashvili had a choice to keep sustaining all systems including the ethnic conflicts, different domestic and foreign factors and the need to reach a decision which would be appropriate in the given international political situation (especially regarding the EU and NATO) made it impossible to continue the routine policy of preservation of ethnic conflicts.

⁷ For example, the opposition's cautious attitude toward the restoration of law and order in Abkhazia's Kodori Gorge or resistance to (or silence about) the emergence of the alternative, pro-Georgian authorities in South Ossetia (breakaway region).

⁸ The mistake was mainly combating the system which it created itself.

⁹ From today's point of view, however, this scenario might manifest itself in the appearance of only one or two extra strong parties in the political arena.

Introduction

The political processes of the last 15 years in Georgia can be described and analyzed in a variety of different ways. One of the possibilities is to set theories aside and view the developments by describing all possible variables that might constitute the causes of individual events. Using a different approach, it is possible to apply a different theory to each separate event. The methodology I use in this text is different from either of the above in that it employs a selection of independent variables using one particular theory, the network (relational) theory, according to which a network of social relationships confines the actors' actions to the limits of a certain framework and consequently, determines political outcomes. The discussion below, therefore, is based on the assumption that both the network structure and the actor's position in the network are factors that influence the actors' actions and political results of these actions.

The independent variables were selected according to the context of the issues which were asked in the questions. In addition, they are sometimes linked with the criteria for assessment of the political processes and events to be discussed. Naturally, many variables influenced the processes at hand, but typically, I highlight one or two variables which I believe have the highest explanatory value. This does not imply underestimating the importance of other variables, but the influence of the described factors is considered the greatest from the standpoint of the network theory. Empirical research and data are required to confirm this, which is why the discussion below should be viewed as a set of hypotheses which are to be confirmed or refuted by future studies.

Both the network structure and actors' characteristics have their respective quantifiable dimensions. Obviously, not all measurements that are available in network analysis are applicable to the political

questions to be discussed, and even if they were, the input of empirical data would be required. This is why I will limit the use of network theory to the three concepts that are useful in description of the structural characteristics of the network and positions of the actors: 1) The so-called *small world* concept is of interest in describing the network structure, as it implies that connecting any two arbitrary individuals is not only possible, but also takes a finite number of links in the social chain of acquaintance; 2) the notion of *structural holes* can be used to compare the positions of actors in the network and is synonymous with the number of non-redundant ties of the actor; 3) the concept of *social capital* relates both to the network structure and actor's position – it is defined as the amount of resources which are available to the network and which the actors can use in their actions.

Benefits of weak connections

Building independent state institutions should be considered the most important of the processes which have been under way in Georgia in the last 15 years. It is known that this process is particularly difficult and often gets dragged out in societies where the traditions of statehood did not exist or were interrupted for a long period of time. The most important dependent variable in the assessment of a country's successes and failures is, therefore, the development of state institutions, which includes two components: the establishment of the institutions and institutional performance. In the process of state building both the old and the newly emerging elite groups are vying for power. The development of the institutions concurs with this struggle, which makes predicting the outlines of the final shape of the institutional system almost impossible.¹ When institutions are established, the problem of putting them into operation at full capacity arises, which requires resolving the dilemmas of collective action of multiple rational actors. Because institutions are nothing but a mental network which is created between the societal actors as a token of acceptance of some set or rules, studying the types of connections between social groups becomes important for evaluating institutional performance. As a variable which is the main determinant of the

establishment of effective institutions, we should select a variable which will also make it possible to measure interactions between different social groups. Social capital meets this requirement and I deem it the most important determinant of institutional effectiveness. In particular, a positive correlation is likely to exist between the amount of social capital and institutional performance.² The concept of social capital can be used to describe both the social network and the position of the actor in it. At the actor's level, social capital is the amount of available resources which the actor can use for action.³ At the collective level, social capital has the characteristics of a public good, in other words, it is non-exclusive and non-competitive. Its availability to one member of the network does not reduce the amount of it available to others, even if they do not plan to pay its price. From this point of view, the source of social capital is generalized trust which is shaped by repeated contacts and which increases the probability of resolving dilemmas associated with collective actions.⁴

The availability of the network resources depends on individual actor's structural position. To compare actors' positions, the concept of *structural holes* can be used, which denotes the number of the actors' non-redundant connections. Numerous non-redundant connections are thought to give the actor competitive advantage.⁵ The concept of structural holes also refers to the strength-weakness dimension of relationships. The strength of relationships is determined according to the context: in general, casual ties between actors which do not imply obligations are considered weak while frequent connections which imply commitments indicate the presence of strong ties. Weak ties are a good means of exchange of information and innovations, because precisely weak ties form the channels of exchange of resources between relatively closed subgroups.⁶ So, at the individual level, a large number of non-redundant and weak ties should be considered a source of social capital.

At the dawn of independence, Georgia inherited a society divided into relatively closed groups. The political elite and other social groups were mostly closed self-sufficient units. Ties within the groups were strong and in large part based on commitments (kinship and other types of strong ties). The network of the political elite was organized

hierarchically, and persons at the top tier shared resources with lower tiers in exchange for their loyalty. The alienation between the public and formal institutions facilitated the strengthening of informal networks. But because all public activities were under the totalitarian state's control, using informal ties to create a large-scale network not connected to the state would have been impossible. As a result, society split up into strong ties-based small informal groups. Limited ties between the groups (lack of weak ties) hindered the exchange of information and innovations within the network and the mobilization of resources. The development of generalized trust in a society of this type is impeded because of a lack of generation of social capital. Naturally, some of the actors within the groups had access to more structural holes than other actors, but the influence of such actors hardly spread beyond the groups.

The main benefit of independence was the increasing frequency of weak ties, which facilitated the exchange of information and resources between groups. Although the abolition of control from the totalitarian state caused chaos for a certain period of time, the networks soon rearranged themselves into a new pattern. The opening of the borders and development of the civic sector and private business resulted in the proliferation of horizontal ties both within the country and internationally, which paved the way for increasing the amount of social capital. Precisely the amount of social capital is, in my opinion, the main variable which explains the successes and failures in the field of building state institutions. At the same time, growing social capital makes society more flexible in terms of adaptability to the rapidly changing environment.

As for the results which remain to be achieved, in my opinion, one of these is maintaining the structure of the political elite unchanged. During the last 15 years, the ruling elite was held together by strong, commitment-based ties. A government bureaucracy that would be guided in its actions only by the law and established rules of the game, instead of social networks, has not come into being. However, the incumbent political elite is made up of a relatively large number of actors compared to the previous period. At present, the political elite is connected with different social group by the propor-

tionately larger number of structural holes than exist between these groups themselves. And this, for its part, makes it possible for the actors in the elite to control the exchange of different resources.

In my opinion, precisely these two network characteristics have the greatest effect on the political processes in Georgia. The relatively large amount of social capital in society makes it possible to resolve the dilemmas of collective actions and lays the foundation for the establishment of effective institutions. But an excess of structural holes within the ruling elite creates a gravitational pull of sorts on social capital. As a result, the authorities can mobilize resources to change the vector of collective actions in the direction desired, whereas for those who are not in power this is difficult. This may be part of the explanation why people in power do not feel the need to take into account the interests of social groups when building institutions.

Cheapness of symbolic capital

Gamsakhurdia's political program can be formulated as attaining independence through uniting society and employing disobedience. Gamsakhurdia thought the rhetoric of national symbols was the best way to consolidate society. The source of his power should also be sought in symbols; people to whom these symbols were important considered him the leader of the nation. An interesting test was conducted under the first elected government after the Socialist era: how would the Georgian voters react to a politician with great symbolic capital. The result of this test was both the greatest achievement and most formidable challenge of the Gamsakhurdia regime – on the one hand, he managed to briefly unite a large part of the population into a mental network, but on the other hand, he failed to transform the mobilized symbolic resources into material ones.

Thus, the most important dependent variable characteristic of the Gamsakhurdia period was the consolidation of society. Among the independent variables, the strength and extent of overlap between the ties that were established among the social groups was important. Presumably, the extent of overlap among the groups and the growth in the number of weak ties among the groups have had a beneficial effect on the consolidation of society. Another important independent

variable is the indicator of political consistency, which can be assumed to have a positive effect on the consolidation measurement.

The unity of small groups at the ballot boxes and disappearance of the Communist government without resistance deluded Gamsakhurdia into thinking that uniting society was possible, whereas when this illusion was debunked, he was pushed toward intolerance and extreme nationalism. His government inherited not only a bleak institutional legacy, but also the organizational structure of the political elite. The ruling elite remained a hierarchical network united by strong ties underpinned by commitments. If under the Communist regime, exchanging loyalty in return for material benefits was the most important part of commitment-based ties, during Gamsakhurdia's presidency, both the reward and the sanction became symbolic. Loyalists were awarded the title of a true patriot, whereas opponents were tagged KGB agents.

The Gamsakhurdia regime as a network can be visualized as a pyramid with a person who possessed large symbolic capital at its top and the absence of both human and social capital in its mid- and lower sections. The main weakness of the government should be sought precisely in its structural composition; the failure to use weak ties with other social groups and the actors' unwillingness to utilize the structure holes put him in an informational vacuum, which eventually evolved into physical isolation as well. Naturally, the Gamsakhurdia government included representatives of many social groups. But in most cases, the actors who found their way to the government were the fringe members of their respective groups. As a result, the entry of a representative of a group to Gamsakhurdia's inner circle meant for the government losing, rather than gaining, the resources of that group.

The Gamsakhurdia government thought that secession from the Soviet Union was a sufficient condition for independence. The economic results of political independence and the necessity of building state institutions were not considered at all. This was clearly manifested in the inconsistency of public policy. For example, confronting the Soviet regime and taking quite a mild position regarding the August 1991 putsch were completely incompatible. The same applies to establishing the local governments and later limiting of the degree of local autonomy by introducing the institution of prefects. The accommodating policy

toward Abkhazia, when ethnic quotas were introduced during the elections to the Abkhaz legislature was also inconsistent against the backdrop of intense nationalist rhetoric. In my opinion, however, this was one of the rare exceptions when politics was based not on symbols, but on taking the reality into account and making a compromise. That agreement not only allayed the ethnic conflict, but also introduced the institutional innovation of shared political power in Georgia.⁷

It is hard to say whether the thesis of the “strength of weak ties” was realized, but the success of the 1991-1992 coup can be assumed to be caused by horizontal ties between groups. Among the ranks of the rebels and their supporters were representatives of completely different groups, of which some belonged to the old communist elite, others – to the intelligentsia, and still others to the criminal world. In addition, the actors who found themselves in the camp of Gamsakhurdia’s opponents were leaders of their own groups. The establishment of horizontal relations among them, which was intended for mutual support, not mutual commitments, also meant the establishment of ties between their groups. If we view the December-January coup as a rivalry between two differently organized networks, it will become clear that the hierarchical single-center network was uncompetitive. As soon as the main node of the centralized network was isolated, the strong ties between the actors who surrounded it were severed. What was left as a result were several isolated micro-networks of the first president’s supporters, of which some eventually merged with other political movements, others fell apart, and still others exist to this day.

