



DEMOCRACY UNDER STRESS: WESTERN FATIGUE, RUSSIAN RESURGENCE, AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN GEORGIA

BIDZINA LEBANIDZE

GIP policy paper/February 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2016 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community has predicted that Georgia might abandon its Euro-Atlantic integration and turn toward Russia.¹ The reasons named included effective Russian propaganda and increased frustration in Georgia over the slow pace of Western integration. Although anti-Russian sentiments are still dominant among Georgians, Russia's rising popularity shows that the danger of Tbilisi abandoning its pro-Western foreign policy, along with its democratic reforms, is real. What can be done to avoid such a scenario and how can the West, together with the Georgian government and civil society, prevent it?

The Georgian Institute of Politics believes that Georgia can overcome its disappointment over the current pace of democratization and Europeanization processes, and that it can contain the negative influences of anti-liberal domestic and external actors that are hindering the democratization processes in the country. This policy brief discusses what the Georgian government should do, and what Western governments and institutions ought to do.

First of all, the Georgian government should be more responsive to the West, stick to its reform agenda, and actively counter anti-Western and anti-democratic discourses. Secondly, the EU and US should become more active in a number of areas. In particular, the EU should communicate its public image with Georgian citizens more effectively, and be more consistent with its demands for democratic reforms when speaking with Georgian officials. At the same time, it should encourage pro-EU political forces by providing more tangible and short-term benefits. Democratization and Euro-Atlantic integration are intertwined in Georgia, and the former will not be possible without the latter.

** Dr. Bidzina Lebanidze is a Research fellow at the Georgian Institute of Politics and the visiting lecturer at Berlin School of Economics and Law* Research for this paper was carried out in the framework of the project N:2015-807 "Analyzing Democratization in Georgia" supported by the National Endowment for Democracy*

INTRODUCTION

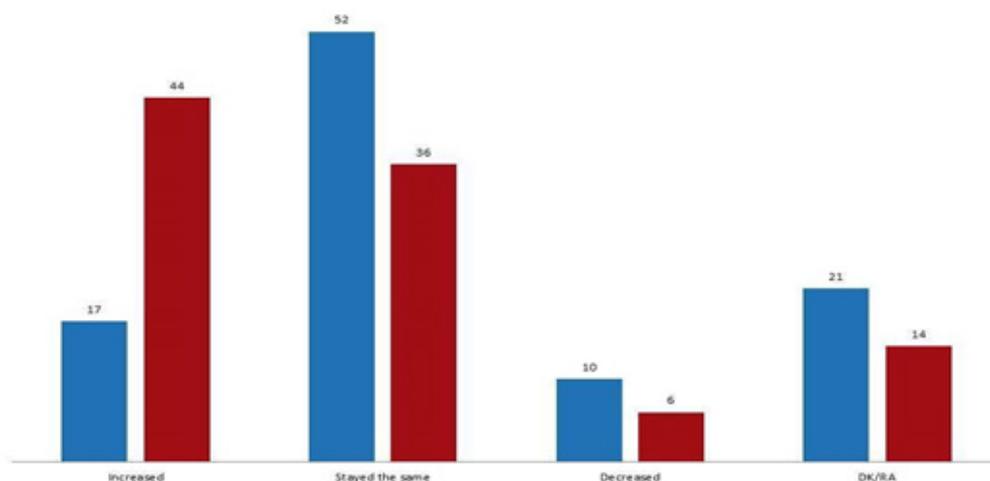
In 2015, Former Prime Minister of Poland Donald Tusk said “Georgia is definitely a front-runner in the Eastern Partnership. This is not flattery. It is a fact.”² He is not the only one with this opinion: Georgia is often considered one of the most Western-friendly, non-EU member post-Soviet states, a country where both the public and political elites have a pro-European orientation. Even though NATO has failed to offer a Membership Action Plan- and the EU has kept Georgia’s hopes for membership at arm’s length – the Georgian public’s pro-European attitudes have not changed. More than 60% of Georgians still support Georgia’s integration into the EU, although this figure has declined recently.³ Overall, Georgia is considered a champion of democratic, economic and administrative reforms in the region, despite a number of setbacks. The fact is Georgian ruling elites are trying to integrate into EU structures as much as possible.

