

THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF GEORGIAN DREAM GOVERNMENT: REALITY AND CHALLENGES

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Report 2021

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GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

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Abbreviations

USA	United States of America
UNM	United National Movement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
APG	Alliance of Patriots of Georgia
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
EUTM RCA	European Union Training Mission in Central African Republic
RIA	Regulatory Impact Analysis
RSM - NATO	NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan

Terms of Reference

This report is aimed at a wide audience including politicians and political parties, civil society representatives, think-tanks, NGOs, political foundations, international organizations, international and domestic observers, and pundits, as well as to wider public with an interest in party politics and governance. The report was presented in Tbilisi as well as in an online format with the aim of better informing the Georgian public and international community about the challenges inherent to Georgia's democratization processes; placing Georgia's reforms in an international context; and advocating for

Georgia's Euro- Atlantic integration efforts. The report will help strengthen the accountability of politicians and political parties to their constituents and promote more responsible election programs. Additionally, it will help the newly elected government receive constructive feedback from civil society activists, as well as Georgian think tanks and expert community, on their policies and planned reforms. For civil society, this report will provide a platform to voice their concerns and provide constructive policy suggestions.

Research Methods

The report is the result of close collaboration among Georgian experts. The writing process followed a number of methodological steps: concept development; the creation of research design and its contextual adaptation; collection, evaluation and categorization of primary and secondary data; triangulation of results through private interviews with Georgian experts; and analysis of results.

The report involved conducting research using both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the Constitution of Georgia, the Rules of Procedure of the Par-

liament of Georgia, Georgian Dream's election program, and various reports issued by the US, EU, and international organizations including the World Bank, Transparency International, and Freedom House. The authors of this report also conducted face-to-face interviews with Tbilisi-based policy experts. Secondary sources include news articles from Georgian and foreign media sources, academic papers published in peer-reviewed journals, and books, reports, and policy briefs issued by think tanks, research consortiums, and non-governmental organizations.

Summary

Georgia's parliamentary elections in 2020 resulted in a new political crisis, which further complicated the grave situation in the country resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. In the context of the present crisis, the newly elected government is facing particular problems. It should both overcome the political crisis and improve the troubled socio-economic situation caused by the pandemic. Under these difficult circumstances, political parties also have an important role to play in creating a stable political environment and putting the country onto a normal development track by working with the Government.

This report analyzes the foundations of the reforms announced and implemented during the first 100 days of GD's new government, which entered office following the October parliamentary elections. In particular, we explore GD's election program and assess to what extent campaign promises were implemented during the first 100 days. Furthermore, we analyze the feasibility of GD's electoral promises based on assessments provided by various experts. Finally, the report discusses ways to overcome the post-election crisis between the government and the opposition and the challenges that may be faced by government in Georgia in the years to come.

Major Findings and Recommendations

Economic Development and Social Welfare

- **Vaccination and economy.** In order to overcome the major social-economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that mass vaccination of the population should be carried out before the end of the year. It is essential that the government thinks about diversifying supplies of vaccines produced in the West, since according to various assessments the majority of developing countries, including Georgia, will not otherwise be able to vaccinate the required number of the population by 2022. Without mass vaccination, the need to introduce harsh social restrictions will remain, which will increase economic stagnation in every direction. It will threaten the country's macroeconomic stability and worsen its investment potential against the background of the record high levels of debt and budget deficits. Considering these factors, the damage incurred to small and medium businesses and individual well-being will be appalling.
- **Effective management of the post-pandemic economy.** Overcoming the post-pandemic crisis in developing countries, where economies are highly vulnerable to the pandemic, requires a consistent economic policy, and this implies both a short- and long-

term response to the crisis and the rearrangement of the existing economic structure. It is important that the government implements active economic policies during the post-pandemic period. The government's ability to find new ways to save small and medium businesses is the priority. More specifically, emphasis must be placed on the development of new formulas for public-private partnerships focused on starting local production and import substitution. Structural reform and the privatisation of state-owned companies as well as state assets must be accelerated. Investors' trust in the business environment must be increased, including through reform of the judiciary.

- **Reforming Pharmaceutical Field.** The Government should facilitate harmonization of legislation regulating the Georgian pharmaceutical market with that of the EU and start quality control of medicines through chemical checks, review the registration mechanisms for imported drugs and fight monopolies in the pharmaceutical business.
- **Reforming the Social System.** It is important to review the mechanisms for calculating the subsistence allowance, which is outdated and does not reflect the existing reality. When reviewing the subsistence allowance, the government should set the amount of all social welfare assistance packages, be they social support, social support packages for target groups or one-off assistance packages for the unemployed.

Foreign and Security Policy

- **Occupied Territories.** The Government should respond to the recent developments in relations with occupied Abkhazia. It is also important that the discussions emerging in Abkhazian society on a dialogue with Georgia be used to refuel the reconciliation policy.
- **Regional Changes.** Recent developments in Georgia's neighborhood, including the 2020 conflict in Karabakh, significantly altered Georgia's geopolitical and security environment. Therefore, the ruling party must critically analyse the risks and the opportunities of new realities and adequately respond to them, including in the areas of defense, regional transportation infrastructure and logistics.
- **Preparing the application for the EU**

membership. It is vitally important that the Georgian government approaches the application for EU membership in 2024 with great responsibility and prepares the relevant qualifying conditions for it. Georgia should present a package of reforms that have been implemented to convince the EU to take Georgia's application more or less positively, not as a mere form of words but a concrete intention. In these regards, stability and consensus among the major parties is also important.

- **EU/Atlantic integration and internal political challenges.** In parallel with deepening the relations with the EU and the US, the Georgian government should work on resolving the internal political problems and challenges without causing damage to Georgia's

reputation in the West. It is important that Georgia does not cross red lines in relations with the West and rationally

manages the risks that may be posed to EU/Atlantic integration due to domestic political problems and political instability.

Democracy and Human Rights

- **Polarization and Legitimacy Crisis.** The main challenges for the ruling party are to overcome the existing political polarization and find common grounds with the opposition parties. Overcoming this polarization could be accomplished for the long term by reforming political institutions, introducing a fully proportional election system and implementing a consensus-based political culture.
- **Fundamental Judicial Reform.** Despite the fact that judicial reform is an on-going process, it is still an Achilles Heel of Georgia's political system. Mis-trust towards the judiciary is a significant problem that makes the country vulnerable to political crises. Therefore, fundamental reform of the judicial system, and dignifying its reputation in the eyes of the population, are essential.

Introduction

During the last decade, Georgia has had a number of successes and failures, however, in the last few years the country has faced significant domestic and foreign political risks. The COVID-19 pandemic, social-economic stagnation and the constant political crisis cast doubts on the country's sustainable development and threaten Georgia's European integration. Today the country is a lot more vulnerable to global and local risk, and its potential for resilience is reduced.

In terms of political and democratic development, the country has been stagnating. Polarization and political radicalization have intensified to the degree that the major actors have no longer been able to communicate with each other without the intervention of international intermediaries. The country is still facing democratic challenges. Despite individual institutional reforms, the perception of the legitimacy of the judiciary and the Central Election Commission are at their lowest ebbs in the eyes of the population, which makes the country especially vulnerable to political crises. The latest post-election crisis is a vivid illustration of this. To overcome these challenges, fundamental institutional reforms are vital, particularly in the areas of the judiciary and of the electoral process, while the major political actors must conduct themselves with more responsibility.

The last four years have been marked by difficulties, including in the areas of economic and social policies. COVID-19 has further intensified the pre-existing issues, such as the devaluation of the currency, inflation

and the lack of foreign direct investments. Despite initial successful management of the pandemic, subsequent COVID-19 waves caused a near collapse of the healthcare system and created significant gaps in the social and healthcare systems.

The recent years have also been filled with risks and challenges in terms of foreign and security policy. The regional geopolitical environment, which was significantly altered by the 2020 war in Karabakh, added to already existing threats and difficulties. As a result of the new regional reality, risks as well as opportunities have been created that require long-term strategic management. In the context of these challenges, it is important that we analyze what expectations we can have from the new government over the next four years and also assess the measures taken by it during its first 100 days in power.