Unbalanced balance

There are two ways assessing the Shevardnadze government. If we compare it to the preceding regime, we will see many conspicuous successes, like the improvement of law enforcement in the country, curbing of the economic downturn, launch of reforms and the country’s achievement of the status of fully-fledged member of the international community. But if we assess the government in terms of its coming up to public expectations and missed chances, failures will outweigh successes.

At least two periods should be distinguished evaluating the Shevardnadze government, because his regime dealt with different tasks at the different stages of its existence. In 1992-1995, the main goal of Shevardnadze was concentrating power in his hands. This is why the main dependent variable for that period is centralization of power, whereas the main independent variables are types of ties within the societal elites. Shevardnadze had to start his work in a society which not only consisted of small groups that were united by strong ties, but in which these groups confronted one another. Shevardnadze took the role of a “broker” between the confronting groups and played it too well. Relations among social groups were mediated by Shevardnadze, which won him exclusive access to structure holes.⁸ Isolating the nodes of multi-centered power (Kitovani, Ioseliani, Sigua) further raised the level of access. The political network again turned out to be bonded by commitment-based relations, but the commodity that was exchanged between the actors changed. Members of the ruling elite, many of whom were at the initial step of the career ladder, could use Shevardnadze’s reputation in their political activities, and in return they were to prove their loyalty by securing votes in the elections. The most glaring example of the venal exchange of resources was rigging several elections in the Shevardnadze period. Incidentally, the practice of election rigging was in my opinion caused more by the structural characteristics of the network than by arbitrary use of administrative resources by the bureaucracy.

Assessment of the successes and failures of the second stage of Shevardnadze’s presidency (1996-2003) is interesting in light of relations between business and the state. Still in transition, the state faced two main challenges – freeing business from state pressure and preventing the state from coming under the influence of private interests.⁹ So, the degree of freedom of the economy and so-called “state capture” indicator will be useful as dependent variables in appraising the Shevardnadze government.¹⁰ As for independent variables, they should be sought in the structure of ties between state and private actors.

On the one hand, the Shevardnadze government merged with big business interests, but on the other hand, small business came under

state pressure. This situation gave rise to a vicious circle: to get rid of the predatory state, businesses were ready to pay bribes and buy tax relief, which translated into smaller budget revenues and unfulfilled social obligations. This forced the state to again resort to predatory policies. The main prerequisite for launching and running a big business was membership in the political elite or government bureaucracy. Big businesses were “buying” favorable working conditions from officials, whereas the government turned a blind eye to tax evasion in return for loyalty. The business sector which was built on these principles was no different from the centralized government network, in which the actor at the top of the pyramid controlled the distribution of resources.

The structure of the ruling team also had a negative effect on relations between state and private interests. Perhaps there never was unity in the Shevardnadze team. The president himself had the goal of staying in power as long as possible, and the young members of his team wanted to establish themselves and become his successors by using Shevardnadze’s name. But eventually it became clear that nobody intended to hand down power to them. The president was implementing the policy of balancing different political and business groups and probably was making preparations for remaining if not the president, then at least the country’s informal leader, for the rest of his life.

Representatives of the younger generation of the ruling team realized that competing with Shevardnadze for structural holes within the ruling elite would prove unequal and destined for failure, so they started to establish new ties where they would be out of Shevardnadze’s control given his background – in the international and local nongovernmental sector and the media. Using these structural holes to accumulate larger social capital than Shevardnadze proved to be a very rational move because it was in both actors’ interests. The media and nongovernmental sector enabled the young politicians to be closer to their voters. The NGOs and the media, for their part, were interested in having supporters in the government to protect them from the predatory state. The alliance which was bonded by mutual interests proved quite strong and paved the way for a non-violent change of government.

Revolution of “social capitalists”

In the November 2003 elections there was not so much a clash of two political programs as of two political networks with different structures. As already mentioned, the political elite which congregated around Shevardnadze were bonded by commitment-based strong ties organized into a hierarchy. These types of systems are vulnerable because, owing to the high degree of centralization, there exists an incentive to get rid of commitments by dismantling the top of the pyramid, which destabilizes the system. The political network of Shevardnadze's opponents was multi-centered and boasted strong horizontal ties, which made it stable. The diversity of the network actors (international actors, civil society organizations, media groups, business community) resulted in a diversity of resources and ideas. The egalitarianism of the network facilitated the process of mobilization of resources to achieve the common goal.

Yet another factor which contributed to the eventual success of the political forces which organized the revolution was their leaders' social capital, which helped build trust between politicians and civil society organizations and introduced the norms of mutual support. The civil society organizations became the driving force of micromobilization during the November 2003 events. The effective media campaigns added to the existing flaws of the Shevardnadze government, making protests against the incumbent regime socially acceptable (although there had never been any shortage of protests in Georgia).

The political regime which was established after the Rose Revolution evinces positive and negative traits of both preceding regimes. The aspiration toward social consolidation, legislative single-handedness and nationalist rhetoric make the incumbent government similar to the Gamsakhurdia regime, whereas attempts to win popular support by implementing an inconsistent policy – to the Shevardnadze government. But the main difference from the preceding regimes is that the incumbent government firmly stays a rightist course most of the time. Effectively, the government is only now implementing the 10 principles of so-called “Washington consensus” which international financial institutions have been directly or indirectly preaching to us for a decade.¹¹

Privatization, investments in strategic sectors, the balancing of the budget and an export-oriented economy are the basic principles which neoliberal economists used to view as the foundation of economic development of the Latin American countries. But the neoliberals have been criticized many times for their attitudes toward the institutions supporting the market economy.¹²

The new government chose an effective, if somewhat unjust, way of addressing one of the two aforementioned challenges facing the state in the transitional period. It forced the businesses which were integrated with state into paying off budget debts and made businessmen buy their freedom, often by conceding their wealth. But the avoidance to regulate the economy and citing the high degree of corruption of the regulatory institutions – for instance, the abolition of the anti-monopoly institution – increases the likelihood that the state will come under the private interests' influence in the long run. At the same time, the issue of freeing business from state controls remains pressing, and there is no shortage of symptoms which attest to that. For example, the arbitrariness of the financial police, unjustified destruction of private investors' property and, most dangerously, attempts to revise property rights.

Overall, from the standpoint of quick planning and implementation of reforms, the Saakashvili government is very successful. The reforms aiming to liberalize the economy, education reform, and improvements regarding corruption in the law-enforcement bodies are good examples. The Achara and Kodori Gorge crises proved to be successful tests for assessing the effectiveness of state institutions. But the government has thus far failed to build an independent judiciary, without which the development of the private sector will be very problematic. Another flaw is related to the style of policy formulation – the direction of the reforms is decided by a small political circle and does not become a subject for discussion for interested social groups. The fact that some civil society groups have merged with the authorities is considered a sufficient degree of public consideration.

Punctuated equilibrium

During the last 15 years, the institutional development of the Georgian state has been following the logic of punctuated equilibrium. Pe-

riods of stability in the functioning of state institutions are followed by sudden unrest and non-electoral change of government, which usually results in a new institutional system.¹³ At first sight, the prospects of the existing institutional system seem brighter. Its stability stems from several different factors: popular support enables Saakashvili to sort out minor discords within the ruling party painlessly, mainly by removing the “troublemakers” from positions of power. The government’s objective successes (which seem especially dramatic against the backdrop of the preceding government) and the opposition’s inability to devise an advantageous campaign strategy further enhance public support for the government. Yet another reason for the stability of the existing system is the voters’ political culture, which is still underdeveloped and quite susceptible to believing in conspiracy theories. As a result, the rhetoric of restoration of territorial integrity and proper retaliation against the northern neighbor’s intrigues still remains advantageous.

One of the fundamental reasons for the weakness of the modern-day opposition parties is the lack of social capital, which derives from the limited number of ties between the groups. This, in turn, can be accounted for by the finite number of structural gaps in a small society, which are mostly occupied by representatives of the government. A good way of generating social capital for the opposition would be repeated and multilateral social relations. But these types of relations have already formed the incumbent ruling elite, whereas building new ties takes organizing new groups, which is a long and expensive process.

At present, focusing on the results of the government’s policy seems the most expedient for the opposition; in other words, the opposition should offer analysis of the effectiveness of individual programs, expose their flaws and propose better ways of their implementation. When the government tells the people how much money was spent to implement a given program, the opposition should assess the effectiveness of the spending and wage an appropriate campaign. It is noteworthy that pursuing this strategy requires two prerequisites. The first is the existence of both independent and political party-affiliated think tanks, which will assist political groups in policy analysis. The second is the voters’ political culture, which should be accommodating toward relatively academic political debates. The ab-

sence of these prerequisites is yet another reason for the opposition's limited competitiveness.

It would have been possible to think that Georgia has embarked on the road toward the establishment of the dominant party system, had it not been for several factors which make me presume that the opposition will none the less grow stronger. Georgia's foreign political orientation causes the least controversy in the country. The time will come soon when relations with Russia will also become a less pressing issue for the political debates. This is why the opposition will essentially have to look for its new messages in the domestic political arena. One of the most significant successes of the incumbent government is decreasing the level of corruption, so it would be difficult for the opposition to achieve success with this slogan. The government manages to neither encroach on ethnic identity nor allow violations of human rights to become large-scale. Focusing on the protection of social rights seems relatively advantageous for the opposition, especially as the mass privatization, public service job cuts, relative growth of foreign investments and reduction of the role of state stand to result in growing social displeasure. This will boost the demand for leftist-type parties on the political market, and if there is demand from the voters, a supplier will always be found. But it also has to be taken into account here that the Georgian political culture does not stand out for its egalitarianism, and the success of socially-oriented messages can only be presumed if income inequality reaches extreme levels.