Yet, not all is as rosy as it might appear at first. Although the country’s European identity is an undisputable feature of Georgia’s political discourse, shared equally by the political elite and the public, democratization and liberal-democratic values have not been fully internalized either by society or the political class. Political elites, and especially those in power are, by default, focused on extending their rule, which often jeopardizes their commitment to demo-

cratic values and their relations with the West. Even during the staunchly pro-western and Western-educated political elite under former President Mikhail Saakashvili, the ruling elite’s reforms were more autocratic than democratic. In addition, important groups in Georgian society still believe certain liberal values endanger Georgia’s national identity. These sentiments are further fueled by anti-liberal and pro-Russian domestic actors in mass media, society, and the clergy, which portray the West as a decadent and hedonistic civilization that contradicts the traditional values of Georgian identity.

Even more alarming is the policy of indefinitely postponing NATO and EU membership, which puts pressure on pro-Western political parties and contributes to the increased popularity of Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) In just three years, the number of people who support joining the EEU has tripled from 11% to 31%.⁴ This tendency has added weight to the fear that, while it is unlikely any pro-Russian force will come to power anytime soon, it is highly possible that their rising popularity will end Georgia’s current ‘pro-West political consensus’ in the upcoming parliamentary elections .⁵ Russia’s strengthening role has not gone unnoticed: according to NDI polls from August 2015, Russian influence has increased by 17%, while the influence of the EU has decreased by 12% (figure1).

Figure 1: Overall, has the EU’s/Russia’s influence on Georgia increased, decreased or stayed the same since 2012? (%) (NDI-CRRC survey, August 2015)⁶



There are also domestic reasons behind the surge in pro-Russian sentiments. Under the Saakashvili administration, pro-Russian views were contained by the government's stigmatization policy, which often used anti-Russian rhetoric to boost its own popularity – and to intimidate and denounce the opposition, often falsely, as a pro-Russian Trojan horse that endangers Georgia's sovereignty.

After the 2012 power change, however, the new government abandoned the policy of anti-Russian rhetoric. Over the past three years, it has also taken a somewhat ambiguous stance toward the West. Moreover, it has often accused the West of lobbying for the former government and trying to cover up the crimes supposedly committed by former officials.⁷ Furthermore, a few members of the governing coalition have even advocated for Georgia's accession to the EEU.⁸ While these statements are just expressions of individual opinions, they decrease the credibility of the overall pro-Western foreign policy of the Georgian Dream (GD) government and increase the social legitimacy of pro-Russian parties and societal actors.

After the 2012 power change, Georgia entered a new era with both opportunities and risks. Whereas the real normalization of relations with Russia can stabilize Georgia's internal reform dynamics, the substantial shift in public opinion and the government's foreign policy orientation toward Russia could negatively impact Georgia's democratization processes.

Developing countries like Georgia need an additional external push to consolidate their democracies and implement good governance-related reforms. A pro-Russian Georgian government could be less inclined to implement democratic reforms due to weakened Western pressure, which would leave Russia as the country's only supporter. Secondly, Russia is not interested in having successful democratic states at its borders. A successful democracy in the neighborhood could raise questions about the dominant position of authoritarian governments in post-Soviet space and prove that post-Soviet societies are capable of building genuine democracies, which is a danger for the Kremlin's authoritarian regime. Finally, the EU and the

USA are the only external actors with sufficient experience in democracy-building in third states, proven by the transitions in the Baltic States and in Central and Eastern Europe.

All the post-Socialist states that have democratized have done so within the context of European integration. Therefore, the processes of European integration and democratization are tightly intertwined. Georgia can only achieve its democratic consolidation if it maintains its pro-European foreign policy orientation.

Over the past few years, Georgia has faced three main obstacles to locking in democratic reforms: the failure of Western actors to sufficiently empower the democratic reform coalitions in Georgia; the strengthening of anti-reformist forces, which are supported by Russia and feel stronger due to the current fatigue in the process of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration; and the overall lack of a democratic political culture among the ruling elites (both current and previous), which often conflate private with the public interests and focus on preserving power, rather than building democratic institutions. This paper will provide detailed analysis of all three points.

The next section discusses Western concerns and expectations for Georgia, and the failure of Georgian governments – both current and previous – to fully meet them. The paper will also focus on flaws in Western strategy and propose recommendations to fix them. In the third part, the increasing influence of Russia's soft power is analyzed and ways to contain it are proposed. The policy brief ends with a list of recommendations addressed to the Georgian government and civil society actors, as well as policy makers in the EU and the West.