Despite the crisis in the country, the Georgian Dream government managed to more or less convince voters that the opposition did not offer a better alternative and won in a competitive, although imperfect, election. However, Georgian Dream now faces existential challenges in every area. The ongoing political crisis between the ruling party and the opposition is a significant indicator that Georgia does not have resilient institutions with high legitimacy levels that can ensure stability for the country. In order to establish them, it is vital to implement important, real and not superficial, reforms, primarily in the areas of the judiciary and election systems. Elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic

exposed multiple deficiencies in economic and social policies that also require reforms. Therefore, Georgian Dream voters and wider society are now expecting effective measures from the Georgian Dream government to defeat the pandemic, revitalize the economy and overcome the existing political crisis.

Effective policies from government are now even more important given the background over doubts surrounding Georgian Dream's victory in securing a third term in government. For the first time in the history of independent Georgia, one political party

managed to win the elections and maintain power for the third term in a row. In transitional democracies such as Georgia, the maintenance of power by one ruling party for too long usually erodes democratic institutions and good governance principles. Therefore, another task for the new Georgian Dream government is to avoid such erosion by implementing reforms that strengthen democracy and good governance.

The following report analyses the government's ability to overcome these challenges, based on the assessment of its first 100 days in power.

Economic Development

Election Program

 10 objectives outlined in the Georgian Dream election program for the economic policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Returning the budget deficit to 3% of GDP ○ Maintaining government debt at within 55% of GDP ○ Boosting the economy by GEL 20 billion, i.e. by at least 40%, by 2024 ○ Creating 200 000 new jobs ○ Fulfilling 85% of the commitments to harmonise legislation with that in the EU, as stipulated by the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement ○ Improving the business environment and the country's investment ranking ○ Completing the implementation of capital market and pension reforms ○ Building an additional 200km of highways ○ Providing natural gas supplies to 400 villages/small towns and 24 hour water supplies to 77% of the population ○ Providing 1 billion GEL in financial assistance to develop the agriculture sector
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Analysis of the economic part of Georgian Dream's party program

The economy comprises almost one third of Georgian Dream's program. In line with their election promises, the ideological platform of the party program is partially left-centrist: "effective" government and "social welfare" remain the main message of the program. Ministers with responsibility for the economy in the governing coalition focused on five major priorities during the election program presentations: 1) macroeconomic stability, 2) supporting business and private sector competitiveness, 3) harmonizing institutions and standards with the EU, 4) infrastructure development, 5)

strengthening the agriculture sector (GDDG 2020d).

Macroeconomic Stability. In terms of macroeconomic and fiscal stability, Georgian Dream states that during the next election cycle it would return to a 3% budget deficit relative to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The next objective is "returning national debt to secure level"- 55% of GDP¹. To develop resilience against foreign exchange shocks, the program envisaged the reduction of the existing deficit to 5% of GDP (5.4% in 2019) and export diversification.

¹ The Organic Law of Georgia on Economic Freedom (article 2) obliges the government to maintain 1) a balanced budget - the consolidated budget deficit ratio to gross domestic product shall not be more than 3% and 2) the ratio of state debt to gross domestic product shall not be more than 60%. (Parliament of Georgia 2011)

The program prioritised a focus on luring “high quality foreign direct investments” and “attracting high-cost tourists” in order to increase income. The ruling party promised to deliver an independent monetary policy, to maintain cost stability and a flexible exchange rate (GDDG 2020e, 23-25).

To increase support for business and competitiveness in the private sector Georgian Dream stated that it would continue to follow free market principles and would use Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)². While discussing the business environment Georgian Dream focused on the country’s progress in international rankings. In line with the ruling party’s projection, during the next election cycle the country should reach an investment ranking that would contribute to increased investments and create new jobs. The government would pay particular attention to structural reforms and the development of the capital markets as part of the support provided to businesses. The objective was to improve access to long-term finances for Georgian companies and to further stimulate investments in the economy. The reform of the law on entrepreneurial activity, among other things, should support “fast and clear resolution of disputes”, while the reform on insolvency should lead to the restructuring of viable companies and at the same time protect creditors and ensure effective utilisation of assets. With regards to expanding foreign trade, Georgian Dream planned to sign free trade agreements with India and Israel. Georgian Dream promised that by 2024 it would implement 85% of its commitments on legislative harmonisation with the EU, as stipulated by the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (GDDG 2020d, 25-35).

To overcome economic challenges caused by the spread of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and to help business as much as possible, the government planned to continue providing financial support through credit guarantee schemes, which would facilitate access to finances for the private sector.

Harmonization of institutions and standards with the EU remained the priority for the next four years. According to Georgian Dream, Georgia’s economic indicators should return to pre-pandemic levels next year and by 2024 the size of the economy would increase at least by 40% or 20 billion GEL, with GDP per capita rising by 5400 GEL, which meant the creation of 200 000 new jobs. According to the program, this would lead to better welfare for every household and the “eradication of poverty would become an irreversible process”. By harmonizing with EU standards, the ruling party hoped the establishment of strong institutions and the development of a competitive market would be possible. The government’s ambitious plan was to apply for EU membership in 2024 (1TV 2020a).

Infrastructure Development is another priority for the government. It plans to maintain capital spending (on roads and transportation) at 8% of GDP. According to the promises of the ruling party, by 2024 95% of roads should be of international standard (with the building of an additional 200km of highways) and 85% of the roads of domestic importance would have been repaired. In 2021-2024 it planned to invest more than six billion GEL for the development of regional municipal and other basic infrastructure. In

² Regulatory Impact Assessment is the assessment of the impact of legislative regulation adopted/to be adopted on various sectors. Source: (TI Georgia 2019)

the energy sector, it planned to supply gas to up to 400 villages and small towns, which would enable 90% of the population to use natural gas. In order to develop transit capabilities, it was planned to build 1140km of long-distance electricity transmission lines by 2024.

In terms of the **development of the agriculture sector**, according to Georgian Dream, the main objective of its policy was to increase exports of agricultural products and reduce the dependency on imported products. During the next three years, the govern-

ment planned to start systemic registration of 1.2 million hectares of land and privatize state-owned agricultural lands. During the thematic presentation of its agency, the Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture announced that “more than 1.5 billion GEL be spent on agriculture from the state budget alone, in addition there will be accompanying financial support from several major donor partners and this is a realistic promise” (BM Georgia 2020d). However, the program outlines financial support of only 1 billion GEL for agriculture (GDDG 2020d, 45–46).

Assessment

ELECTION PROGRAM	
i	<p>Summary:</p> <p>A significant portion of the economic aspect of the election program focused on measures implemented by the Georgian Dream government between 2012-2020. In the view of the ruling party, economic recovery after the post-pandemic crisis will be possible with small government, with a focus on the private sector and by fully utilizing Georgia’s economic potential. The extent to which these economic projections were backed by economic calculations was not evident in the program. However, the government has stated that the program was based on post-crisis economic policy recommendations from Georgian and international expert groups (BM Georgia 2020b). The economic part of the Georgian Dream election program clearly did not belong on a left-centrist ideological platform, which was the openly stated view of the party (GDDG 2020b). Rather, its economic program focused partially on messages such as maintaining low taxes, small government/less regulations and a free market. By doing so, the ruling party is positioing itself more as a centrist (partially right-wing) party (election compass 2020).</p> <p>Contradictory Issues:</p> <p>The Georgian Dream program emphasized that the policy implemented during previous years would be kept in place, with further development planned for every area. In some cases, it repeated promises of the 2012 and 2016 election cycles which had not been fulfilled or had been delayed in time and moved to the 2020 program. The Georgian Dream promised to create 200 000 additional jobs in four years in 2016, however, during the pre-pandemic period in 2016-2019, instead of an increase, the number of employed fell by 27 000. The ruling party representatives have stated that the number of unemployed and hence the unemployment rate has been falling.</p>

In this case, they are relying on data provided by Geostat, which stated that according to 2019 data the number of unemployed , in fact, decreased by 57 900 in 2019 compared to 2016. However, the decrease in unemployment may have been the outcome of a shrinking workforce instead of an increase in the number of jobs. According to Geostat, the number in the economically active workforce decreased by 84 000 in 2019 compared to 2016. This may have had various causes, including that of migration. Naturally, the number of unemployed would be much higher if this workforce remained in the country³.

Despite the government's project to expand Poti port, the Georgian Dream states that it still prioritizes Anaklia port. Yet, Anaklia Development Consortium and Georgian and foreign analysts blame the government for obstructing the process of developing Anaklia port(Chkhikvadze 2020; Netgazeti 2020c).