Let us presume that there is demand for a leftist party. Where will the new political force emerge from? Presumably, by the end of the president's second term in office, an opposition force will split from the incumbent ruling elite. This presumption is based on two observations. The first is the institutional heritage of rifts within the ruling parties, enhanced by the president's personality profile. The tradition of getting rid of more or less independent players within his team is bound to result in rifts within the party. In time, this policy might drive the social capital which the party has been accumulating for years outside the party. The second factor is the structure of the ruling network, which is built according to the *small world* model. *Small world* implies that contacts between any two individuals in the

political arena is not only possible, but also takes a finite number of intermediaries. One of the explanations of this is that a limited number of actors establish numerous ties, whereas the majority of actors maintain only a few relations. This is why establishing contacts with the node with many ties raises the probability of establishing relations with the actor choice. The significance of this for the political process is that, as network theorists say, the “rich get richer and the poor get poorer”, in other words, the node with a substantial number of connections establishes even more relations and makes itself even more different from others.¹⁴

If we visualize the ruling party as a network similar to the *small world*, we will find that several actors in the network have equal access to structural holes both in the country and in the international arena. Naturally, the president is an exception because his structural position is incommensurately advantageous compared to the others, but because we presume that the end of his second term in office is formally also the end of his tenure in power, I look at the ruling party network separately from the main actor, the president. Following the logic of a multi-centered network, the actors with a wealth of structural holes will in time establish even more connections. It should be expected that by the end of Saakashvili's presidency there will be several equally competitive nodes in the political elite. The deepening of relations with NATO and the EU will probably prevent external actors from becoming supporters of a new revolution, which makes it possible to presume that the political forces which will split off from the incumbent ruling team will test one another's strengths in elections.

Foreign factors

Foreign factors always play a special role in the development of a small country, especially if the country maintains relations with many countries. In Georgia's case, the foreign factors fall under two main categories. The first includes factors whose influence on political and economic developments is noticeable. Among these factors is the assistance of the developed Western democracies in the development of both state institutions and nongovernmental and business sectors. From this standpoint, cooperation with NATO and the EU has special

importance, as it is a strong incentive for the government to carry out reforms. For example, the implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan will be greatly beneficial for Georgia even if the country remains the EU neighbor forever because its goals include strengthening state institutions and improving accountability mechanisms. The economic crises and embargoes in neighboring countries belong to the same category as its results have tangible effects on people's lives. But this might prove useful for the country's economy in the long run. Finding and entering new markets will stimulate the economy in two different ways. The economy will be diversified and the quality of products will improve. Economic development would take much longer (if it would take place at all) if the country relied solely on the northern market.

The factors of the second category are imaginary and affect the political processes only because the political actors think that they have some effect. From this point of view, the Georgian saying that even a tree will die if you keep telling it to dry out holds as true in politics as in the economy: If you expect the worst, the probability arises that things will go wrong. The imaginary factors should not be interpreted only from the negative aspect. Claims that Georgia is considered a haven of reforms and a model of democracy in the West belong to the same imaginary category. However, imaginary as this factor might be, it stirs up positive expectations among the political and economic actors, which increases the likelihood of expectations becoming reality.

If we review the dynamic of influence of the international factors in the 15 years of independence, we will see that Georgia has evolved from a recipient of assistance to a partner. It is quite likely that cooperation will strengthen in the near future. The implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy will result in greater similarity of the Georgian state institutions with the institutions in the developed democracies. The deepening of cooperation with NATO will create security guarantees for the country. The establishment of a predictable political and investment environment should translate into more foreign investment into the country. It is likely, therefore, that in the long run, the privatized property will find its way into

the hands of strategic owners, which is one of the preconditions for economic development. But to achieve this, the further liberalization of the investment environment, the introduction of the principle of immunity of private property, and the establishment of the independent judiciary is required.

Priorities of the ideal government

The main priority of the incumbent government is achieving economic growth. Yet quite a few omitted variables can be found in the equation of economic growth which the government leaders seem to keep in their heads. There is no gainsaying the fact that privatization, tax reform, the tackling of corruption in the law enforcement agencies and the development of the education system are important factors of economic growth in the long run. But ruling circles also seem to believe that one of the main factors on which the success of the reforms and economic development are predicated is the stability of the executive branch of power.

However, the experience of the Central and Eastern European countries attests to the opposite. Sustainable economic growth was achieved precisely in the countries with stiff competition in the political arena.¹⁵ It follows that the introduction of the institutions which will ensure strong political and economic competition has to be the main priority if long-term growth is to be achieved. The institutions in charge of establishing a competitive economic environment should also stifle the state's desire to interfere with the economy in its attempts to achieve political goals. At the same time, a good institutional environment needs to ensure competition not only in the economic sector, but also in politics.

One of the most important factors in the establishment of a competitive political environment is ensuring vertical and horizontal distribution of power. At the horizontal level, judiciary reform is to be carried out, which is important for bringing about both political and economic freedoms. To promote a competitive political environment, the degree of representation of the representative bodies has to increase through lowering the electoral threshold and introducing a bicameral parliament.

At the vertical level, fiscal decentralization is important, as this will make financially solvent local governments possible. Local governments with financial powers will make for relatively more equal economic development because a favorable fiscal policy will enable even the constituencies in grave starting conditions to attract investments. A strong local self-governance system will broaden the opportunities of political participation too.

In the long run, fair competition will facilitate the regularity of relations among the actors and the creation of overlapping networks, which will create the preconditions for building up social capital and developing effective state institutions.

Notes:

¹ Anna Gryzmala-Busse, "Pauline Jones Luong, Reconceptualizing the State: Lessons from Post-Communism", *Politics & Society* 30 (December 2002): 529-554.

² See more on interdependence between social capital and institutional performance in Italy's example in Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

³ Nan Lin, *Social Capital. A Theory of Social Structure and Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁵ For example, if in a four-actor network, actor A is connected to actors B, C and D, whereas the latter three actors are not directly connected, then actor A has the possibility to control the information and resources which exist in the network (the number of his structural holes is three). See more on the significance of structural holes in Ronald S. Burt, *Structural Holes. The Social Structure of Competition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁶ Mark Granovetter, The Strength of Weak Ties, *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1973): 1360-1380.

⁷ For the models of institutional systems in divided societies see Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

⁸ For types of brokerage in social networks see David Knoke, *Political Networks. The Structural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 145. Shevardnadze's role is most similar to the "connecting broker" type, which connects the isolated social groups and controls the movement of resources among them.

10 questions on Georgia's political development

⁹ Laszlo Bruszt, "Market Making as State Making: Constitutions and Economic Development in Post-Communist Eastern Europe", *Constitutional Political Economy* 13 (March 2002): 53-72.

¹⁰ For causes and economic results of "state captures" see Joel S. Hellman, Geraint Jones, Daniel Kaufmann. "Seize the State, Seize the Day: An Empirical Analysis of the State Capture and Corruption in Transition", Paper Prepared for the ABCDE 2000 Conference, Washington, DC, April 18-20, 2000.

¹¹ For the review of the principles and history of the "Washington consensus" see John Williamson, "The Strange History of the Washington Consensus", *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 27, 2 (winter 2004-2005): 195-206.

¹² For criticism of the neoliberals' attitude toward the phase of transition to the market economy see Grzegorz W. Kolodko, "Ten Years of Post-socialist Transition: The Lessons for Policy Reforms". *The World Bank Development Economics Research Group* (April 1999): 2-27.

¹³ For employment of the notion of punctuated equilibrium to explain institutional changes see Stephen D. Krasner, "Approaches to the States: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics", *Comparative Politics* 16 (January 1984): 223-246, 240.

¹⁴ Duncan J. Watts, *Six Degrees. The Science of A Connected Age* (New York, NY: W.W Norton & Company, 2004): 107-108.

¹⁵ The World Bank, *Transition: The First Ten Years. Analysis and Lessons for Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, DC, 2002): 98-102. Political participation manifests itself in the political actors' right of veto and frequency of changes of the executive branch.

In this article I have tried to collate Georgia's political evolution in the recent period with historical developments and to show that nostalgia for "tsesrigi" (law and order) on the one hand and dross of the nonpolitical and feudal which became ingrained in Georgian culture on the other proved to be the controversial legacy on which the new political system, which bore the marks of personal qualities of some of the leaders, was built.

Despite the difference in conditions of the agrarian and postindustrial eras, Georgia, like an embryo which goes through the eons of phylogeny of its species in a very short time, has in the last 15 years reiterated in reverse order the modes of statehood of the preceding millennium and negated the violence and anarchy which took root through the negation of state power in the 13th century by restoring its statehood in the 21st.

In the 13th century, Georgia's political evolution was terminated in the final phase, and the ship of statehood capsized. In the 21st century, the surviving seafarers of the lifeboat that was cobbled up from the flotsam of that ship get the opportunity to arrive at the harbor for further improvements.

Nostalgia for "tsesrigi" (law and order)¹

Remote though this comparison might seem, the historical analogy of the situation which has taken shape today in building the Georgian state can be found at the time of King David IV the Builder's unfinished project...

In the political history of our country, two ruling systems have been intertwined from the very outset: *state and demesne*. David the Builder's kingdom first set a bridle on the demesne system and then subdued the

church and city-states with a republican form of government, *winning the exclusive right to exercise political power* and effectively met the minimal Weberian requirement for the existence of state. The last missing brick in building the Georgian state was nipping the chance of the revival of the demesne system in the bud. This could be accomplished in the form of constitutional or, indeed, absolute monarchy, but the Georgian state of the period proved unable to achieve such a morphological perfection. Furthermore, the state ceded its positions some time before accession to the throne of Queen Tamar.

Under Tamar's rule, several systems of authority vied for primacy. A talented politician and flexible diplomat, she managed to sustain mostly peaceful and, in terms of state security, successful coexistence of the incompatible systems of political power (monarchist, demesne, republican and theocratic systems) throughout the 29 years of her reign, but after her death, demesne lords exacted historical revenge and dramatically limited the state's rights to regulate social relations. The country split apart into demesnes or feudal provinces.

Separatist feudal lords in essence maintained only a *confederate union* with the kingdom at best.

Throughout the entire late Middle Ages, the state, reduced to the territory immediately surrounding the royal palace, fought with the demesne system to regain its old positions.

The instruments of exercising state power are law and justice. The state maintains law and order by using these tools. The demesne system was exactly the opposite. Although the feudal lords, together with the military and economic powers, combined the judiciary authority as well and set legal norms, they used to summarily violate their own laws and ruled at will over what had by then become their private estate and no longer was a territory which had been assigned to them for governing. The lords' officinary also acted arbitrarily, and accordingly, violence established itself as a predominant norm or relations.