WESTERN INTERESTS IN GEORGIA

The EU (and the US) want to establish a democratically-governed “ring of friends”⁹ in the post-Soviet states without violent conflicts, dysfunctional societies and flourishing organized crime.¹⁰ In other words, the EU believes that its own security interests can be best served by strengthening the stability and prosperity of its neighbors.¹¹

The European understanding of security and strategic interests radically contradicts that of Russia. The main objective of the Russian regime is to keep post-Soviet countries firmly under its control and to prevent the emergence of successful and democratic states on its borders, as they could one day serve as an example for the Russian population.¹² Therefore, “Russia [...] has actively sought to stifle any democratic change on its periphery”.¹³ Edward Lucas summarizes the difference between Russia and the EU: “Russian interest is to have the weak and unstable neighbors. The Russian concept of security presupposes the strong Russian influence in neighboring countries. Here lies the fundamental difference to the geopolitical concept of the EU, which requires the existence of strong, independent and responsible states on its eastern border.”¹⁴

Georgia is perceived by the EU as a promising neighbor on its Eastern frontier.¹⁵ It is interested in strengthening Georgia’s statehood and seeing that democratic and economic reforms succeed. Yet, whereas Georgia has implemented major successful economic and administrative reforms, Georgian governments have been less responsive in terms of democratization.

Nevertheless, compared to other countries in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region, the West has viewed Georgia as a poster child for Western democracy promotion over the past decade.¹⁶ It signed the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014 and completed negotiations on visa liberalization in 2015. The West, for its part, played a crucial role in the first electoral power transition in 2012. By publicly urging Mikhail Saakashvili to give up power, it did not leave much room for political manipulation, ‘forcing’ the Georgian president into the country’s first electoral power transition.¹⁷

After the power change, the West sought to further institutionalize the democratic rules of the game and urged the new government to constructively cooperate with the former ruling party. The new government, however, charged and imprisoned members of the former government, a policy that was criticized by the West.

The government and parts of Georgian society largely understood the West’s criticism –and

warnings to avoid the impression of selective justice –as interfering in domestic affairs or covering up crimes committed by members of the previous government. The criticism was, however, aimed at establishing an example of a democratic power transition without political retaliation. Although the remarks did not entirely deter the detention of former officials, they served to limit the number of arrests. Critiques by the West also helped to secure media pluralism in the country, saving the main opposition TV channel Rustavi 2 from governmental interference.

There is still a lot of work to be done: the Georgian government needs to improve key political reforms, which are, first of all, in Georgia’s best interest. Moreover, it should abandon the hostile rhetoric toward the West, which is further fueling the anti-Western mood in Georgian society. The government and parliament should also work on a common code of conduct, which will discourage some of their members from questioning the universal values of the democratic model of governance. Alternatively, the Georgian government’s unresponsiveness toward the West might further decrease the Western attention toward Georgia, which will harm the process of Euro-Atlantic integration and of democratic reforms in the country.

In addition to the country’s democratic situation, the EU and the US are also concerned with the deteriorated security situation in Georgia’s separatist regions and Russia’s increasing influence in Georgia, both of which negatively impact the democratic processes inside the country. So far, the West has not been able to cope with security-related problems.

For instance, its engagement in Georgia’s territorial conflicts was no match for Russia’s destabilizing measures. In addition, the continued policy of denying Georgia EU and the NATO membership contributes to the rising frustration in the population –and Russia’s increasing popularity. Thus, whereas the West has been willing to assist Georgia in its democratic development, it has not always invested enough resources to assist the South Caucasus country, especially in terms of hard security and territorial conflicts.

Recent Georgian governments also bear a

part of the responsibility for diminished Western interest in conflict settlement. The Saakashvili administration, through its hyperbolic approach to conflict settlement, was not able to gain the trust of the Europeans, who were too cautious to oppose Russia at that time. Instead, Brussels supported freezing the conflicts rather than conflict resolution. The situation drastically changed, however, after the beginning of Russian-Ukrainian conflict and Russia's annexation of Crimea, which inspired the West - for the first time since the end of the Cold War - to challenge Russia in its backyard. Now, the Georgian government has to more actively advocate for inclusion of Georgian conflicts into the Western agenda.

The Georgian Dream government has so far refrained from putting the issue of Georgian conflicts back on the agenda of Russian-Western relations, however.

If it is unable to do so, the Georgian issue will disappear from the Western agenda and the Georgian government will be left alone vis-à-vis acute security problems.