Feasibility:

How realistic is the Georgian Dream's promise that Georgia's economy would return to pre-pandemic levels and that the economy would increase by 40%, or 20 billion GEL by 2024? A rise in economic activity would be highly dependent on how long the restrictions lasted, how the business sector developed and the economic policies implemented by government. When we talk about the pre-pandemic state of the economy, we refer to data from 2019. Considering the fact that the economy decreased by around 6.1% during 2020, it is seems unlikely to return to the 2019 level with a 2021 projected economic increase of 4.3% (IMF 2020). This view is supported by the delayed vaccination process⁴, since without mass vaccination, the need to maintain various restrictions will remain in place, further aggravating economic problems. According to the National Vaccination Plan of the Ministry of Health, the government plans to vaccinate around 60% of its population this year, however, what is still unknown is timing, cost, and from whom the government will purchase the required quantities of vaccine⁵.

It is also noteworthy that the program discussed a nominal increase of the economy without considering the impact of inflation. In its scenario, a 40% economic increase within the next four years is a realistic and unambitious objective⁶.

The main claim of the election program is that the government would implement the required reforms and create the necessary conditions for an application for EU membership. Georgia has not made full use of access to the EU market as granted by the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) made between Geor-

³ The National Statistics Office has not yet published 2020 data. Source:(Netgazeti 2020a)

⁴ Georgia has guaranteed 1,484,400 doses of vaccine from the COVAX platform by 2021. Alternative sources are being considered for an additional 2,494,927 doses. 3,979,327 doses are required to cover at least 60% of the population.

⁵ Government Resolution #67, January 21, 2021. According to The Economist forecast, the majority of the developing countries, including Georgia, will not be able to get their required quantities of vaccines by 2022. Source: (EUI 2021)

⁶ Calculations indicate that an average 5.1% annual increase in the real economy would result in a rise of only by 22% over the next four years. Source: (Commersant 2021)

gia and the EU. Clearly, if most of the commitments made under the Association Agreement, including DCFTA, are met by 2024, Georgia needs to consider its next steps. At this stage, it is hard to tell if the Government would be able to implement the required measures and reverse any setbacks. Application for membership does not imply a necessity to fulfill every obligation, however, it can, among other things, act as a catalyst for implementing important economic reforms (Netgazeti 2020b).

First 100 Days

	10 steps by the Georgian Dream government in the first 100 days <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Steps taken to minimize the economic costs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic: ○ Maintaining capital expenditures at 8% of GDP ○ Approving the government program for 2021-2024 "Towards Building a European State" ○ Launching new services on the online platform tradewithgeorgia.com ○ Launching the reform of state enterprises ○ Updating the list of state-owned properties to be privatized and offering them to investors ○ Introducing new strategies for capital markets ○ Launching a program for temporary legal employment abroad ○ Adopting new legislation on bankruptcy ○ Measures facilitating domestic and foreign investments
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Analysis

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic caused global healthcare and economic crises and damaged almost every country and sector. Countries with tourism-based economies, such as Georgia, were hit the hardest. Restrictions introduced to stop the spread of the virus had a negative impact on the economy⁷. The government's anti-crisis plan was introduced during the first phase of the spread of the coronavirus in the Spring of 2020 and included three main components:⁸ 1. Caring for citizens and providing them with social support. 2. Caring for the economy and sup-

porting entrepreneurs. 3. Strengthening the healthcare system and fighting against the pandemic. Due to the epidemiological situation, in the fourth stage of its anti-crisis plan, in parallel with strictly targeted restrictions, the government continued during the first half of 2021 to finance anti-crisis measures to minimise the economic impact. In terms of the support for business, the total in 2020-2021 added up to 800 million GEL⁹, including automatic return of extra VAT¹⁰, tax relief to maintain jobs, financing credit guarantee schemes and waiving 2021 of proper-

⁷ In 2020 real GDP was reduced by 6.1%, which was the biggest fall since 1994. Source: (Geostat 2020a)

⁸ It was totally 3.5 billion GEL. Source: (Gov.ge 2020)

⁹ Out of which 955 million GEL is reflected in the 2021 budget.

¹⁰ However, the objective of the automatic VAT return is to implement the mechanism for correcting payment from taxpayer in the shortest possible time and has nothing to do with the pandemic or crisis.

ty taxes for the tourism sector. To sum up, Georgia started 2021 in a deep crisis, with some COVID-related restrictions still in place (acci.ge 2020).

Last December, Parliament approved the Government and its **Program for 2021-2024 “Towards Building a European State”** (GDDG 2020c). The economic policy of the program was directed towards maintaining macroeconomic stability after the COVID pandemic, reviving businesses that had suffered due to the pandemic and improving the investment environment. Rapid development of infrastructure to stimulate economic growth remained a priority. Besides that, according to the program, the government would continue to expand opportunities for employment abroad and to provide information support to job-seekers. Starting from February 2021, a seasonal employment program was launched enabling Georgian citizens to work in agriculture in Germany for a maximum of three months.¹¹ Germany is the first country to officially start implementation of an agreement on circular migration. According to the Ministry of Health, in addition to Germany three agreements were signed – with Israel, France and Bulgaria – with the possibility of launching them before the end of the year (IPN 2021b).

As for investments, the “aggressive campaign” announced by the government was not reflected in the program. During committee hearings as a part of the approval process of the new government, the Minister of Economy clarified that it was planning to present an updated large-scale list of state property, as well as state enterprises, to be

privatized to ensure rapid economic growth. In terms of state enterprises, the government has been considering a differentiated approach and did not plan to alienate strategic companies. Strategic entities such as railway, the electricity system and gas corporation would not be privatized – the government was only planning their corporatization and reform. In terms of property privatization, the government planned to present in March 150 properties for privatization.¹² Out of these 150, 50 would be new packages of assets that would be offered to interested businesses, together with their privatization terms and conditions (BM Georgia 2021a). More active privatization of agricultural lands was also being considered.

New insolvency laws and improvement of the legal framework for securities markets were named among priority economic reforms. The new law on “Rehabilitation and Collective Satisfaction of Collective Claims” should enable companies to “avoid the stage of bankruptcy and be able to recover at the rehabilitation stage” – stated the Minister of Finance, when commenting on the draft law.¹³ Within the framework of capital market development, pension scheme reform and the presentation of a new capital market strategy was planned in 2021, which should support the demand for GEL.

To support local production and export, a new function of the online platform www.tradewithgeorgia.com was launched, which offers a “one-stop shop” opportunity with various services for the exporting companies. The platform also included company selection and co-finance components for

¹¹ According to the LEPL Employment Agency, 86 395 individuals registered on a special portal within one week to seek temporary employment in Germany.

¹² It will include the former Parliament Building in Kutaisi and the so-called Rike Jugs.

¹³ The Minister of Finance stated that the “Doing Business” ranking, where Georgia held seventh place and covered numerous criteria, is to include the law on insolvency.

international exhibitions, which envisaged the selection of companies in a fully automated mode. The web page aims at facilitating access to Georgian export products and services for interested individuals (foreign importers, trade network representatives, etc). Additionally, it was planned to launch consulting centers – so-called business hubs.

According to the 2021 budget, the government foresaw 4.3% annual economic growth. It was evident that the pandemic would cause problems, at least during 2021, as evidenced by the 11.5% decrease in GDP in January, 2021¹⁴.

According to the draft 2021 budget, compared to 2020 the budget of the **Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure** had increased the most – by 551 million GEL (2,371 million GEL) – which was caused by the increasing cost of construction of highways, development of road infrastructure and rehabilitation of water supply infrastructure. More than half (65%) of these costs related to road infrastructure development. The increase in infrastructure projects is especially important for the country's stable long-term development. In the medium-term, maintaining capital costs at 8% of GDP is in line with the Georgian Dream election program promises, supports eco-

nomic growth and is an important source of investment for the generation transit income (TI Georgia 2020e).

The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable development suffered the most significant budget cut – of 353 million GEL (470 million). The cut was clearly related to rising costs due to the impact of COVID-19. The 2020 budget allocated 330 million GEL for a credit guarantee scheme, but this was reduced to 50 million GEL in the 2021 budget. The cut was logical, since according to December 2 data, only 16.4 million GEL had been used from the credit guarantee scheme. There were no funds available to support small, medium and family hotels next year, which decreased those costs by 70 million GEL (MoF.ge 2021).