From the point of view of social evolution, the country was at an impasse which only the kingdom was trying to break, but besides internal enemies, neighboring empires also hindered the fulfillment of its plan to fully restore statehood. Ultimately, through the influence of

all these internal and foreign factors, violence and complete *anarchy* crystallized as a permanence which was handed down from one generation to the next. The fact that the kidnapping and selling of humans became the only profitable and successful business on the entire territory of what once was called Georgia was the result of precisely this situation.

Presumably, no social group or estate could have been pleased with the situation that had taken shape, although despite numerous selfless attempts, breaking the pattern kept proving unmanageable. So, *as a result of centuries-long bitter experience, the demand for "law and order" became the most fundamental social demand of Georgian society: for Georgian society most coveted goal was law and order, i.e. the state.*

In the conditions of an agrarian civilization, before it enters the urban phase, the state may develop in two diametrically opposite directions: it either becomes an *absolute monarchy* or yields to *absolute anarchy*. In Georgia's case, the latter option was realized and, because opposites attract, absolute anarchy was then replaced by absolute monarchy (tsarism) again.

The establishment of the Russian empire in the formerly Georgian territory put an end to chaos and internal disorder, but society remained disappointed. Organized violence replaced unorganized subsistence. This time around, violence emanated from the state and its officials. The fundamental purpose of state is the creation for its citizens/subjects of an environment conducive to the realization of their personal and social potential, which under the Russian absolute monarchy was just as nonexistent as during the Georgian absolute anarchy. So, the tsarist annexation of the Georgian states turned out to be swapping the devil for the deep blue sea for the Georgians. While the Georgian reality gave the option of slowly dying in the chaos of an agrarian state, on the opposite pole absolutism was committing suicide, which, incidentally, manifested itself, *inter alia*, in the growing single-mindedness of Russian society in its struggle against tsarism. The prospect of normalcy gleamed briefly with the February 1917 revolution, and, against that background, an independent country called the Democratic Republic of Georgia sparkled all too transiently

on the political horizon, but soon industrial absolutism (totalitarianism) substituted agrarian absolutism.

For all this time, both tsarism and totalitarianism oppressed Georgian society both socially and ethnically, which first (in the early 20th century) imparted a socialist hue to the aspirations for liberation, and then (late 20th century) molded these aspirations into the form of a national movement.

But still, what type of state was to be built following the restoration of national sovereignty?

Because the dismantling of totalitarianism became irreversible already in the Soviet era, the new Georgian state would not be able to become totalitarian even in the worst case. In addition, the results of the referendum on independence called for the restoration of statehood of the *democratic* republic, so it turned out that the Georgian people wanted to reform the system in a democratic way, but the Menshevik republic was a failed state (although Russia and several other states did recognize it *de jure*) which succumbed to the dictate of Russian Social Democrats and the only democratic component of it was its façade. Neither would the Shevardnadze-era Georgia avert the façade democracy later on, and would be christened a “Potemkin democracy”,² but before that, in the fuss of restructuring the political system (perestroika), the leaders of the liberation movement, including Gamsakhurdia, will try to restore national independence in abstraction from the typological strength and weaknesses of the future political system. Because democracy was yet to be built and independence was yet to be won, the standard-bearers of the liberation movement made the job easier and armed themselves with a tempting guiding idea: “First independence, then democracy!”³

Gamsakhurdia – tragic herald of the agent era

The Gamsakhurdia period of the liberation movement, as well as the initial period of Shevardnadze’s rule until August 1995, might well be called the “agent era”.

The Russian propaganda machine has always used conspiracy theories to put public consciousness into the required frame of reference. People who lay claims to belonging to the elite, or even simply indi-

viduals who are more or less familiar with politics, fear interpreting political processes from the standpoint of conspiracy theories to avoid the harmful influence of deliberately adulterated thinking patterns, but it has to be said to be fair that during the dissolution of the Soviet empire, security services and their agents certainly did not twiddle their thumbs, so their relentless efforts largely determined how the events unfolded.

Gamsakhurdia used to publicly accuse his political opponents of being KGB agents, but did not care much about proving his accusations. His opponents deemed this a manifestation of demagogic projection whereby he externalized his own guilt. In general, Soviet society indeed so abounded with spies of different calibers that the upper tier of the organizational pyramid of the emerging liberation movement's efforts to prevent the ill-wishers from penetrating into their ranks were in vain. Presumably, the most natural indicator for identifying agents should have been assessments of the behavior of the individuals in question by the criterion of who would benefit from their particular actions (information leaks and thefts were of no concern because everything that happened was public anyway). But unexpectedly, a more reliable, if grotesque, indicator was found – whether or not a person had a record of imprisonment! Criminal mentality, which is so wide-spread in Georgian society, was reinterpreted in a specific way in the circles of the new political elite: *Trusting anyone who did not have the sublime aureole of former political prisoner is risky, and such persons should not aspire to leadership.* Although there were exceptions, they only proved this rule.⁴ *This standard dramatically reduced the already tiny strength of the vanguard of the liberation movement.*

The importance and significance that were attached to the agents were growing in proportion to the increasing realization that, thanks to mass anti-communist hysteria, the once formidable Communist Party – the main lever of political governance in Georgia for the Kremlin – had become a debilitated and useless tool. And this was natural too, because Gorbachev himself, with perestroika, was undermining the political hegemony of the Communist Party. But no party seeking to replace the communists would have been able to evade the all-pervasive demand for independence. So, the Kremlin could rely only

on its omnipresent *agents* and the *nomenclature* of the autonomous political entities in Georgia to regain a foothold; and the Kremlin adopted the strategy of discrediting the idea of national independence.

Ever after his dissident-times fiasco (and in some people's opinion, even before that), Gamsakhurdia was considered a KGB-hired dangerous adventurist among certain activists of the liberation movement. Gamsakhurdia's actions, his rhetoric and provocative decisions supported this view repeatedly. In addition, Gamsakhurdia's group was initially not particularly influential compared to others, but the Communist government kept emulating the tried and true practice of artificially creating a privileged stratum to cause a rift in the workers' movement, and openly favored Gamsakhurdia. Complaints which others pointed out to the authorities remained ignored, but as soon as Gamsakhurdia would say the same later on, his demands were met, which persuaded the masses of Gamsakhurdia's capability and efficiency. This expanded his influence quickly and dramatically, but caused a rift within the liberation movement. Most of its activists confronted the Soviet authorities and Gamsakhurdia at the same time. Still, public support for Gamsakhurdia was growing.

While Gamsakhurdia promoted the Kremlin's political interests (such as the staging of the provocative rally near Tskhinvali, harassment of repatriated Muslim Meskhetians, causing of the rift in the National Forum (the inter-party body of the liberation movement) and groundlessly accusing leaders of the liberation movement of being affiliated with the KGB), naturally, he did not encounter resistance from the authorities, but when he declared Georgia's independence following the nationwide referendum, the Kremlin perceived this as perfidy. Gamsakhurdia would be unable to vindicate that decision in the eyes of KGB people who terrorized him. From that day on, the problem of his personal safety became his major concern and he started to think about consolidating his power. He hastily changed the political system and introduced presidential rule. He could already sense that he would fall victim to Georgia's declaration of independence.

In the meantime, the old Soviet institutions were gradually replaced (at least at the top level) with new ones. Gamsakhurdia's "program" of building the Georgian state was voiced by his Prime

Minister Besarion Gugushvili and, despite the terminological abracadabra (“state capitalism”), admonished the openly autocratic government. Democracy was over, it would come later at best, but the Georgian intellectual elite (the political elite was formed precisely by recruiting representatives of the intellectual elite) associated the country’s liberation with democratic reforms. And this happened despite the fact that no one had any clear-cut civil society project, and the only thing that existed was the *longing* to transform our society into one of the Western type. Later on, the public would see that this is no mean task to accomplish, but rapturous faith in social engineering was what Soviet citizens inherited from their communist past, and if the Soviet utopia disappointed them, it did not mean that their social psychology changed completely. At any rate, it is a fact that Gamsakhurdia’s plan and the steps he took to carry it out angered the leading, most influential part of society. Gamsakhurdia’s unpopularity among elite circles derived not so much from his dissident-times fiasco as precisely from his losing his bearings, which George Bush Sr. qualified as *swimming against the tide*. The absence of support from the elite greatly encouraged the initiators of Gamsakhurdia’s ouster.

Without outside (Western) support, the days of the young Georgian state were numbered while *the deficit of statehood, in other words, the habitual millennia-old anarchic situation in Georgia, was growing stronger*.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union fell apart. But this did not mean that the Kremlin decided to desist from controlling political process in former Soviet republics. At the same time, the contumacious Gamsakhurdia declared that the GKChP [State Emergencies Committee] coup attempt was staged by the government, which only deepened the rift between him and the Kremlin; and finally, he refused to join the CIS (he made a verbal statement on accession only after the “Christmas putsch”, but it was too late), which was viewed as complete disregard for the rules of the game which were set and stipulated by Moscow. It seems that Gamsakhurdia had no hopes left of settling his relations with the Kremlin.

Moscow strove toward kindling the ethnic conflicts and establishing governable chaos by staging a coup aimed at securing the newly-

founded state a place within Russia's orbit. At the same time, the Kremlin preferred to maintain the posture of an apparently disinterested umpire and make its agents pull the chestnuts out of the fire for it, but strong popular support for Gamsakhurdia proved to be the stumbling block for the Kremlin. The limited resources of the leaders of armed groups, who were hired for the "democratic revolution" scheduled for Christmas, proved to be insufficient. Neither Kitovani's so-called guards proved adequate, nor did Ioseliani, just released from prison, and his Mkhedrioni manage to properly organize the Christmas coup. Despite the mock-militarist ostentation of these Georgian "king's men" (according to Ioseliani's classic sermon, "democracy ain't eating beans!"), their units were falling back all the time, which forced the secret protagonist of the Christmas fuss, Russia, to openly intervene in this business. On the morning of the coup (January 6), the center of Tbilisi was flooded with tracked hardware of the Transcaucasus Military District. The issue was sorted out in the blink of an eye, and the armored vehicles disappeared. Gamsakhurdia was ousted or, to be more precise, seized, and he spent the remaining months of his life in Russia, in the captivity of his KGB oppressors. The Kremlin made use of him, this time around as a counterbalance to Shevardnadze, and did away with him only after its main strategic plan was implemented.