THE WESTERN FATIGUE

Despite many flaws in its strategy, the West is still the main guarantor of Georgia's democratic consolidation. As political culture is still underdeveloped, and the instruments of checks and balance are weak, Western democratic pressure has been instrumental in disciplining successive Georgian governments, which, as a rule, are inclined to resort to non-democratic measures in order to remain in power. As previous experience shows, however, whenever the West applied democratization pressure on Georgia, officials have been surprisingly responsive.¹⁸ Western criticism was essential during the Rose Revolution.¹⁹ In 2012 the West again stepped up democratizing pressure and persuaded the Saakashvili government to allow the country's first electoral power change.²⁰ Recently, the strict position adopted by Western states contributed to the Georgian Dream government giving up the temptation to gain political influence on Rustavi2 - the main opposition TV outlet.²¹

Yet, the West has not always been consistent in promoting democracy in Georgia, which has

harmed its image in the country and slowed reforms. More often than not, the EU and the US ignored democratic shortcomings and, sometimes grave, human rights violations by Georgian governments. The West did not react when the post-Rose Revolution government consolidated power in its hands and nearly falsified the 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections. Neither did it react sufficiently when the GD government started to prosecute former officials, raising fears it was pursuing a policy of selective justice. The West's reluctance harms both the democratic processes in Georgia and the West's reputation. More consistent democratizing pressure on Georgian officials from the EU and the US would benefit both sides .

The EU should also prepare for the post-association era in Georgia and ensure that Georgian government remains responsive to the EU demands for democratic reforms once all the juicy carrots (such as the Association Agreement itself and the liberalization of visa regimes) have already been eaten. For this reason, the EU should develop post-association mechanisms which can be modeled, for instance, on post-accession instruments, such as the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism in Bulgaria and Romania. The main objectives of such mechanisms should be the monitoring of the implementation of democratic reforms and 'punishing' the government in cases it does not comply with EU norms. The EU has to send a clear signal that, even after signing the Association Agreement, the institutional approximation of Georgia to the European Union is not irreversible, and that any progress achieved in relations can be rolled back at any time.

Inconsistency in democracy promotion is not the only flaw in the Western approach toward Georgia. The lack of the EU membership perspective has also undermined the West's democratizing impact. The EU's reluctance to offer Georgia something more than the vaguely defined close relations has weakened the pro-reform coalitions and strengthened anti-reformist forces on many occasions.²² Due to the current enlargement fatigue, among both the population and the political elites of EU member states, the EU may not be able to grant Georgia (and other EaP states) membership perspective in the short run. However,

there is no need to continue to refer to Georgia as a “neighbor” rather than a “European state,” and to constantly remind the Georgian political elite and the population that membership is not on the agenda in the long-term perspective.²³ For Georgia, which has had a very difficult process of identity building since regaining independence in the early 1990s, a clear commitment by the EU (and NATO) to accept it as a European country could be a strong inspirational incentive to stick to democratic reforms even without the immediate accession perspective.²⁴

The EU also needs to change its government-centered approach and focus more on Civil Society Organizations (SCO) as the main reform agents. Despite the recent inclusion of SCOs in its programs and an increase in financing of SCOs, the EaP – the main instrument of the EU – remains largely centered on the state, with state agencies its only partners in the reform process and policy dialogue. This is a fundamentally flawed strategy, as governments frequently act as main veto players in the reform process since they are trying not to lose their grip on power. Instead, the EU should increase its tools to empower citizens and SCOs in their push to reform their own governments. Moreover, the EU should make its assistance to Georgian government conditional on the sufficient inclusion of citizens’ representatives and NGOs in processes of democratic reforms.

CONTAINING RUSSIAN SOFT POWER

Russia does not directly challenge the processes of democratization in its neighboring states.²⁵ Instead, it effectively utilizes its soft power to mobilize post-Soviet societies against certain liberal-democratic norms and to portray the EU as a threat to their national identities. In recent years, Russia has internalized the role of the main protector of ‘traditional values’ versus the ‘decadent’ West.

In his 2013 State of the Union address, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Western countries of “reviewing moral norms and erasing national traditions and distinctions between nationalities and cultures”.²⁶ The Russian president portrayed himself as a defender of traditional

family values, which are “the foundation of Russia’s greatness and a bulwark against so-called tolerance – genderless and infertility”.²⁷ According to one author, “with the help of the Russian Orthodox Church, Putin began a battle against the liberal (Western) traits that some segments of Russian society had started to adopt”.²⁸ A prime example is when Russia criminalized ‘homosexual propaganda’, while suppressing LGBT and other minority groups who fail to fit the traditional Orthodox image promoted by the Kremlin propaganda.²⁹ Anti-homosexual propaganda moves easily throughout the post-Soviet states, since post-Soviet societies are not LGBT-friendly in the first place.³⁰ Aware of the deep resentment of parochial segments of post-Soviet societies toward the homosexuality, Russia reduces the notion of European values to that of active promotion of homosexual propaganda.