Privatisation was planned to bring in an additional 150 million GEL, which was 60 million GEL more than last year's plan. In 2021 the government of Georgia will take 5.3 billion GEL worth of debt, of which 2.8 billion GEL is to cover earlier debts. Only foreign debt increased and by the end of 2021 the government debt will reach 32.1 billion GEL, which is 60.1% of projected GDP (illustrating the weight of debt in relation to the economy).¹⁵

¹⁴ Georgia's economic contraction slowed to 5.1% y/y in February 2021, in 2M21, real growth was down by 8.3% y/y.

¹⁵ According to the Law on Economic Freedom, the ceiling of government debt is 60% of GDP. Since the current debt ratio is higher than 60%, the government must present to Parliament a plan to return to the parameters as defined by law. According to the this plan, by 2022 debt will reduced to 60%, at 58.6%.

Assessment

	<h3>GOVERNMENT'S 100 DAYS</h3> <p>Main topics:</p> <p>Since the October elections, the political crisis has meant that the government has not been able to spend 100 days in office, however, it is still possible to assess the economic policies that have been implemented.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic crisis that started last year illustrated clearly the vulnerability of Georgia's economy. The country suffered a 6.2% fall in the economy in 2020. The situation has been complicated by the fact that Georgia's economy is dependent on foreign factors, including tourism. This makes up a significant portion of the country's GDP¹⁶ and its contribution fell by 81% in 2020 (2.7 billion USD). As a result of lockdowns, which were introduced twice in Georgia, the economy is likely to have suffered a 1 billion GEL fall in 2020, while foreign direct investments were reduced by 52.9% compared to 2019¹⁷.</p> <p>Significant devaluation of the national currency (by a total of 14.3% in 2020), reduced the income of most of households (more than half of households – 53% – suffered a reduction of monthly income) and increased prices on primary products (compared to previous years, prices of some products increased by more than 20% in 2020). This caused an increase in the number of people living below the poverty line and created hard social-economic conditions¹⁸. According to the latest research done by the World Bank, Georgia regressed on its success in fighting poverty during the pandemic – in 2020 the poverty rate increased by 5.4%, which created additional social risks (World Bank Group 2021).</p> <p>The timing and pace of recovery in domestic activities and the tourism sector are highly dependent on access to COVID-19 vaccines which will affect factors such as the dynamic of the spread of the virus and the probability of third wave restrictions. Other important factors include the continuation of an unstable political environment in Georgia. With the ongoing pace of vaccination, it is hard to see implementation of the initial plan of vaccinating 60% of the population being achieved by the end of the year, which is a vital pre-condition for opening up the economy¹⁹. According to World Bank forecasts, even in the best case scenario, Georgia would not be able to get close to the pre-pandemic level of the economy even at the end of 2022.</p>
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¹⁶ The tourism sector, including related services and restaurant businesses, make up about 25% of GDP.

¹⁷ In April 2021, IMF released updated economic forecasts. IMF revised downwards Georgia's 2021 growth forecasts to 3.5%, from 4.3% projection in December 2020.

¹⁸ According to research conducted to assess the post-crisis perspectives of the economy, the anti-crisis plan introduced by the Government of Georgia does not meet the needs of the poorest and socially vulnerable groups. The same research states that the prospect of the crisis dragging into 2021 was more realistic than any revival of the economy. Source: (EPRC 2021; Geostat 2021; RFE/RL 2020d)

¹⁹ As of April 16, 24,917 people (0.7%) have been vaccinated in Georgia. As of April, on average 1,318 people get vaccine per day. Acceleration of vaccination rate is expected from 2H21. (Galt&Taggart 16.04.2021)

If the political crisis drags on much longer and the tourism sector does not open up, the forecast will be far more pessimistic. Further devaluation of the currency (TBC Capital 2021) will cause price hikes on primary products. The Government of Georgia will not be able to implement stimulus and compensation measures through the budget, which will lead to poverty for thousands of individuals and keep many more in poverty.

Against the background of record-high state debt (60.1% of GDP) and the budget deficit (minimum 7.6%)²⁰, significant risks are posed to the country's macroeconomic stability. Further devaluation of the national currency²¹ is a significant risk factor as it may cause the national debt to rise, both in amount and relative to GDP, since 80% of it is denominated in foreign currency. (TI Georgia 2020e). If this happens, transition to the list of high debt countries will significantly worsen Georgia's credit rating and investment attraction. The government did not decrease the cost of administration, particularly consumer costs, which directly contributes to the increase in exports and outflow of foreign currency from the country. No other important reforms and no significant cost reallocation have been planned, according to the Budget.²²

To sum up, there is no clear important reform in the pipeline that focuses on not only rapid post-pandemic revival of the economy, but also on creating the economic structure necessary for sustainable and long-term economic growth. Individual decisions, such as the months-long idea of privatizing state property and a new capital market strategy, will not be sufficient to improve the investment climate or increase the competitiveness of the private sector (IDFI 2020). The main concern for the government should be the inflow of foreign investments, however, the world economic crisis and unstable environment in the region, coupled with the political crisis in the country, do not create an attractive environment for investors.

Compliance with election program

At the end of 2020, the economic policy in the government's program as presented during the approval process of the new government, and the state budget, aligned. The Government program is at first sight wide and comprehensive, yet, it is mostly generalized and does not usually clarify what specific measures are intended to be implemented to achieve the various objectives.

After Parliament's approval of the new government, the new Prime Minister – Irakli Gharibashvili – stated that his government would present a ten year plan for eco-

²⁰ According to the 2021 state budget, the budget deficit will equate to 7.7%

²¹ According to March 30, 2021 data, 1\$ costs 3.446 GEL, thus the GEL devalued by 3.4% during the past month. The National Bank ha sold 215 million USD in 2021 to reinforce the national currency.

²² Despite the current economic crisis, the Budget does not include a cost reduction policy. For instance, the salaries for temporary employees made up 99 million GEL in 2012, while in 2020 it exceeded 240 million GEL. Salaries of permanent employees increased by 600 million GEL, making up 1.6 billion GEL (without bonuses).

nomic development within 100 days. He also called the idea of a small government a myth and noted that the state should be actively involved in the economy (Netgazeti 2021b). Later on, the government established a commission to work on a long-term economic development plan and stated that it would present a first document by May. In this context, the question of whether or not the government's economic policy would be consistent and in line with the ruling party's election or government program remains open (BM Georgia 2021b).

Social Policy

Election Program

i	<p>10 new topics from Georgian Dream 2020 election program on social policy, with the focus on healthcare and social care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transitioning the reform on primary healthcare to the next stage and strengthening the system's function as a "gatekeeper" ○ Elaborating and implementing a post-diploma and life-long medical education development strategy ○ Implementing a unified tariff policy within the framework of a universal healthcare program ○ Harmonizing regulatory legislation for the pharmaceutical field with EU legislation ○ Postgraduate and continuing-education program strategy development and adaption ○ Gradual increase of pensions for people of retirement age by 300 GEL and not less than 400 GEL for the various pension categories ○ Effective management of the cumulative pension scheme ○ Improving the methodology for assessing social-economic conditions for socially unprotected families and rules on granting subsistence allowances ○ Increasing the amount for social packages and improving social-economic conditions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) ○ Implementation of effective labor safety mechanisms ○ Developing new family support services based on the objectives of the Code on the Rights of the Children
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Analysis of the social policy part of Georgian Dream's program

Georgian Dream focuses on principles for the protection of social justice and universal access to healthcare in the social development part of its program. Unlike other

areas, the universal healthcare program implemented by it may be more consistent with the left-centrist ideological principles (Partiebi.ge 2021) with which they official-

ly identify (GDDG 2020b). However, critics of the existing healthcare program question the universal welfare and justice principles when discussing its flaws because of a defective cost monitoring mechanism (Verulava 2020).

