

CONFERENCE AGENDA



“POLARISATION TRAP: GEORGIA'S DEMOCRACY ON THE EDGE OF TRUST CRISIS AND THE RISE OF POPULISM” #GEODEM2019

Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel, Tbilisi | 03 April 2019

09:30	Registration and Morning Coffee
10:00 10:10	Opening Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">Prof. Kornely Kakachia, Director, the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)
10:10 10:40	Conversation with H.E. Carl Hartzell, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia Moderator: Prof. David Aprasidze, Ilia State University
10:40 12:00	<p>Panel 1: FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE? CAN WE SET POSITIVE AGENDA IN GEORGIAN PARTY POLITICS?</p> <p>Moderator: Laura Thornton, Georgia Resident Director, The National Democratic Institute (NDI)</p> <p>The first panel focuses on polarization among Georgia’s political parties and the radicalized nature of political competition. The high degree of polarization among party politics remains a major stumbling block for Georgia’s democratic development. Moreover, the parties often fail to offer voters a positive agenda. Instead of presenting their own visions for the country’s development and discussing the dire social-economic situation – or any of the many other issues that voters are concerned about – pre-election campaigns are often based on scandals and attempts to demonize one’s opponents. This strategy creates a zero-sum game among political parties and hampers the establishment of a stable party system. It also forces political parties into populist and radical modes of campaigning and enflames detrimental tendencies in Georgian party politics. In addition, it negatively influences the expectations of the electorate and radicalizes the entire political space, resulting in voter nihilism and political apathy. The increased polarization and uneven political conditions also deny other political actors the chance to compete fairly in the race. To address these concerns, the panel will explore how attempts to demonize and marginalize political opponents impact the electorate. It will also discuss best practices for building and maintaining trust in (traditional) political parties.</p> <p><u>The panel will address the following key questions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">How does maintaining/building trust work with traditional parties? (International context, foreign speaker)Why are Georgian political parties unable to maintain continuous contact/trust with the electorate? Why are they unable to offer a positive political agenda to voters, focusing instead on aggressive and negative campaigning?Why do political parties try to marginalize opponents? Does this process undermine voters' perception of political parties? Is it possible to restore the Georgian public's trust in political parties?Can political parties be “forced” to conduct more positive political campaigns? <p><u>Speakers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">10:40 Dr. Alessandro Nai - University of Amsterdam10:50 Archil Talakvadze - Georgian Dream11:00 Giorgi Baramidze - United National Movement11:10 Khatuna Samnidze - Republican Party11:20 Prof. Iago Kachkachishvili - Tbilisi State University

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12:00 12:25	Coffee Break
12:25 13:45	<p>Panel 2: CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA POLARISATION: HOW TO TRANSFORM PROCESS INTO PLURALISM?</p> <p>Moderator: Rayhan Demytrie, Foreign Correspondent, BBC News</p> <p>The intense polarization of political space in Georgia is not confined to political parties; it also extends to other areas. Extreme polarization and partisan reporting is a major problem for Georgia's otherwise pluralistic and vibrant media landscape. Similarly, civil society and public spaces are marred by increased radicalization and intolerance. The challenge is how to identify the thin line between polarization and pluralism in order to strengthen Georgia's democratic development. To address these issues, the second panel will talk about polarization in different segments of society, including the media and civil society, and will discuss ways to mitigate tensions. Members of the panel will also suggest how to turn polarization into pluralism.</p> <p><u>The panel will address the following key questions:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How does polarization affect the democratic process? What is the dividing line between polarization and pluralism?2. Are there ways/mechanisms to mitigate polarization in the media?3. How can partisanship and polarization be turned into pluralism?4. How can external factors influence polarization in Georgian society? What can be done to insulate civil society and the media from negative external influences? <p><u>Speakers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o 12:25 Dr. Marina Vashakmadze - Ajara TV, Public Broadcastero 12:35 Lasha Kavtaradze - Media checkero 12:45 Ana Natsvlishvili - Georgian Institute of Public Affairso 12:55 Prof. Fernando Casal Bertoa - University of Nottinghamo 13:05 Nino Robakidze - SAFE Initiative Eurasia Center Manager, IREX
13:45 14:40	Lunch
14:40 16:00	<p>Panel 3: “POPULISM IN GEORGIAN COLORS” - MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF RADICAL POPULISM</p> <p>Moderator: Felix Hett, Director FES South Caucasus, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)</p> <p>Finally, the third panel will address the challenge of rising populist nationalism in Georgia and discuss the potential to slow the momentum of the far-right. Following a similar trend in EU countries, radical populism has now arrived at all levels of public and political life in Georgia. Both mainstream and Eurosceptic parties use populist discourses and strategies to achieve their political objectives. Populism is also widely utilized by new, radicalized youth groups, media outlets and civil society organizations. In addition, the strong social-conservative attitudes of Georgian society makes the public especially vulnerable to Eurosceptic narratives. To address these issues, this panel will trace the recent rise of populist nationalism in Georgia: What does populism mean in the Georgian context; how does it differ from the concept of populism 10 years ago; and how do the trends in Georgia fit into the international context?</p>

*The annual conference is organized by the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)
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The panel will address the following key questions:

1. “Populism in Georgian colors” - What are the root causes of this political phenomenon? What are the main discourses, topics and challenges in Georgia?
2. What is the role of, and how influential is, right-wing populism in Georgia? Does the rise of right-wing populism threaten the stability of the political system? How can the Georgian government and society address the problem of radical populism?
3. How do Georgia's populist trends fit into the international context?

Speakers:

- 14:40 **Dr. David Sichinava** - CRRC Georgia
- 14:50 **Lasha Bakradze** - Giorgi Leonidze State Museum of Literature
- 15:00 **Grigol Gegelia** - European University Institute
- 15:10 **Eka Chitanava** - Tolerance and Diversity Institute
- 15:20 **Zaza Piralishvili** - Philosopher

16:00

Concluding Remarks

16:10

- **Renata Skardžiūtė-Kereselidze**, Deputy Director, Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)

16:10

End of Conference



საქართველოს პარლიამენტის ინიციატივით
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



**National Endowment
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