In Georgia, however, during the Saakashvili government, the country’s pro-Western foreign policy orientation was undisputed and the government was more eager to challenge Russian ideological narratives, for instance, by opening the Russian-language TV PIK and by limiting the broadcasting of Russian TV channels. As a result, there was little need for SCOs to step in to counter Russian soft power.

The situation drastically changed, however, after the 2012 power change. Although the Georgian Dream (GD) government has preserved the country’s overall pro-Western foreign policy, it has, at the same time, radically changed its approach toward Russia. As a result, the government’s mild policy has encouraged important parts of Georgian society – mostly Soviet-era intelligentsia and some media outlets – to openly campaign against the ‘decadent’ and ‘gay’ Western values and embrace close ties to Russia, which occupies part of the country but shares the same values and same religion (figure 2).

To cope with the increased popularity of anti-liberal and anti-democratic values, the current government should engage in a battle against Russia-supported propaganda, which is promoted by local pro-Russian proxies. It should, for instance, limit the broadcasting licenses for Russian TV channels and launch a media campaign to support the process of European integration

by explaining to citizens that approximation to the EU does not endanger Georgia’s traditional values.

But if the current Georgian government is not interested in containing Russian propaganda, it becomes the responsibility of the liberally-minded SCOs and the EU to handle the myths disseminated by the Kremlin-controlled media and its local anti-liberal partners. Georgian civil actors, who possess great regional expertise, can serve as local partners to the EU. A good example is the Ukrainian stopfake.org, a website made by the students of Ukrainian Kyiv Mohyla Academy, which exposes Kremlin’s lies by “fact-checking” the fabricated Russian media news. In addition to launching fact-checking media projects, the SCOs should conduct an active media campaign to explain the merits of the democratic form of governance, as well as the advantages of European integration and communicate the true image of the EU, to the broader public. They should especially focus on the sensitive issues that are actively utilized by Russia and local anti-liberal actors. For instance, it has to be sufficiently explained that the approximation to - or even becoming a member of - the EU will not automatically result in the legalization of the same-sex marriage. This is the only way to oppose the Russian propaganda directed against the West. Alternatively, the unchecked gospels of anti-liberal and pro-Russian forces might attract more and more citizens and further undermine pro-Western attitudes among Georgians.

In 2015, the EU launched its own ‘disinformation review’.³² Yet, the public visibility of these products remains a major problem. The EU publishes the review only on its web portals, which

are not accessed or read by the broader public, both in the EU and in the Eastern Partnership countries (EaP). The review does not have a Facebook page – the main social media which is actively used in Georgia for public political discussion.

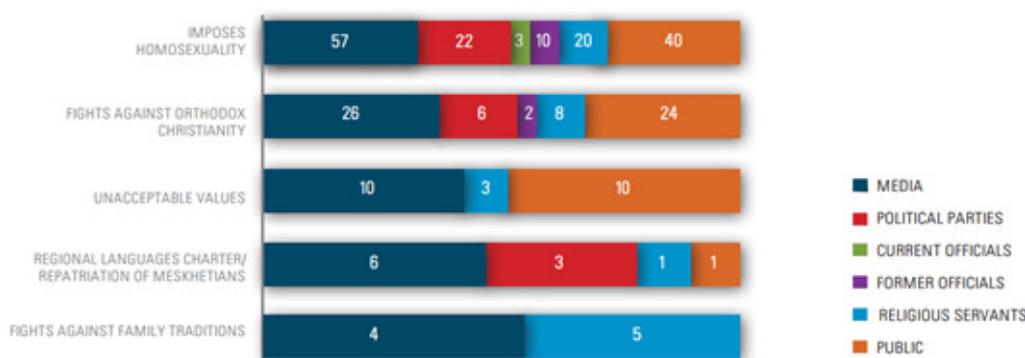
The EU has also tried to persuade the Georgian population about the advantages of European integration and attempted dismantle fears related to the Association Agreements and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, but again its explanatory material has never gone further than the webpage of the EU delegation to Georgia.³³

In order to be more effective, the EU should broaden its communication strategy. A campaign on the country’s main TV outlets to counter, as straightforwardly as possible, the anti-EU propaganda would be a good start. “Myth busting” will only work when it is successfully delivered.

Compared to the EU, US state agencies are more active in countering anti-Western propaganda. For instance, USAID recently financed the report on ‘anti-Western propaganda’ published by the Media Development Fund.³⁴ Nevertheless, as long as such kind of reports do not reach the broader population, inter alia by active campaigning through mass media, their impact will be limited.