Among the priorities of the Georgian Dream election program were the rapid and effective transition of **healthcare system** reform to the next phase. The next phase of the primary healthcare reform envisaged early detection and the deterrence of illness among the population. This is clearly a positive initiative, since it should ensure the prevention of health issues before they reach a critical phase, and therefore reduce the costs for patients as well as for the state. However, the program did not specify ways to ensure that diseases would be quickly identified and prevented, which makes the promise rather vague. For the transition of the primary healthcare reform to the next stage, the Georgian Dream program envisaged improving primary services and systems for their funding, as well as further developing infrastructure and increasing the role of family doctors. In healthcare experts' opinion, in order for the initiative to succeed, it was important that the aim should be for well-considered care alongside the required prophylactic, which necessitates a targeted not a mass-oriented approach (Respondent 1, March 18, 2021).

The next stage of primary healthcare reform covers development of **digital technologies and telemedicine**. The initiative aims at increasing and facilitating access to the healthcare system. It needs to be noted that implementing the use of digital technologies in medicine was speeded up by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, digitalizing the healthcare sector across the country requires adequate equipment at medical centers, full re-

training of healthcare workers and efficient control by the doctors to ensure their effective use.

The Georgian Dream election program emphasized the implementation of a **unified tariff policy** within the framework of a universal healthcare program. The main idea of the initiative was to establish unified standards and quality. According to a government official, completion of the unified tariff system was planned for April 2021, which would contribute "to the decrease of the costs from the pockets of population" (Respondent 2, March 19, 2021). A unified tariff system covers public as well as private medical facilities and started gradually in 2019 (Matsne.gov.ge 2019). Defining a unified tariff caused protests and discontent among private clinics (1TV 2019). They protested about the determination of tariffs by the MoH without consultations with medical personnel and specifically with private clinics.

Next to the unemployment problem, Georgian Dream named medicine quality and price as related challenges (Respondent 2, March 19, 2021). Even though a number of producers in this field have already attained ISO and GMP certificates, public trust towards Georgian producers is still very low, since the quality of medicines is not controlled.

As for the priorities in the area of **Social Security** in the Georgian Dream election program, the primary objective was named as an increase in pensions. This was planned to be implemented based on economic parameters and creation of social guarantees for the population of retirement age, in the context of low taxes. The initiative would have a positive impact on tax regulation, and the avoidance of price increases on primary

products, and improved access to medicines would be ensured. Together with the pension increase, implementation of an accumulative pension scheme is an important initiative. Thus their plan envisaged effective management of the pension system and its investment assets, which must be considered to be in the interests of scheme participants and their heirs.

In addition to plans for the population of retirement age, the Georgian Dream program also mentioned the methodology for assessing the socio-economic situation of socially vulnerable families and the rules for issuing subsistence allowances, as well as facilitating the employment of capacitated members of socially unprotected families. However, the program did not mention the ways in which Georgian Dream planned to improve the socio-economic state of these individuals. Additionally, the Georgian Dream election program envisaged an increase in social packages for targeted groups and improving socio-economic conditions for the IDPS, which is clearly a positive initiative. However, the program did not reflect the situation caused by the pandemic both in Georgia and internationally. Despite a background of worsening socio-economic conditions in

Georgia and the loss of jobs, the program did not emphasise forming an effective pandemic social strategy.

Another priority that is defined at the legislative level within the framework of the Association Agreement concerns **labour rights**, inspection and employment. In these regards, the program outlined matters related to strengthening the existing mechanisms of labour inspection and employment support.

Additionally, the **Code on the Rights of the Children** went into force in September 2020, aiming at maximum protection of children and youth and consideration of their needs, in which local self-governments have a special role. Taking into consideration the objectives of the Code, the Georgian Dream program included the development of family support services and effective functioning of central and local care and guardianship entities. In terms of the protection of the rights of children, the program also needs to consider the important role of social workers. The present number of social workers is insufficient to enable them to effectively fulfill their functions and to protect their rights – an issue that is not emphasised in the program.

Assessment



ELECTION PROGRAM

Summary:

Aims and plans for healthcare and social protection objectives were discussed extensively in the Georgian Dream election program. Priorities and plans listed areas at strategic level that needed to be improved, refined, toughened or implemented in terms of healthcare and social protection. However, the program did not outline in sufficient details either the mechanisms or ways to achieve these objectives and fulfill the plan. The latter was better presented at indicator level in the government document Expected Outcomes and Indicators of the Programmes Envisaged by the 2021, State Budget of Georgia (Parliament of Georgia, 2020), as illustrated in the following table.

Table 1: Projected outcomes and indicators of the programs envisaged by the budget

**ბიუჯეტით განსაზღვრული პროგრამების მოსალოდნელი შედეგები და ინდიკატორები
ხელმისაწვდომი, ბარისხანი ჯანმრთელობის დაცვა და სოფიალური უზრუნველყოფა**

კოდი	დასახელება	2021 წლის მონაცემები	მ.მ. სამოუწოდო სასსრტბი		2022 წლის მონაცემები	2023 წლის მონაცემები	2024 წლის მონაცემები
			სამოუწოდო სასსრტბი	საკუთარი სასსრტბი			
27 02	მოსახლეობის სოციალური დაცვა	3,579,390.0	3,579,390.0	-	3,614,200.0	3,898,900.0	4,163,000.0
27 03	მოსახლეობის ჯანმრთელობის დაცვა	1,103,972.0	1,103,972.0	-	1,274,200.0	1,289,000.0	1,324,000.0
27 01	ოკუპირებული ტერიტორიებიდან დაცილება, მომზადება, ჯანმრთელობისა და სოციალური დაცვის პროცესების მოწოდევა	61,868.0	59,978.0	1,890.0	75,570.0	75,170.0	72,170.0
27 04	სამდგრადონ დაწესებულებათა რეაბილიტაცია და აღჭურვა	30,000.0	30,000.0	-	55,000.0	55,000.0	55,000.0
27 05	მოწმობისა და დასაქმების სისტემის რეფორმიზაცია და პროგრამა	6,860.0	6,860.0	-	8,000.0	8,000.0	8,000.0
21 00	სსპ - საქანიო საკეთებები	4,400.0	4,400.0	-	5,000.0	5,000.0	5,000.0
30 05	საქრონიკო მოწმობის საქმიანობის სამინისტროს სისტემისა და საქრონიკოლის სახლმწიფო უსამართხოების სამსახურის მოსამსახურებთა ჯანმრთელობის დაცვის მომსახურებით უზრუნველყოფა	4,280.0	4,180.0	100.0	4,223.0	4,223.0	4,223.0
39 00	ა(ა)ეს - საქრონიკოს სილოდნების ფონდი	260.0	260.0	-	260.0	260.0	260.0
	ჯამი	4,791,030.0	4,789,040.0	1,990.0	5,036,453.0	5,335,553.0	5,631,653.0

Source: Parliament of Georgia 2020

When assessing the healthcare part of the Georgian Dream election program, it is important to focus on three areas: firstly, introduction of the universal healthcare system to ensure the availability of healthcare services to the population was clearly a positive development, however its cost has become a tremendous burden on the annual state budget (Verulava 2016). A number of experts think that the solution for correctly distributing costs and controlling quality may be via a selective approach that would allow a choice of properly qualified medical facilities for participation in state programs (EMC 2020). In addition to quality control, a number of independent experts consider the problem to be the lack of control of hospital bills on part of the government (Respondent 3, March 24, 2021). However, one way to control expenditure may lay in the Ordinance of the Government of Georgia 520, 2019, which, referring to the Georgian Dream election program, talks of the implementation of a

unified tariff process within the framework of a universal healthcare system. Even though the unified tariffing process has not yet been completed, it has caused differences of opinion among experts. According to a representative of the government, the number of clinics had significantly increased and this had increased accessibility on the one hand and tariffs on various services on the other hand, which complicated the process. Thus, according to the respondent, the introduction of a unified tariff system was important to ensure that the budget was not overspent (Respondent 2, March 19, 2021). The opinions of the government representative and an independent expert were in line in terms of the need to review tariffs, which had not changed since 2013. However, according to the independent expert, launching a unified tariff system was problematic without consulting with clinics and associations. According to him/her, "it is better to control rather than prohibit something, since any business will be able to find the way out" (Respondent 3, March 24, 2021).

The third, no less important, issue linked to healthcare is pharmaceutical policy and challenges related to it. When we talk about the harmonization of pharmaceutical legislation with the EU, it must not imply verification of documents of medicines, local or imported. Instead, it is important to do a quality check that implies that a chemical inspection has been carried out(Metronome.ge 2017). Today no such practice exists in Georgia (Respondent 2, March 19, 2021; Respondent 3, March 24, 2021). Besides, according to an independent expert, today there are three companies which have a monopoly on the pharmaceutical market of Georgia - GEPA (GPC and Pharmadepot), PSP and Aversi (Respident 3, March 24, 2021). No initiatives to fight these monopolies were outlined in the Georgian Dream program.