In Ghia Nodia's opinion, the toppling of the Gamsakhurdia regime had two main causes: One was his obsessive personality, which verged on mental derangement, and the other was moving to the fore of the anarchist political culture in the opposition's behavior.⁵ Soon after Gamsakhurdia's ouster, it became clear that an inclination to anarchy of sorts was noticeable not only in the opposition's actions, and bitter historical experience taught politically unaffiliated ordinary Georgians too how to join bandit brotherhoods and do as they please; centuries of anarchy and violence (in the absence of the organizing influence of state) gave rise to this sort of self-annihilating survival culture.

The prince

The agent era continued. The country was shrouded in the veil of civil strife, and the redeemer in the person of Shevardnadze came from Moscow; at any rate, many people pinned their hopes on

Shevardnadze, who, however, did not meet expectations, at least in the initial, Kitovani- and Ioseliani-associated period of his rule.

Of course, he catered to every whim of Moscow, but Yeltsin's trust for Shevardnadze went only as far as the Russian wisdom *trust but verify* ordained. Assigning the "praetorian guards" from Moscow as guarantors of Shevardnadze's "security" was not enough; appetite comes with eating, and to further expand its influence, the Kremlin made Shevardnadze appoint its agents to ministerial or other important posts. Shevardnadze lacked power from the very outset. Initially, talk of any legitimacy of his government was out of the question. He had only personal contacts and the support of foreign politicians. After the fall 1992 parliamentary elections, when he formally combined the post of the chairman of parliament with the position of the top official of the executive (head of state), the real power still remained in the warlords' hands.

Armed gangs and criminals ran rampant in the country. The police was in organized alliance with criminal kingpins. Such a situation took shape in which even simply walking out into the street became dangerous (let alone movement of commercial cargo or any kind of economic activity). The economy was destroyed. Hyperinflation broke out when Russia threw Georgia out of the rouble zone and the provisional currency, the kupon, was introduced hastily. Its exchange rate fell by the hour.

The employable and industrious were fleeing the country; the energy sector collapsed, apartment blocks were without electricity, roads impassable, production facilities defunct or pillaged; the rural population went back to subsistence farming.

The chaos which enwrapped the country was also caused by the absence of state and looked like a brief flash-back to the post-industrial era of the historical experience of which the country failed to emerge from the Middle Ages. And it was brief because Shevardnadze soon led the country to the phase of "feudal lords' confederation".

By making heavy concessions to Russia⁶ and most importantly, thanks to great assistance from the West, Georgia of the period of stabilization under Shevardnadze settled down as a "weak state", or, as Shevardnadze himself used to call it, a "half-state".

The stabilization period was nonetheless a relief compared to chaos: the crime situation was more or less sorted out; the rampage of gangs was checked; the military was brought under control; economic indicators started to improve, and a national currency, the lari, was successfully introduced.

The first rudiments of civil society emerged in that period: non-governmental organizations were created, the media were developing, and independent trade unions were founded here and there. Direct contacts with international organizations gave rise to a new culture of relations. The introduction of personal computers and the Internet caused the gradual replacement of the Russian language with English. *The beneficial influence of globalization eventually played the decisive role in the breakthrough which took the form of the Rose Revolution.*

In the second phase of his presidency, Shevardnadze cozily ensconced himself in the center of the clientelist cobweb which he had weaved mostly from his relatives' interests and, *en rapport* with modern equivalents of medieval demesne lords – the new rich of the drugs, bank or energy mafias and Aslan Abashidze – ruled the corrupt domain which they called a state and in which every courtier was at work in coordination with Shevardnadze.

It's easier said than done, but sorting the country out even in this form could not be managed without a life-or-death confrontation with the agents' world. As soon as Shevardnadze, encouraged by the West, decided to get rid of the agents in his entourage, there was an assassination attempt against him! However, thanks to his luck and ex-Communist Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, who looked as pale as he did at that moment, he escaped from the burning car unharmed. Time would pass, and Rcheulishvili, disappointed with Shevardnadze, would rally people at a demonstration to shout for the world to hear: "Shevardnadze – to the dustbin of history!"

Rcheulishvili's foreknowing behavior did not really delight the public back then, but his prediction did come true. And the irony was that Rcheulishvili would be Shevardnadze's supporter, and next time, he not only would be unable to save Shevardnadze, but would find himself in the dustbin of history too.

The era of roses was to begin in Georgia.

But until then, Shevardnadze, the relentless careerist adorned with the nickname “White Fox”, would remain the main protagonist in the modern history of our country.

Political scientists are closely familiar with the metaphorical use of “fox” – it was introduced by the classic of Renaissance, Machiavelli, as one of the types of prince.

Yet another noteworthy paradigm of assessment of politicians belongs to American thinker Eugene Jennings. He divided politicians into three main categories: supermen, heroes, and princes.

Supermen are those politicians who challenge old values and the obsolete social order and create the new values;

The heroes *fight* to establish the sublime ideals introduced by supermen;

And the princes try to stay in power by fair means or foul. This is their supreme and only ideal.

Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or Woodrow Wilson were examples of supermen.

Nelson Mandela and Mikhail Gorbachev would be entered on the list of heroes, although the latter could be described as a hero, in other words, the introducer of ideals, only from the Western standpoint, whereas from the Russian standpoint, the title of superman would better suit him because the political ideals toward which Gorbachev turned his rudder were completely unusual and novel for Russia; and Jennings bestowed the lofty title of superman for those who introduce new values.

One of the leaders of the national liberation movement, Merab Kostava, most certainly belonged to the category of heroes. And Gamsakhurdia, the author of “Georgia’s Spiritual Mission” would think himself a man who introduced new ideas, i.e a superman, but his “missionary values” were a laughing stock for the social elite. In some people’s opinion, as a politician, he would better fit into the definition of a hero of the national liberation movement (some would say, an antihero), and it is no surprise that his life ended tragically; tragedies become heroes, and heroes’ ends are tragic.

Shevardnadze was another matter altogether. He was a classic prince.

The term “prince”, it seems, was borrowed by Jennings from Machiavelli. Machiavelli says nothing about “heroes” or “supermen,” these are more of a product of the modern-day political experience. Machiavelli knows only princes and divides them into two subgroups, the “foxes” and “lions”. The nickname of “lion” applies to those politicians who manage to remain in power by use of force and perfidy,⁷ whereas the foxes stay at the helm through cunning, deal-wheeling and permanent maneuvering.

Be that as it might, the so-called White Fox (that is to say, a prince), held the reins of power in Georgia for 30 years; dizzy with the ploys of the fox, our society deluded itself for the same 30 years (from the Soviet-era “struggle against negative phenomena”), constantly awaited “heroism” from the prince (reforms, i.e. the establishment of new values), and once even tried to coerce the prince into an act of heroism (the “young reformers” attempt to win Shevardnadze over). This should be viewed as a fundamental mistake by our society. The prince cannot become a hero, for no man can do more than he can.

When the vanguard of the Rose Revolution broke into the parliament session hall, even our Heavenly Father would not have been able to keep Shevardnadze in his post, but he kept reading his address, as if nothing had happened, and his personal security detail had to use their muscles to pull him out the hall. As a Georgian saying goes, a fox was dying, but still headed for henhouse. The already former commander-in-chief of the Georgian Armed Forces did not have a single soldier under his command by then, yet he declared a state of emergency, which under other circumstances might have resulted in a national tragedy, but fortunately, that time around, it went down as a comical episode in history. The prince still fought to the end and even managed to keep his quarters at the Krtsanisi Government Residence.

By Jennings’ definition, the country is an arena for the prince, just a means, and by no means an end. Of course, this was equally true about both the Soviet Union and Georgia. “My most precious ‘object’ is called Georgia,” – the publishers made these words by Shevardnadze

the title of a book of his thoughts and aphorisms (Tbilisi, 2000, *Sakartvelo* Publishing House). The prince put the word “object” in quotation marks, as if they were marks from his own claws.

It should not come as a surprise if, under Shevardnadze and his predecessor, Russia’s agent policy proved to be the most fruitful precisely in Georgia compared to other countries along Russia’s borders. In addition to all other benefits, *Shevardnadze’s personality profile precluded the implementation of a more successful policy.* Wherever decisive, daring action was necessary, the fox was cautious, as is its nature. The period of stabilization during his presidency and decisive steps against Ioseliani and Kitovani (as well as getting rid of then Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev’s godson in both literal and figurative senses, Varden Nadibaidze) started only after these much-respected corpses started to pose a threat to his physical existence. Having survived assassination attempts by sheer luck, Shevardnadze changed beyond recognition and started to make daring personnel decisions, but then went on to implement a policy of intrigue, wheeling and dealing, and bidding his time.

The public alternated between hopeful and suspicious views of Shevardnadze. He had always demonstrated selfishness, which is characteristic for princes, but at the same time he was known worldwide, which was what people factored in when they assessed him; people reckoned with the fact that Shevardnadze was to be reckoned with.⁸ Besides, compared to the eccentric Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze’s international political experience and his personal contribution toward the international recognition of Georgia’s independence, the country’s accession to international organizations and the launch of international projects made his kind of nomenclature feudalism more or less tolerable, especially as the recent experience of surviving a nightmare made even his minimal stabilization look like a godsend for a while.

This notwithstanding, the situation was gradually changing – the situation, but not Shevardnadze, he was the same. He had not done anything new or unusual in the 2 November 2003 parliamentary elections. He had lied and rigged the elections. But this brought the people to the end of their patience. Zurab Zhvania sensed – the gut feeling of an intelligent politician – where he could find the largest

“social capital”. He spoke everyone’s mind when he said that people felt *insulted* and angry. The fox had once again sunk the nation’s millennia-old dream under lies, but to his great surprise, it did not work. The fox, who had many times double-crossed his own people, this time found himself pulled down from the political Olympus by that very same people.

Birth of state from the spirit of truth

Among Shevardnadze’s achievements, one arouses a particularly intense feeling of gratitude. In the days of the Rose Revolution, he ensured the people’s unanimity and therefore, a clear formulation of the public demand. His rule had become so anti-society and mafia-like that the entire Georgian public rose up as one against the existing “law and order”, which accounted for the success of the revolution.

The people’s will is a binding message for the government. The Rose Revolution’s message was simple – “The Truth!” This message was sent to the government long time ago; “Tell the truth! We all ought to be saying the truth!” – the most popular hit song in the aftermath of the 9 April tragedy dealt with the nation’s political ideal.⁹ The Georgian people sorely missed law and order, i.e. the state, but a just, orderly state, not a Potemkin village. Accordingly, its leader was to be a truthful politician, not a fibster who had completely rigged the elections.