In addition to the information campaign, the EU and the Georgian government have to work closely with the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) to limit Russian influence on the country’s most popular institution. The GOC’s informal structure is quite complicated and consists of

Figure 2: Types of messages concerning [Western] values and human rights (amount of messages between 17 February 2014 – 18 February 2015)³¹



several factions. Most of them are more inclined toward Russia, but there are also strong, pro-European groups.³⁵ The Georgian governments should empower the pro-European factions inside the Church through increased cooperation and public support. The EU should try to make the Church a cooperative partner in democratic reforms. It should offer church clerics increased possibilities to study and conduct research in European universities, as well as intensify contacts with European churches. Persuading the Georgian church about the merits of European integration and democratic development is tremendously important.

If this is not done, the alternative is a powerful Georgian Orthodox Church that will remain under the dangerous influence of Russia. That relationship will become a powerful tool of soft power for the Kremlin, which will try to instrumentalize its close connection to the Georgian Church to harm the process of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration.

Russian soft power in Georgia has also been strengthened through the intensified trade and business relations between Russia and Georgia that began in 2012, when Moscow opened the country's market to Georgian products. Georgian exports to Russia almost doubled between 2012 and 2014, amounting to \$274 million USD in 2014. Russian investments reached five percent of the country's total FDI in 2014.³⁶ Although the figures are still not high, stronger trade-relations with Russia makes important groups of Georgian exporters, such as wine-makers and mineral waters companies, increasingly dependent on the Russian market, and thus vulnerable to potential political pressure by Russia. Whereas the intensification of trade with Russia is not a negative development as such, the accompanying risks should be taken into account and adequately addressed by the government. Moreover, the government should develop alternative scenarios in case Russia begins to utilize increased trade and mobility contacts for political reasons. If it does not take these steps, the government runs the risk of repeating the pre-2006 situation, when the Georgian economy was vulnerable to Russian pressure. It is obvious that Russia, which is famous for instrumentalizing

economic ties for political reasons, will at some point try to use Georgia's increased dependence on Russian market as a "stick" against the Georgian government.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: MANAGING GEORGIA'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

In small countries like Georgia, the process of democratization is closely linked to foreign policy orientation and regional integration processes.³⁷ The experience in the post-Socialist world clearly shows that the process of democratization in small countries is best served by facilitating their approximation to Euro-Atlantic structures.³⁸ For instance, the Baltic States achieved a high degree of democratization and good governance within the process of their Euro-Atlantic integration. In this regard, the processes of democratization and of European integration are inextricably linked. That means attempts by certain anti-liberal forces, both of local and foreign origin, to discredit Georgia's European integration process and European values also undermine Georgia's chances for democratic development.

In light of this, there are three main challenges which should be urgently addressed by domestic actors to avoid autocratic backsliding – and to lock in Georgia's existing democratic reforms. First, the Georgian government and SCOs should ensure that the wider population knows about – and understands – the advantages of European integration and EU reforms. Second, the government and the SCOs should seek to contain Russian soft power by launching an active campaign to dismantle the Russian discourse that aims to discredit Western liberal-democratic values. Finally, the EU should also improve its democracy-promotion agenda by being more consistent in its relations with the Georgian government; by providing new incentives to strengthen pro-reformist parties; by closely cooperating with the Georgian Church; and by supporting the active campaign to improve its own image among the Georgian population.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Georgian government should:

- Limit the influence of Russian soft power, which is primarily aimed at discrediting Western-style liberal democracy, by, for instance, limiting the broadcasting licenses for Russian TV channels.
- Avoid ambiguous statements regarding the role of the EU and the democratic form of governance by some members of government and the ruling coalition's members of parliament by elaborating a common stance on foreign-policy orientation and liberal democratic values.
- Launch an active media campaign to explain to citizens that the process of European integration and Georgia's traditional values go hand in hand, and that the reforms demanded by the West are, in the first place, in the interest of the Georgian population.
- Analyze the risks of increasing trade and mobility with Russia and develop alternative scenarios in case Russia starts to use increased trade and mobility contacts for political reasons.
- The existence of occupied territories and security problems severely limits both state capacities and public mobilization for democratic reforms. The Georgian government should put more pressure on the West to prioritize Georgia's territorial conflicts and its security concerns in their agenda. The Georgian government should emphasize the importance of improved security for accomplishing democratic reforms.

The civil society actors should:

- Oppose Russian soft power by dismantling Russian myths, for instance by launching fact-checking media projects, such as the Ukrainian stopfake.org.
- Conduct an active media campaign targeted at the wider public to explain the merits of the democratic form of governance, as well as the advantages of European integration, and communicate the true image of the EU. They should

focus especially on the sensitive issues that are actively utilized by Russia and local anti-liberal actors. For instance, it has to be sufficiently explained that the approximation to, or even membership in, the EU will not automatically result in the legalization of the same-sex marriage.