The Georgian Dream election program does not emphasize minimum wage, subsistence allowance or a right to housing. However, it describes in length program objectives for supporting IDPs, as well as social support and increasing the support provided to recipients of targeted social packages. Any kind of social package should be built around basic needs. This will be impossible unless the rule for calculating the subsistence allowance is rewritten; currently it is calculated according to 1997 legislation (Matsne.gov.ge 1997).

Contradictory issues:

Even though the government knew that the pandemic would be part of our lives for at least one year, the Georgian Dream program was very general and unfit for such an extraordinary situation – except for the parts on telemedicine and technological development. It is worth mentioning that the 2021 budget did not include finances for COVID-19 quarantine measures, and what is more, the amount provided for the universal healthcare program was reduced by 42 million GEL (TI Georgia 2020e).

Feasibility:

Plans reflected in the Georgian Dream election program were more or less based on attainable goals, however, the program focused less on potential risks. During

the pandemic, the government may have to face challenges that require a complete review of plans related to the healthcare or social protection measures outlined by the program.

Implementation of a unified tariff policy under the framework of the universal healthcare program may face challenges. These challenges may be related to a prolonged negotiation process with private clinics and associations. The competitiveness of clinics on the medical market may be reduced and they may be threatened with loss of patients, and thus closure, due to the equalizing of tariffs, or private clinics could evade regulations. Unified tariffs in the healthcare sector may cause discontent among doctors because of the fact that they might not be able to work simultaneously in multiple healthcare facilities (Respondent 1, March 18, 2021). Without the provision of appropriate salaries, the prohibiting of qualified doctors from working in multiple medical facilities may cause a big protest.

Implementing effective mechanisms for labor safety should mean increasing the roles and authorities of labor inspectors, which includes inspecting facilities at any time during working hours (Amiranashvili 2020). A number of business representatives believe that the institute of labour inspector may then become a punishing mechanism, while others think that due to a lack of resources, despite its increased legal authority, the work of labour inspection will not be effective and will be hard to implement (BM Georgia 2020a).

First 100 Days



Georgian Dream's 10 steps towards healthcare and social protection during the first 100 days

- Launching the 4th phase of the government's anti-crisis plan
- Starting vaccination
- Starting fundamental healthcare reform
- Giving cardioverter-defibrillators for free
- Increasing tariffs on taxes
- Launching pension indexation mechanisms and increasing pensions
- Increasing the mandate for labour inspection from 2021 and approving the labor time recording form and the rules of recording
- Launching a program for Georgian citizens for temporary legal employment in Germany
- Resettling IDPs and eco migrants and providing them with housing
- Arranging playgrounds for children in multiple IDP settlements and providing the settlements with the equipment to support agricultural work

Analysis

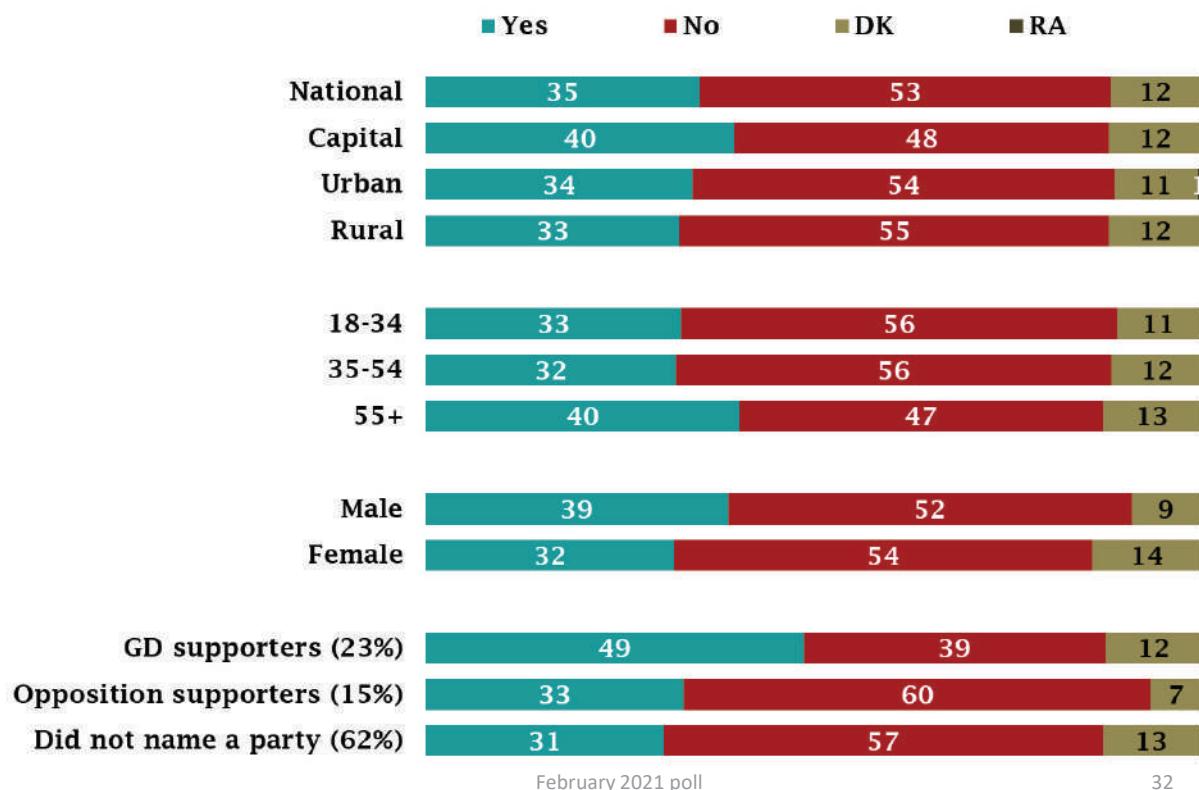
The launch of fundamental healthcare reform is one of the main priorities for Georgian Dream, which started on March 16, 2021. This reform is the next stage of primary healthcare reform, which was also stipulated in their election program. The reform envisages increasing the quality of diagnostics, treatment and prophylactic measures and enhancing the qualification of doctors (1TV 2020b). Additionally, within the framework of the national universal healthcare program, the government started a cardiac surgical project. With this project, the National Healthcare Agency will provide vital heart devices of Western quality – cardioverter-defibrillators – to patients for free (moh.gov.ge 2021).

COVID-19 pandemic vaccination issues have overridden the implementation of the government's planned priorities. At the be-

ginning of 2021, access to vaccination was the main challenge for the healthcare system. There were halts in the negotiation process between the relevant entities of the government and the COVAX platform which delayed the shipment of the COVID-19 vaccine Pfizer (USA/Germany) to Georgia (Interpressnews 2021). However, Georgia received the British vaccine AstraZeneca (UK, Sweden) at the beginning of March and Pfizer at the end of the month. Despite the start of the vaccination process, a recent public survey conducted by NDI shows that trust in vaccines among the population is not that high: 53% say that they will not vaccinate, 35% will vaccinate and 12% are undecided (CRRC/NDI 2021). The table below shows responses according to demographics, which clearly illustrate that regardless of age, gender, geographical location or political preferences, views do not differ much.

Table 1: Public opinion about vaccination with COVID-19 vaccines

Would you or would you not get vaccinated?
(q21 X Settlement, Age, Gender, Party closest to you)



32

Source: (CRRC/NDI 2021)

Anti-crisis plans have been the main social intervention mechanisms for government during the pandemic. The fourth stage of the anti-crisis plan includes new assistance packages for citizens and the private sector (stop.cov.ge 2020). The total budget for the citizens' assistance program is 545 million GEL to provide support to more than 500 thousand beneficiaries. This budget does not include finances provided for subsidising utility bills. It includes a 200 GEL monthly payment to individuals in the formal sector who have been left unemployed; a 300 GEL one-time payment for individuals who had to stop economic activities in the December-January period as a result of the restrictions; the assistance package also includes an additional 100 GEL monthly over a six

month period for socially unprotected and disabled individuals; individuals employed by businesses that had to stop economic activities during the December-January period were given an opportunity to defer loan repayments.