Shevardnadze simply did not believe in any political techniques unless they were based on lies. Deceitful rhetoric and false statements were a usual Soviet practice, and the rapid spread of anti-Communist sentiments during Gamsakhurdia’s presidency also stemmed from the public weariness of the Communist elite’s lies and longing for decent (fair) politics. Communists briefly remained in power in the Gamsakhurdia period, whereas under Shevardnadze, the Communist Party’s influence already vanished, but the Communist tag had always been used as a disguise for a chameleon which in effect was nothing but a ruling nomenclature; to the nomenclature, communism as a political idea was but a tool of promoting its plutocratic interests; as soon as communism went bankrupt, the chameleon changed its color and, aping Eduard was baptized as Giorgi, and Orthodox icons were hung in the offices where

Communist Party General Secretaries' portraits used to hang. The Shevardnadze-era elite has never had any respect for communist or any other ideals; the communist-era style of state government, i.e. the one that was based on falsehood and corruption, was in their flesh and blood even without any supporting doctrine. Of course, *corruption was bound to flourish under Shevardnadze, and it did.*

Because of his hypocritical and venal policy, the people no longer viewed Shevardnadze as their leader. By contrast, *Mikheil Saakashvili's popularity arose precisely from his image of a politician who speaks the truth. Demonstratively waving the photographs of the corrupt ministers' mansions at a government meeting proved to be more efficient than brandishing a sword.*

The Rose Revolution was a turning point in Georgian history. The most important thing that it brought was changes at the leadership level. The Shevardnadze-era elite was fundamentally incapable of building a normal state. Shevardnadze was the mastermind behind the feudal demesne (clannish and corrupt) governance system in modern Georgia (he called his favorite "object" a "half-state", after all, and this was one of the rare cases when he did not lie), although his half-state was still a state; in contrast to the feudal demesne system, whose adepts were all in their estate, the nomenclature parasites of Shevardnadze's half-state were sucking blood (money) from the state. Shevardnadze's weak state, which, however, was still a state, had many ready-made institutions, of which the new elite took advantage. The country's political and legal systems (the Constitution, laws, institution of the president, parliament, the National Bank, the Prosecutor-General's Office and the police, etc.) were not at all specifically designed for corrupt governance. The state required not so much to be built up as to be put into operation. But this would require a complete replacement of all top officials, which happened after the Rose Revolution. This was the main goal, otherwise, constitutional changes and another revamping of the political system seemed the most thankless task, although the new rulers (back then, it was still a triumvirate), started precisely with these things.

Overall, building statehood in Georgia is an artificial process, in other words, it begins from the top. One of the reasons for this is that

the Soviet state institutions have effectively been dismantled, and the new Georgia, as we saw, was born from chaos (that aside, the Soviet system itself was somewhat artificial and created from the top downwards according to the doctrine that was conceived in an office). This is why the will and inclinations of the elite (both political and civil society elite, but first and foremost, of the political one) are decisive factors in building the state. And the main thing here is overcoming the *Gemeinschaft* culture which is so deep-rooted in the Georgian reality. Otherwise we will go back to the era of lack of order.

At some ancient point in Georgian history, the state eroded and started to go down the slope of involution. In modern times, statehood is revived through the process which is opposite to the downhill movement – in less time and in presence of the specifics of the post-industrial era. In addition, if in the past the Georgian state was created by the social and economic development of the Georgian communities, now first state institutions are created before the development of social or economic patterns. This is why the elite, not the people, play the decisive role. For historical reasons, the Georgian people cannot place with the government a detailed order for any specific political project that would be tailored to adopt the Western or any other set of values because socially and economically, the vast majority of the population are undecided gullible dupes, whereas public demands are molded by the political interests of already established groups. Therefore, not only the political system, but also the modification of society in large part hinges on the tastes and orientation of the political and intellectual elite. In other words, in the paradoxical situation that has taken shape, the ruling elite is in charge of not only satisfying public demands, but also formulating them, at least to some extent. Fulfilling this task leaves much room for social engineering, but the limit which should not be transgressed is set by the people and clear-cut – it is so trivial but, despite that, the Georgian people lacked and missed it so much: *Law and order, maintained by politicians, Leviathan, speaking the language of justice, or, ultimately, a rule-of-law state.* Meeting this demand would unquestionably mean earning “surefire” social capital which every government should treasure if it wants to successfully carry out any political project.

Threats

This is precisely where the threat to the Rose Revolution government emanates from. The new elite will squander the aforementioned social capital, the people's trust, for no good purpose if corruption takes root among its ranks too. The people did not enter either integration into NATO or restoration of territorial integrity at the top of their list of demands. By demanding Shevardnadze's resignation, the people rejected falseness, corruption and perverse political ethics. However, signs of *elite corruption* have been noticeable from the very outset in the new government too. For the purpose of creating conditions for uprooting corruption, a necessary, but insufficient measure was taken: high salaries are paid to the upper level of establishment – members of parliament and ministers – but what is a little odd about this is that it improved the situation more at the lower levels.¹⁰ The centuries-old culture of *Gemeinschaft* exposes the new Western-educated politicians with the ambition to modernize society to strong temptation. The hackneyed issues of state racket and lobbying of personal business interests is a wide highway toward the creation of a new nomenclature; on the other hand, thanks to the efforts of the civil society and political opposition, as well as partly out of their own free will, the ruling team sidelined a couple of their corrupt members. The relentless government reshuffles make the ministers' overindulgence at least a little less possible. In addition, the authorities have openly declared war on the criminal kingpins; the education reform too, is a strong anti-corruption message in addition to its other benefits...

Perhaps for now, the only thing which would be fair to say is that in the Saakashvili period, state has mounted numerous offensives against corruption and is exercising its monopolistic right to violence with increasing success. It seems that the Saakashvili government has no serious rival for power.

But there can be different types of power.

What matters is that the law and order which will be established in the country are democratic. First, the Georgian people demand (support) democracy (the Rose Revolution is perhaps not a completely watertight argument in support of this, but nor is it entirely tenuous);

second, global influences and the foreign factor push Georgia toward Western-style law and order; in addition, paradoxically though this might sound, Russia too is prodding us toward the country's democratic evolution. Russia poses threats to the country's national security, making military and political integration into the West the only real guarantee of Georgia's security. *Georgia as a country has only a democratic future, or else it has no future at all. It is precisely the erosion of democracy that is the gravest threat faced by the country.*

Georgian democracy has too many flaws as yet, be it imperfections of the political structure (insufficient separation of powers and lack of checks and balances) or weakness of the judiciary, deficient electoral laws or underdeveloped civil society and support for an anti-democratic institution – the Georgian Orthodox Church¹¹.

The issues of territorial integrity, inadequate integration of ethnic minorities into the Georgian society, and in general, social consolidation could also be added to the list of threats and flaws in the development of the Georgian state, but these should suffice...

Notes:

¹ “Tses-rigi” used to mean both “law and order” and “legislation” in the Georgian language.

² See Charles King, *Potemkin Democracy, The National Interest* 3. 2001

³ The Social Democrats, leaders of the political movement of the early 20th century, had a contrary view. In their opinion, social problems were to be resolved first, and then the free working people would resolve the independence problem on their own.

⁴ For example, **Nodar Natadze**, later the chairman of the Popular Front, was an exception. He had made a name for himself as a fearless dissident. **Zurab Chavchavadze** was another exception; he had never been a political prisoner, but he established himself among the liberation movement with the help of Tamar Chkheidze, who worked with Chavchavadze as a team and delegated the authoritative powers of a political prisoner to him. **Zviad Gamsakhurdia** himself was also an exception: he had chosen to turn down in the past the glorious but hard-to-earn title of prisoner of conscience by making confessional statements to investigators and apologizing publicly, but thanks to a lack of information or some other factors, the public at large set down his months in forced exile at a shepherds' hut in Kizlyar as his “spell in prison”.

⁵ See Ghia Nodia, “Putting the State Back Together in Post-Soviet Georgia”, *Beyond State Crisis?* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D.C. 2002).

⁶ The concessions took indeed a heavy toll: Shevardnadze ceded Abkhazia and South Ossetia and deployed Russian troops as peacekeepers there; agreed to joint monitoring of the borders, etc.

⁷ **Jaba Ioseliani** might have laid claims to being a “lion”, but he still fell into the White Fox’s trap. As for the “Acharan Lion” **Aslan Abashidze**, he was so nicknamed because of his Turkish name (Arslan means “lion” in Turkish), otherwise he was a fox like Shevardnadze. The pseudo-lion of the “second political center” of Georgia, whom President Yeltsin gave the rank of general when Abashidze was already in the post of the head of an autonomous entity within a sovereign state live on TV(?!), ruled his share of Georgia in harmony with the White Fox. That these foxes’ tails were knotted together was best exposed during the Rose Revolution.

⁸ Honorable Doctor of Boston, Harvard, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Providence and Trieste Universities, winner of the Kant, Onassis, Nixon, Harvard, Wunsch and Israel Democracy Institute awards and destroyer of Berlin Wall.

⁹ Soviet troops violently broke up a protest in front of the Supreme Council building on 9 April 1989.

¹⁰ At any rate, both Zurabishvili, Salome and David, whose departure from the ranks of the ruling party and joining the opposition caused a stir, reproached the government effectively for the same thing: David Zurabishvili cited as the main reason for his “renegade” action the process of the transformation of the ruling team into a new clan; and according to Salome Zourabichvili, “demons should leave Georgia”; by demons she meant those corrupt officials who view their posts as tools for personal enrichment.

¹¹ The church is the most influential civil organization in the modern-day Georgia, a country with a high potential for religious fanaticism. The trajectory of the country’s future evolution depends in large part on how relations with the Church will be regulated.

The Georgian and Russian Churches are similar, and not only because of their co-religionism. Besides the dogmatic and theological issues, the influence of the Russian Church on the Georgian Church also spreads into areas of political values and civilization identity. However, the Russian Church is antagonistic toward Western social ideals, which is why strong anti-Western, and consequently, anti-democratic sentiments are growing in Georgian society.

1.

The two main goals which were set in Georgia shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union were:

- a) Sovereignty;
- b) Democracy.

It is interesting that the realization came almost from the very outset that there might not be harmonious interconnectedness at all between these two goals (hence the slogan of the early 1990s, “Independence first, democracy later”), but the decision that neither could be given up came much later. Of course, the meaning of democracy here was the broadest possible, encompassing not only the principle of elected authority, but also protection of fundamental human rights and liberties (liberalism), free market economy (capitalist economic system), and in conjunction, all this was to become a guarantee of Georgia’s integration into the Euro-Atlantic organizations (pro-Western orientation).