- SCOs should actively monitor Russia's increasing influence in Georgian media. For instance, the dramatic changes in the editorial policy of the popular Maestro TV channel after it was acquired by Russia-based businessman.

The EU should:

- Improve its public image by broadening its communicating strategy and directly targeting citizens in Georgia through an active mass media campaign (such as launching short informational clips) to explain existing policies and to counteract the anti-EU discourse that is encouraged by pro-Russian politicians, parts of the 'intelligentsia' and several media outlets, and is supported by Russia.
- Be more consistent in applying democratizing pressure on the Georgian government to prevent autocratic backsliding and avoid being identified with officials' misdeeds.
- Develop post-association conditionality mechanisms to prevent the Georgian government from developing a sense of self-satisfaction from successfully accomplishing the Association Agreement and visa liberalization. The EU has to send a clear signal that Georgia's institutional approximation to the European Union is not irreversible and that any progress achieved in relations can be rolled back at any time should the government not comply with democratic norms.
- Offer new incentives, such as more economic benefits or new and more advanced ways of integration, to stabilize democratization reforms and stipulate the government's continuing adherence to democratic norms.
- Increase funding for SCOs and make them the main local partners in policy dialogue with the government, both in terms of policy adoption and policy implementation, as well as the reform monitoring process.

- Launch a dialogue with the Georgian-Orthodox Church (GOC) to identify areas of common interests and to use the Church's influence to reach the wider population. Provide the GOC clergy with study and research opportunities in European universities and educational centers. Support a dialogue between the GOC and the European Catholic, Evangelic and Orthodox churches.

REFERENCES:

- ¹ Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community Senate Armed Services Committee, http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Clapper_02-09-16.pdf, retrieved February 16, 2016
- ² EU Neighbourhood Info Centre. 2015. Donald Tusk says Georgia a front-runner in the Eastern Partnership. Available from <http://www.enpi-info.eu/eastportal/news/latest/41598/Donald-Tusk-says-Georgia-a-front-runner-in-the-Eastern-Partnership>>. Accessed 16 February 2016.
- ³ Gilbreath, Dustin. 2015. No, Putin is not winning Georgia away from Europe. Here are the facts. Available from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/12/21/no-putin-is-not-winning-georgias-loyalty-away-from-europe-here-are-the-facts/>>. Accessed 20 January 2016.
- ⁴ Cecire, Michael. 2016. Yes, Putin may be starting to win Georgia away from the West. Here's why that matters. Available from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/01/25/yes-putin-may-be-starting-to-win-georgia-away-from-the-west-heres-why-that-matters/>>. Accessed 26 January 2016.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Graph taken from: Social science in the Caucasus. 2016. The Georgian public's perceptions of the EU's and Russia's influence on the country. Available from <http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.hu/2016/02/the-georgian-publics-perceptions-of-eus.html>>. Accessed 3 February 2016.
- ⁷ Civil Georgia. 2016. Georgia in U.S. Intelligence Annual Report. Available from <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28974>>. Accessed 16 February 2016.
- ⁸ Tass. 2015. Georgia to move towards EU, not Eurasian union — prime minister. Available from <http://tass.ru/en/world/785068>>. Accessed 26 January 2016.
- ⁹ Prodi, Romano. 2002. A Wider Europe - A Proximity Policy as the key to stability. Available from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-02-619_en.htm>. Accessed 2 January 2016.
- ¹⁰ European Council. 2003. ESS: European Security Strategy. Available from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>>.
- ¹¹ Council of the European Union. 2009. European Security Strategy.: A secure Europe in a better world. Brussels: EUR-OP.
- ¹² Umland, Andreas. 2009. Understanding the Orange Revolution: Ukraine's Democratization in the Russian Mirror. Available from http://www.geopolitika.lt/index.php/www.ibidem-verlag.de/news.php?artc=3686#_ftn1>. Accessed 22 March 2013.
- ¹³ Walker, Christopher. 2011. The Authoritarian Dead End: The Arab Spring's Implications for the Former Soviet Union. Available from https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/NIT-2011-Release_Booklet.pdf>. Accessed 12 March 2014.
- ¹⁴ Lucas, Edward. 2013. Putin's Latest Hunting Trip. Available from <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB1001424052702304014504579247894276291648>>.
- ¹⁵ EU Neighbourhood Info Centre. 2015. Donald Tusk says Georgia a front-runner in the Eastern Partnership. Available from <http://www.enpi-info.eu/eastportal/news/latest/41598/Donald-Tusk-says-Georgia-a-front-runner-in-the-Eastern-Partnership>>. Accessed 16 February 2016.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Sherwood-Randall, Liz. 2012a. President Obama Meets with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili: The White House. Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/02/03/president-obama-meets-georgian-president-mikheil-saakashvili>>; Sherwood-Randall, Liz. 2012b. President Obama Meets with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili: The White House. Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/02/03/president-obama-meets-georgian-president-mikheil-saakashvili>>.
- ¹⁸ Börzel, Tanja and Bidzina Lebanidze. 2015. European Neighbourhood Policy at the Cross-Roads: Evaluating the Past to Shape the Future. MAXCAP Input Paper (13).
- ¹⁹ Börzel, Tanja, Yasemin Pamuk, and Andreas Stahn. 2009. Democracy and Stability? EU and US Engagement in the Southern Caucasus. In *Promoting democracy and the rule of law: American and European strategies*, edited by Amichai A. Magen, Thomas Risse-Kappen and Michael McFaul, 150–184. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- ²⁰ Börzel, Tanja and Bidzina Lebanidze. 2015. European Neighbourhood Policy at the Cross-Roads: Evaluating the Past to Shape the Future. MAXCAP Input Paper (13).
- ²¹ Civil Georgia. 2015. In Quotes: Int'l Reactions to Rustavi 2 TV Case. Available from <http://www.civil.ge/eng/>