A number of experts have positively assessed the government's decision to provide 300 GEL social support packages to the self-employed (Respondent 4, March 18, 2021). However, the assistance mechanisms within the framework of the anti-crisis economic plan for street traders is uncertain. For some of them ways to participate in this scheme are still vague because of the informal nature of their economic activities (Karapetiani 2020). The same is true for babysit-

ters, caregivers, housekeepers and other self-employed individuals (PIA 2020).

The second part of the anti-crisis plan includes assistance packages for businesses worth 515 million GEL. This includes tax cuts on income: more specifically, “individuals with salary of 1500 will be waived of income taxes on up to 750 GEL between December-May 2021” (stop.cov.ge 2020). The initiative also includes property tax cuts for individuals employed in the tourism sector, micro grants for entrepreneurs, restructuring of existing loans for the private sector and in some cases even deferral of loan payments. The total budget for the new package is 1.1 billion GEL (stop.cov.ge 2020).

Starting from 2021, tariffs have been increased on electricity and water (Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission, GNERC, 2020). Resulting from a GNERC decision, the residential electricity price for Telasi subscribers in Tbilisi will increase by 3.497 GEL. As for the regions, the price was increased by 3.494 GEL for subscribers of Energo-Pro Georgia (Civil.ge 2020a). This decision impacts social matters as it may have a negative effect on the socio-economic conditions of vulnerable groups. When amounts for social packages were being determined, it would have been sensible to consider in advance the potential increase in tariffs.

During its first 100 days, the government increased pensions for pensioners under the age of 70 by 20 GEL, giving a total of 240 GEL, and by 25 GEL for pensioners over

70, giving 275 GEL. Pensions for individuals in high mountain settlements were increased to 288 GEL, and for those over 70, to 330 GEL. However, the program stated that pensions would be increased in the context of low taxes. Should taxes and the prices on grocery items increase, this initiative will no longer have the same positive impact as under the conditions of low taxes and prices. It needs to be mentioned that according to the National Statistics Office’s (Geostat) data, the price on food products has increased significantly since November, 2020 (Geostat 2020b).

Legislation on labor rights has been visibly improved during the last couple of years. The mandate for labor inspection has been increased from 2021 and recording labor hours has become mandatory (BM Georgia 2020a). The labor inspector has been assigned the authority to enter and inspect without prior notice (Order №01-15/n on approving the labor time recording form and the rules of recording 2021). Calculating unemployment statistics in Georgia with new methodology is another important process (BM Georgia 2019). The work related to the implementation of new standards has been ongoing actively since 2019 (Geostat 2020b). Another initiative, related to labor migration, that caused a lot of interest among Georgians has been the temporary employment program in Germany. Within 24 hours of the launch of this program 35 121 citizens filled in application forms (RFE/RL 2021), a high level of interest that pointed out the hard social and economic challenges in Georgia.

Assessment



FIRST 100 DAYS OF GOVERNMENT

Main topics:

Measures implemented during the first 100 days of Georgian Dream government were limited to the measures outlined by the anti-crisis strategy, but the priorities of the election program of Georgian Dream did not include measures to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. The start of vaccination only became possible at the end of the 100 days of the new government, and the government failed to adequately prepare the public for the vaccination process. As a result, trust in the vaccines was very low, especially at the beginning of the vaccination process: 48% of those who refused vaccination named the low quality of the vaccine as a reason for refusal (CRRC/NDI 2021). The low trust may be caused by various conditions. However, in the view of a number of independent experts, one of the main reasons for mistrust was that the government was not effective in providing information to the population on vaccination, vaccine quality, proper vaccination methods and potential side effects. (Respondent 1, March 18, 2021). The launch of telemedicine mechanisms and their targeted use is particularly important in these circumstances. To gain the trust of the public, it is also essential that all the important protocols preceding vaccination process are followed thoroughly.

As for the targeted social assistance, be it the additional 100 GEL for recipients of social assistance, assistance packages for persons with disabilities or other social groups, or small amounts of compensation for unemployed individuals, this initiative will only bring tangible results if the rule for calculating subsistence allowance is changed and a minimum wage is determined. Without calculating a subsistence allowance adequate to the existing reality, the social package offered to citizens by the government does not have the potential to mitigate hard social conditions and may be considered as more of a PR move against the background of rising costs for primary products and higher taxes.

Additionally, instead of equally redistributing targeted social packages, it would be more sensible if the government determined the type of financial support based on a specific needs and allocated the funds more rationally (Kandelaki 2020). With more effective work by the revenue service, it would be easier to check the socio-economic conditions of the population (individuals or households).

Compliance with the election program:

Since the 2020 parliamentary elections the start of the fundamental primary health-care reform, the launch of pension indexation mechanism and the gradual increase in pensions are among the measures implemented within the first 100 days that are in line with the Georgian Dream program. Also in line are initiatives to improve the social and economic measures for IDPs in a number of cities by resettling and

providing new housing for them. No tangible results are evident with regards to improving pharmaceutical policy, the unified tariff system or harmonisation of pharmaceutical legislation with that of the EU. In terms of employment, the most visible initiative is the support for temporary legal employment in Germany, although the government has not done much to support employment programs locally. This may also be the result of the hard social conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, when the government was mostly focused on alleviating the social-economic conditions of the people that were left unemployed. To conclude, priorities outlined in the Georgian Dream program and the measures implemented by the government are not very far from each other. However, because the program does not anticipate problems or the possible impact and risks of the pandemic, implementation of the program initiatives has been delayed and measures put in place to overcome the socio-economic crisis are mostly reactive.

Foreign and Security Policy

Election Program

i	<p>10 main foreign policy objectives of Georgian Dream election program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Peaceful restoration of territorial integrity ○ Peaceful resolution of the Russian-Georgian conflict; strengthening contacts with Russia with national interests in mind ○ Preparing for an official application for EU membership by 2024 ○ Finding new opportunities for Georgia-EU relations within the Eastern Partnership Initiative and further developing cooperation ○ Effective use of political and practical mechanisms to facilitate the prospect of NATO membership ○ Further deepening strategic partnership with the US ○ Deepening contacts with Asian, Middle Eastern, African and South American countries ○ Balanced and consistent neighborhood and regional policy and strengthening Georgia's transit and economic hub functions ○ Actively pursuing Georgia's soft power abroad ○ Intensive implementation of a Total Defense approach in the national defense system development process
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Analysis of foreign and security policy part of Georgian Dream party program

Priority areas for foreign and defense policy in the Georgian Dream program included issues with the territorial conflicts and restoration of country's sovereignty, Euro-Atlantic integration, deepening bilateral strategic partnership with the US and balanced relations in the neighborhood, including with Russia.

In terms of foreign policy, the election platform of Georgian Dream was based on maintaining **"pragmatic" approaches and balance among big players**, which does not differ much from the general foreign policy view adopted over the past years. **Peaceful restoration of territorial integrity** remains as the

priority among officially declared objectives. To those ends, the government seems to be planning specific measures, such as "peaceful resolution of Russian-Georgian conflict, intensifying the Geneva format, working on occupied territories through the de-politicization of humanitarian matters and human rights, implementation of reconciliation and engagement policy and consolidation of non-recognition policy" (GDDF 2020a, 2020d). However, this part of the program offers more general formulation and fewer specifics.

At the same time, **membership in Euro-Atlantic organizations** remains to be the pri-

ority in the ruling party's foreign policy objectives. Unlike similar past documents, the 2020 election program included the promise to prepare for the official application for EU membership.

In terms of **Euro-Atlantic integration**, according to the Georgian Dream pre-election program, NATO membership was still a priority. However, according to the program, Georgian Dream does not consider it as a final objective for this term and focuses mainly on "getting closer to the prospect of NATO membership" in its agenda (GDDG 2020d). In these regards, the list of measures to be taken outlines more specific objectives planned by the party on its track towards membership. However, some of the points are rather general, which makes the promise more vague.

In the context of bilateral relations with other countries, Georgian Dream's vision is based on the promise to **deepen partnership with the US**. General areas of cooperation are listed as "defense capability, Euro-Atlantic integration, the end of occupation of the country, deepening of trade-economic relations and US support in the process of economic and democratic consolidation" (GDDG 2020d). Amidst this, "the work on free trade agreement with the US with the aim of its final approval" must be emphasized.