As for the cultural factors which played an important role in political processes, negative social capital and non-civically-oriented political culture have to be mentioned, which left their mark in the Georgian politics of last 15 years. The familism, which allowed the country’s population to survive the totalitarian regime with relative ease (it can be said with certainty that that regime wiped out the borders between public and private with much less success in the southern culture of Georgian kind than in the northern of the Russian kind: compare Italy under the Mussolini regime and Germany under the Hitler regime, where the same difference existed), turned out, as expected, to be a hindering factor for the establishment of liberal democracy.

After the Rose Revolution, yet another important social change was added to these cultural factors – the emergence of the new

political elite, which set as its explicit goal the struggle against the aforementioned cultural factors. So, one might call the answers to the second and third questions complementary, because the main clash today is taking place between the new political elite on the one side and the old social practices and discourses on the other (using the language of the modern social theory) or old political culture (talking the language of modern political theory, which is less reflexive in methodological terms, but is more widespread).

2.

The main achievement was the establishment of democracy in a very narrow sense of the word. By democracy I mean elected authority, which before, in the Soviet period, played only the role of a façade. Of course, it was not liberal democracy. Moreover, the Gamsakhurdia government can even be christened as a typical instance of un-liberal democracy: It was a regime in which the people's will, instead of being limited by the principle of supremacy of law and the constitution, was guided by the rhetoric of the charismatic leader.

The history of the Gamsakhurdia regime clearly demonstrated that the logic of independence might not coincide with the logic of democracy,¹ especially if the demos which resides in the country is identified with one of the ethnic groups and the rights of other ethnic groups are ignored. The main failure of the Gamsakhurdia regime – the kindling of the ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which was caused by ethno-nationalist political views – resulted precisely from this.

3.

In political science, regimes of the Shevardnadze kind are called “competitive authoritarianism” or “semi-autocratic”.² These are regimes in which decisions are made by small groups, but which, despite this, still provide the opportunity to oppose them without the risk of falling victim to repressions. In the Shevardnadze period, the structural possibilities of such opposition arose in the form of civil society and the free media. Rampant corruption and increasingly large-scale election rigging were inseparable parts of this system.

The cause of the revolution was the rigged parliamentary elections. But it is known that one cause is not enough for a revolution. A combination of several factors were required to make the revolution successful: the free media and nongovernmental sector, which monitored the elections and informed the public about the results, the unpopularity of the government leader (Shevardnadze), the united opposition, successful mobilization of the masses, among others.³

But the fundamental methodological problem facing the present-day researcher who is trying to supply an answer to the question on the causes of the November revolution was known very well to the social sciences of the 20th century. This is a dilemma between structure and agency. On the one hand, there is a desire to rely, when performing an analysis, on objective structures from whose existence we can deduce the revolutionary situation, but on the other hand, there is just as intense a desire to link every revolution with the will of the people, whose scientific reification would be a problematic undertaking and which yields varying results in different cases. In this case, the answer to the question of why the November revolution happened should be sought not in the structural conditions which were antecedent to it, but in the population's reactions to these structural conditions. And this will itself can only be explained by historical analysis of perception by the Georgian people of their freedom as an important value and loyalty to the pro-Western orientation.

4.

The main project of the Saakashvili period is building statehood. The main thing which the Shevardnadze government proved (and, as another example, the Yeltsin government proved the same in Russia) was that intuition, which has been known to political science for quite some time now, does exist. The fundamental difference between states is not ideology, and it does not even run through the border between dictatorship and democracy, but through the difference between effectiveness and ineffectiveness.⁴ The state has acquired its function, which, according to Max Weber, is establishing a legitimate monopoly on use of physical violence,⁵ in its full form only under the Saakashvili government. It is no accident that among the first steps which the

incumbent government took was precisely reforming the police and military. As is known, the process of building statehood starts in full accordance with the above definition by Weber.⁶

Noteworthy among the other achievements is restoration of the central government's control over Achara and Upper Abkhazia (the upper part of Abkhazia's Kodori Gorge), which is an important step toward the restoration of territorial integrity. In addition, I would highlight as a social and cultural development of special importance the education reform, which encompasses not only the secondary, but also higher education and which envisages producing not only human capital which would meet the modern labor market's demands, but also the values which are necessary for citizenship of a democratic society. The real (in contrast to the Shevardnadze regime, not merely declared) fight against corruption, whose first successes are evident, and the creation of the local governance system should also be noted.

5.

The main problem of the opposition, which would not be resolved by the emergence of a charismatic leader either, is the absence of an alternative political project which would rally large enough groups of population. The criticism of the authorities by one portion of the opposition is rhapsodic and unsystematic, whereas the ideological positions of the other part coincide with the authorities' to such an extent that the only difference between the propagators of this ideology should be sought in their facial features, not in some values-related or ideological stances. The strengthening of the opposition is also hindered by the government's objective successes in a sense that among the country's current problems, which have been prioritized by the elite a long time ago using the criteria supported by the majority of voters, there are many issues which require not separation of ideological positions (e.g. between the rightist and leftist poles), but straightforward progress (e.g. uprooting corruption in the education system, efficient tax administration, etc.).

We should expect the emergence of the strong opposition:

- a) In case of stagnation of the incumbent government, which would make it possible for other political forces to pick up the same political project where the government left off;

- b) If the most basic problems facing the country get resolved, an array of the less basic problems will become more noticeable, as this would attach greater importance to ideological differences. In that case, an alternative political vision might win a more-or-less broad support base among the population.

6-7.

In view of the logic of the current situation, I cannot see the possibility of the opposition's strengthening in the near future, which is why it would be difficult for me to speculate on the potential issues which would unite the opposition. Presumably, in the future the opposition will consist of both members of existing opposition parties and a group which will break off from the incumbent ruling team. The opposition's main message will entirely depend on the situation in the country at that moment and on how successful the government is.

8.

The establishment of a dominant political party system would be an interesting prospect, but, as the experience of the previous two parties (Gamsakhurdia's Round Table and Shevardnadze's Citizens' Union) shows, one factor which is important for the existence of the dominant party does not exist in Georgia: longevity. Parties in Georgia are created around, and entirely depend on, the leaders and their immediate entourage.⁷ Accordingly, the probability of the National Movement's survival as an entity which will be able to generate leaders for several decades, as was the case with the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan or Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico,⁸ is, in my opinion, not very high. It is more likely that the destiny of this party will directly depend on Mikheil Saakashvili's political trajectory.

9.

Answers to the previous questions were one-sided in a sense that they dealt with only endogenous aspects which unfold within the country, without a link with the actors and processes outside. It is clear, however, that one of the country's main problems, the ethnic conflicts, would be completely different had it not been for Russia's

role in kindling and sustaining them. Also, the democratization process which is under way in the country depended, and still does, in large part on assistance from the United States and Europe.

I do not expect much change in relations with Russia. The post-imperial syndrome in relations with former colonies assumed such irrational forms in even much more modern countries (like, for example, the Netherlands or Great Britain)⁹ that it should come as no surprise that the extremely negative attitude will probably remain the determinant of Russia's policy toward Georgia for a long time to come.

The main novelty which is to be expected in the next 3-5 years is Georgia's accession to NATO. A substantial part of the population supports this in Georgia (in contrast, say, to Ukraine). According to the opinion poll conducted in August 2006,¹⁰ 59.2 percent of the population wanted Georgia to join NATO, and only 7.1 percent is against it; 47.5 percent of the population expects security guarantees from accession, and 29.5 percent expects restoration of territorial integrity. The former expectation is indeed appropriate, and as for the issue of settling the ethnic conflicts, accession to NATO would at least facilitate a revision of the *status quo*, which is in Georgia's interests.

10.

One step unanimously regarded as vital in Georgia today is a fundamental reform of the judiciary system, which to this day remains the most vulnerable area in the process of establishment of liberal democracy in the country. Tackling the unemployment problem and establishing a social security system also require major efforts. It is noteworthy that the ruling party views all three areas as priorities.

But what I would like to briefly touch on here is not these priorities, but the people who should staff a government that would be completely acceptable for me. Only the generation which was born free from Egyptian slavery entered the Promised Land. Translating this into the language of social science, people whose socialization took place when they were slaves are banned from entering the Promised Land. The biblical story points out the decisive importance which is

attached to the socialization process (in this case, the political socialization process, in other words, the molding of values, beliefs and views which enable the citizens to support the political system of their choice). It has to be said that the change of generations is one of the significant guarantees for the stability of democracy in Georgia. Even the famous premise by Lipset,¹¹ who said that stable democracy is only possible in a country whose GDP is above a certain limit, should not be taken literally. The influence of material prosperity is not direct, it is mediated precisely by the socialization process; when the individual's system of values is established, the decisive factor is the conditions in which the socialization of the individual took place.¹² Precisely the material conditions which existed in the socialization period are the factor of influence on the process of establishment of the value system, and precisely they form the foundation for the civil culture, which for its part is a prerequisite for a stable democracy.

Notes:

¹ See the description of this conflict in Juan J. Linz, Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore, 1996).

² Larry Diamon, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (April 2003): 21-35; Stephen Levitsky, Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism", *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2003): 51-56; Michael McFaul, "Transitions from Postcommunism", *Journal of Democracy* 16 (July 2005): 5-19; Ghia Nodia/ Alvaro P. Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia: Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects* (Tbilisi, 2006): 19-20.

³ Michael McFaul, "Transitions from Postcommunism," *Journal of Democracy* 16 (July 2005), especially pp. 7-15

⁴ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, 1968).

⁵ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Zweitausendeins, 2005), 39.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, "Stateness First", *Journal of Democracy* 16 (January 2005), 87.

⁷ The change of the dates of the next presidential and parliamentary elections to make them coincide is a good example of this, proving once again the impossibility of separation of the ruling party and its leader in Georgia.

⁸ See, for instance, Brian Roger Hamnett, *A Concise History of Mexico* (Cambridge, 1999): 234-306. Despite the change of its name twice, the party has maintained its identity and monopoly for more than 70 years. It has to be noted here that, besides beneficial functions which the party had in preserving the stability of the

political system, there were also numerous negative phenomena, such as a high level of corruption, significant and often unproductive state influence on the economy, and strained relations between state and the business sector.

⁹ As an example, the Netherlands recognized 1945 instead of 1949 as the year of Indonesia's independence only in 2005 (!) by expressing its regret over the death of the Indonesians who died during the war that was being waged during those four years. Presumably, writing the history of post-colonialism on the basis of the rational choice theory would be difficult.