article.php?id=28756>. Accessed 26 January 2016.

²² Babayan, Nelli, Tanja Börzel, Antoaneta Dimitrova, Julia Langbein, and Bidzina Lebanidze. 2015. 10 Years of the ENP - The Way Forward with the EaP. Available from <http://maxcap-project.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/policy-briefs/maxcap_policy_brief_01.pdf>. Accessed 24 January 2016.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Way, Lucan A. 2015. The limits of autocracy promotion: The case of Russia in the 'near abroad'. *European Journal of Political Research*:n/a-n/a.

²⁶ Vasilyeva, Nataliya. 2013. Putin defends Russian conservative values. Available from <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/12/12/putin-russia-gay-sochi/3997351/>>. Accessed 28 March 2014.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Barbashin, Anton and Hannah Thoburn. 2014. Putin's Brain: Alexander Dugin and the Philosophy Behind Putin's Invasion of Crimea. Available from <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141080/anton-barbashin-and-hannah-thoburn/putins-brain>>. Accessed 7 June 2014.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Babayan, Nelli, Tanja Börzel, Antoaneta Dimitrova, Julia Langbein, and Bidzina Lebanidze. 2015. 10 Years of the ENP - The Way Forward with the EaP. Available from <http://maxcap-project.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/policy-briefs/maxcap_policy_brief_01.pdf>. Accessed 24 January 2016.

³¹ Graph taken from: Social science in the Caucasus. 2016. The Georgian public's perceptions of the EU's and Russia's influence on the country. Available from <<http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.hu/2016/02/the-georgian-publics-perceptions-of-eus.html>>. Accessed 3 February 2016.

³² Rettman, Andrew. 2015. EU diplomats launch Russia 'myth-busting' weekly. Available from <<https://euobserver.com/foreign/131006>>. Accessed 24 January 2016.

³³ Babayan, Nelli, Tanja Börzel, Antoaneta Dimitrova, Julia Langbein, and Bidzina Lebanidze. 2015. 10 Years of the ENP - The Way Forward with the EaP. Available from <http://maxcap-project.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/policy-briefs/maxcap_policy_brief_01.pdf>. Accessed 24 January 2016.

³⁴ Kintsurashvili, Tamar. 2015. Anti-Western propaganda. Available from <http://www.media-diversity.org/en/additional-files/documents/Anti-Western_Propaganda_Media_Monitoring_Report.pdf>. Accessed 24 January 2016.

³⁵ Kapanadze, Sergi. 2015 // op. 2015. Russia's Soft Power in Georgia – A Carnivorous Plant in Action. In *The different faces of "soft power": The Baltic States and Eastern neighbourhood between Russia and the EU*, edited by Toms Rostoks, Andris Spruds and Andris Sprūds, 162–184. Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ambrosio, Thomas. 2014. Beyond the transition paradigm: A research agenda for authoritarian consolidation. *Demokratizatsiya* 22 (3):471–495.

³⁷ Ibid.

THE GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS (GIP)
is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.



საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

Georgian Institute of Politics
Tel: +995 599 99 02 12
Email: info@gip.ge
www.gip.ge