¹⁰ Values of the Georgian Society, Tbilisi, 2006.

¹¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy", *American Political Sciences Review* 53 (March 1959).

¹² Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, 1989).

Georgia after communism

1989-2006

Timeline

- 1989, April 9 A large pro-independence demonstration in Tbilisi is crushed by the Soviet troops leaving 20 people dead. As a result, the Communist regime in Georgia is dramatically discredited and pro-independence national movement takes political initiative.
- 1989, July 16 There are skirmishes between the Georgian and the Abkhaz in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. The immediate trigger is the protest of the Abkhaz against the opening of a branch of Tbilisi University in Sukhumi, the general background – Georgian opposition to Abkhaz demands of increasing the level of autonomy of Abkhazia or seceding from Georgia.
- 1989, November 23 First violent clashes take place between Georgian and Ossetian nationalist activists in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. The latter demand the increase of the level of autonomy of South Ossetia or joining the North Ossetian Republic in Russia, while the former oppose the existence of the Ossetian autonomy.
- 1990, October 28 The Round Table, a nationalist coalition led by former dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia, wins the multiparty parliamentary elections thus

Georgia after communism 1989-2006 Timeline

- ending the Communist rule; in November, Gamsakhurdia becomes chairman of parliament.
- 1990, December 9 Regional elections that are held in South Ossetia without an authorization from Tbilisi elect a new regional council which declares the creation of the South Ossetian Republic.
- 1990, December 11 The Supreme Council of Georgia abolishes South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. Skirmishes.
- 1991, March 31 Referendum overwhelmingly supports independence of Georgia.
- 1991, April 9 Parliament declares secession from the Soviet Union.
- 1991, May 26 Gamsakhurdia is elected president by 87 per cent of vote.
- 1991, September Elections to the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia are held based on a power-sharing agreement leading to the creation of a regional parliament that can only make principal decisions if the Georgian and Abkhaz groups of deputies come to an agreement.
- 1992, December 22 Fighting erupts between government troops and opposition militias in downtown Tbilisi.
- 1992, January 6 Gamsakhurdia flees and power is taken by the Military Council consisting of Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani, the leaders of the National Guard and Mkhedrioni (the Riders), two victorious militias.
- 1992, March Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Communist leader of Georgia (1972-85) and the foreign minister of the Soviet Union (1985-90; 1991) returns to Georgia. He is appointed head of the newly created State Council.
- 1992, June 24 In the Russian city of Dagomys, an agreement is reached on ceasefire in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, to be moni-

10 questions on Georgia's political development

- 1992, August tored by the three-partite Georgian-Ossetian-Russian peacekeeping force.
After Georgian troops enter Abkhazia with a declared aim to protect the railway and highways, fighting erupts between them and local separatist forces.
- 1992, October Parliamentary elections lead to the creation of Parliament with no clear majority party but generally supportive of Eduard Shevardnadze. In a separate vote, Shevardnadze is elected, uncontested, chairman of Parliament and head of state.
- 1993, May Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani resigned from their formal positions in the government thus signifying the strengthening of Eduard Shevardnadze's influence.
- 1993, September The war in Abkhazia ends in the defeat of the Georgian forces. The ethnic Georgian population is being driven out of Abkhazia.
- 1993, October After Georgian troops leave Abkhazia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia's supporters escalate their insurgency in western Georgia aiming to depose Eduard Shevardnadze's government. Shevardnadze seeks military assistance from Russia and makes a statement on joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).
- 1993, November Supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in western Georgia are defeated.
- 1993, November Constituent assembly of the Citizens' Union of Georgia, the new ruling party headed by Eduard Shevardnadze, is held in Tbilisi.
- 1993, December 31 Zviad Gamsakhurdia was found dead in a village in western Georgia. The official version is suicide, though his supporters allege he was murdered.

Georgia after communism 1989-2006 Timeline

- 1994, March Georgian Parliament ratifies a decision to join the CIS.
- 1994, May 14 A Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement is signed between the Georgian government and Abkhaz separatists. Russian troops serving under the aegis of the CIS troops become the peacekeeping force, with UN Observers Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) mandated to monitor the peacekeeping operation.
- 1994, September A new program of economic reforms based on recommendations of the International Monetary Fund starts with liberalizing prices for bread, public transport and fuel.
- 1994, December 3 Giorgi Chanturia, a popular leader of the National Democratic Party, is assassinated.
- 1995, January Tengiz Kitovani is arrested while leading a group of armed volunteers, ostensibly to regain Abkhazia by force.
- 1995, August 24 New Constitution is adopted that in the main follows the US model of separation of the executive and legislative powers, though with a somewhat greater role of the president.
- 1995, August 29^s Eduard Shevardnadze survives an assassination attempt. Igor Giorgadze, the minister of security with Russian connections, is charged with masterminding the attempt in cooperation with leaders of Mkhedrioni militia. Giorgadze flees to Russia, more than 200 members of Mkhedrioni are arrested. The paramilitary organization Mkhedrioni banned in September.
- 1995, September 15 Georgia and Russia sign an agreement on four Russian military bases being stationed in Georgia for 25 years. There is an understanding that Georgian Parliament will only ratify the agreement if Russia helps Georgia

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- 1995, September 25
1995, November 5
- solve the Abkhaz and South Ossetian issues. The agreement was never ratified.
A new Georgian currency *Lari* introduced.
Parliamentary and presidential elections are held. Shevardnadze is elected president, while his party – the Citizens' Union of Georgia – becomes the majority party in Parliament. Revival Union, a party of the leader of the Autonomous Republic of Achara, Aslan Abashidze, and the National Democratic Party, are also elected to Parliament.
- 1998, February 9
- Shevardnadze survives another attempt on his life, this time blamed on supporters of former president Gamsakhurdia with Chechen connections.
- 1998, May
- Fighting breaks out in Abkhazia's Gali District. Abkhaz troops suppress Georgian guerrilla groups, while the Georgian population that had returned to the district flees again.
- 1999, April
- Georgia is admitted to the Council of Europe.
- 1999, October 31
- New parliamentary elections lead to even stronger majority of the Citizens' Union in Parliament. (Second round is held on November 14.) A bloc of parties led by Aslan Abashidze's Revival party, and the Industrialists' party also join Parliament.
- 1999, November
- At the OSCE summit in Istanbul, Georgia and Russia sign an agreement whereby two of the four remaining Russian military bases in Vaziani (near Tbilisi) and Gudauta (Abkhazia) would withdraw until July 2000, while terms of withdrawal of the other two bases (in Batumi and Akhalkalaki) would be negotiated during 2000.

Georgia after communism 1989-2006 Timeline

- 2000, April 9 Shevardnadze is re-elected president.
- 2001 June/July Russia hands over Vaziani military base to Georgia.
- 2001, October A group of Chechen fighters fleeing the war in Chechnya traverse to Abkhazia and, with support from local Georgian paramilitaries, engage in short-term clashes with Abkhaz troops. The latter successfully drive out the intruders.
- 2001, October 30 A raid of the Security Ministry forces on Rustavi-2, the most popular independent TV channel which was often critical of the Shevardnadze regime, leads to anti-government demonstrations. Zurab Zhvania, the reformist speaker of Parliament, resigns in solidarity with the protesters. Shevardnadze sacks the government but shortly reappoints everybody save for the two most powerful and popular ministers, those of internal affairs and security.
- 2001, September Mikheil Saakashvili, the reformist minister of justice, resigns from the Shevardnadze government and starts the National Movement, strongly oppositional to the government.
- 2002, February A US government representative says there are Al Qaida members in Pankisi.
- 2002 April The USA launches its "Train and Equip" program to prepare Georgian troops for counterterrorist operations.
- 2002, June 2 Local elections lead to humiliating defeat of the ruling party.
- 2002, November Saakashvili becomes the chairman of the Tbilisi city council.
- 2002, September 11 Russian President Vladimir Putin declares that Russia may invade Georgian unless it takes

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- 2002, October care of Chechen rebels that hide in Pankisi Gorge, which neighbors Chechnya. Georgia starts an anti-terrorist operation in Pankisi that leads to the re-establishment of state control over the area.
- 2003, May Work begins on laying the Georgian section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline that would take Caspian oil from Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean coast in Turkey.
- 2003, November 2 Parliamentary elections are held with numerous irregularities noted by local and international observers. Large-scale protest demonstrations continue for three weeks and lead to the seizure of Parliament and the resignation of President Shevardnadze on November 23. The Supreme Court invalidates the election results in the party lists; MPs elected from constituencies retain their seats.
- 2004, January 4 Mikheil Saakashvili is elected president with overwhelming support (96 percent of the vote) in snap elections that were considered free and fair by internal and international observers. Zurab Zhvania is appointed prime minister.
- 2004, March 28 In the repeat partial parliamentary elections, the United National Movement (created on the basis of merger between Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement and the United Democrats led by Nino Burjanadze and Zurab Zhvania), gets 66 per cent of the vote. The only other group to overcome the 7-percent threshold was the bloc of the New Right and Industrialist parties.
- 2004, May 6 Mass protest rallies in the autonomous republic of Achara, supported by the Tbilisi government, lead to ouster of Aslan Abashidze, an authoritarian ruler of Achara.

Georgia after communism 1989-2006 Timeline

- 2004, June Georgia is admitted to the European Neighborhood Program (ENP).
- 2004, August Tensions in South Ossetia lead to occasional fighting leaving more than 10 people dead. The crisis ends after Georgian government units take several strategic heights but withdraw some of the troops.
- 2005, February 3 Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania is found dead in an apartment in Tbilisi.
- 2005, May 9-10 US President George W. Bush visits Georgia proclaiming it the “beacon of democracy”.
- 2005, May Agreement signed with Russia on the withdrawal of the remaining military bases to be completed by the end of 2008.
- 2006, September Georgia enters Intensified Dialogue for membership in NATO.
- 2006, July Emzar Kvitsiani, former governor of the Georgian-administered Kodori Gorge, and his militiamen from the Monadire (Hunter) paramilitary unit start a mutiny in the Kodori Gorge. Georgian police units take control over the Gorge, Kvitsiani escapes.
- 2006 Nov/December The alternative government of South Ossetia led by Dimitri Sanakoyev is established in the village of Kurta following the 12 November elections in South Ossetia. It supports autonomous status for South Ossetia within Georgia.
- 2006, October 5 Municipal elections in Georgia lead to domination of United National Movement in all municipalities of Georgia.