In the context of bilateral relations, the election program also covered the vision on strengthening relations with **European, Asian, Middle Eastern, African and South American regions**. However, objectives and priorities in these areas were presented in a rather general way and provided insufficient information. The same can be noted on the vision for relations within the neighborhood: the significantly changed geopolitical situation is inadequately reflected in

the strategy followed by Georgian Dream. Meanwhile, processes related to border demarcation with Azerbaijan and Georgian Dream's position on Azerbaijan are worthy of attention. Davit Zalkaliani – the Minister of Foreign Affairs – focused on the plan to delimitate-demarcate borders with Azerbaijan and Armenia during an oral presentation of the program (GDDG 2020a). At the same time, the program included the promise "to facilitate trade-economic, cultural or people-to-people contacts with Russia as a part of rational and de escalating policy with the Russian Federation" (GDDG 2020d). During his talk on the foreign policy part of the program, held in Gori, Davit Zalkaliani noted that "Regulating relations with Russian Federation follows the red line, that implies deoccupation and only after deoccupation we can talk about improving relations with Russia" (GDDG 2020a).

In terms of **engagement in multilateral formats**, Georgian Dream aims at implementing policy in line with the country's national interests" (GDDG 2020d); however, this part of the program is far too general for analysis. The same can be said on activating **Georgia's soft power** abroad. General formulations are outlined, however, the program did not mention any specific plans besides the fact that the ruling party aims to "successfully hold 2021 World Book Capital Tbilisi events, as well as the international arts festival Europa Georgia in 2022" (GDDG 2020d).

In the Georgian Dream election program, the part on defense was mostly based on NATO-Georgia and US-Georgia strategic partnership. Under the **Total Defense** strategy, the election program set more specific objectives to improve defense capabilities, such as stable continuation of military-defense programs, logistical modernization and strengthening human resources (GDDG 2020d).

Assessment



ELECTION PROGRAM

Summary:

The foreign policy and defense parts of the Georgian Dream program can be assessed as detailed and comprehensive in relation to major topics. Goals set for the next four years were based on the same processes that have been implemented by the party during past terms in office. The objectives of restoring territorial integrity, Euro-Atlantic integration and a balanced foreign policy remain among the priority issues. The most important new factor appearing in the 2020 election agenda was the preparation for application for EU membership.

The program outlined clear objectives with regards to specific topics, such as focusing on the Geneva process as the appropriate format for improving humanitarian and human rights on Georgia's occupied territories, specific steps towards EU membership and NATO integration, a focus on sectoral strategic partnerships and agreements with the US, border-related matters in the neighborhood and promises related to the economy and security. This makes the possibility of realising some of the general objectives more feasible. On the other hand, the ruling party presented general or long-term objectives with regard to certain topics in its program. This included ambitions such as peaceful restoration of territorial integrity, strengthening bilateral relations with European and other regional countries and active engagement in multilateral forums. Topics relating to bilateral relations and multilateral formats of co-operation were not emphasized enough in the 2016 program and including them in the agenda in the context of 2020 pre-election campaign promises can be assessed as positive. Yet insufficient progress has been made.

Problematic issues:

Some of the most contradictory issues of the 2020 election program arise from the different facets of Georgia's relations with Russia as is reflected in Georgian Dream's plan to prepare for an official application for EU membership and for deeper relations with NATO. The paragraph on Russia states that this objective must not contradict Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. At this stage, it is still unclear what Georgia Dream plans or for what it has resources for achievements in relations with Russia without damaging Georgia's Western aspirations on the one hand, domestic internal democratic processes on the other hand and finally, the security environment, and particularly the red lines with regards to the occupied territories.

Meanwhile, the decision to announce 2024 as an application deadline for EU membership caused a stir among the opposition parties. According to their general assessment, this promise was a "hollow" message for the pre election campaign, and merely aimed at mobilizing supporters for the elections (Netgazeti 2020b). Additionally, the opposition stated the argument that "you cannot apply for EU mem-

bership, if you do not have 100% guarantee that this will have positive dynamics" (Netgazeti 2020b). According to opposition leaders, in order to establish similar dynamics, an appropriate political context was required, and this had not been created by the ruling party.

Feasibility:

To conclude, the foreign policy and defense parts of the Georgian Dream election program set feasible objectives. However, there are certain topics that are presented more broadly. So, peaceful resolution of territorial conflicts or ways in which to achieve objectives are rather general and incomprehensive. These two factors lead us to think that the implementation of the main aspects of the program may be questionable. In these regards, the enhanced integration processes with NATO and EU, in parallel with improving relations with the Russian Federation, remain incompatible objectives. Additionally, approval of Georgia's application for EU membership by 2024 is questionable, particularly in the context of the ongoing internal political crisis.

First 100 Days



10 important foreign policy events within the first 100 days

- Parliamentary resolution on foreign policy
- Unsuccessful EU mediation during Georgia's political crisis
- Mostly positive EU assessment on the implementation of the Association Agreement, though with notes on certain gaps
- Visit of US Secretary of State – Mike Pompeo
- Approval of US financial support on November 11, 2020
- Deployment of units for EU and NATO missions in Afghanistan and Central African Republic
- Increased criticism from the West and the threat of sanctions on Georgia's political parties
- "Program for the formation of common social and economic space" between the Russian Federation and the de-facto republic of Abkhazia
- The decision of European Court of Human Rights [Strasbourg] on 2008 August war
- The Turkish-Iran 3+3 cooperation format for the South Caucasus and Georgia's principled refusal to participate in the format

Analysis

Foreign and security policy events in the first 100 days of the new government have been following the main messages outlined

in the election program and voiced during the pre-election campaign. At the end of 2020, the parliament of Georgia approved a

resolution stipulating that EU membership was a priority and without any alternative. The resolution envisaged preparation of an institutional and a legislative basis for the application for full EU membership in 2024. According to this resolution, it was also seen as important to establish pragmatic relations with Russia and deepen other bilateral cooperation [formats] (Civil.ge 2020k). However, the Georgian Dream government has had to implement its foreign and security policies in a peculiar environment: the post-election political crisis in Georgia created a special atmosphere in terms of interactions with traditional foreign partners. The opposition's boycott of parliament and its refusal of parliamentary mandates caused political deadlock and interparty negotiations became almost impossible. Against this background Western actors became involved at different stages of the crisis in a variety of ways. Even the involvement of the president of the European Council – Charles Michel and his special representative Christian Danielsson in the mediation process turned out to be futile.

In parallel with these processes, the EU published an **Association Implementation Report on Georgia** on February 9, 2021. This document reflected the progress Georgia had achieved in bilateral relations within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. However, it also described the threats in the context of the post-election crisis with regards to resolving global issues, such as the pandemic (EEAS 2021a). In terms of assessment, the document also caused different reactions among the members of the government and the opposition. If the ruling party members thought that this report was a positive document for use with its application for EU membership in 2024, the opposition parties stated that according to the document, "this ambition is not backed by the fundamen-

tal changes in vital and critical areas, such as democracy and justice" (Civil.ge 2021j). In this context disappointment among the members of the European parliament with the unsuccessful mediation process did not reflect positively on Georgia's prospects, indeed, according to the official statement "EU-Georgia relations will not be the same as before" (European Parliament 2021).

Joint statements by the Georgian, Moldovan and Ukrainian governments with regard to EU membership should be assessed positively. According to the statement, the three countries expressed their desire for deepened integration and cooperation as well as the wish for more approximation with the EU, a stronger political dialogue and new opportunities for economic and sectoral integration (Civil.ge 2021k).

Within the framework of Euro-Atlantic integration, The Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, covering several practical additions was approved. It includes strengthening the capabilities of the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center, increasing the number of NATO liaison port visits, and intensive training and widened cooperation in the medical field (Civil.ge 2020f). As for more fundamental progress in terms of NATO integration, during the March 5, 2021 meeting at the College of Europe, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg stated that Georgia (along with Ukraine) needed to carry out more active reforms and democratisation processes (NATO 2021).

During the first 100 days, the new government of Georgia twice sent new units to join EU as well as NATO **military missions**: in the beginning of January, the 32nd infantry battalion was deployed to the Islamic State of Afghanistan under the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission (RSM) (1TV 2021a),

while at the beginning of March, Georgian peacekeepers were deployed to the EU-led Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM RCA) capital of Bangui, at the military base of Ukatex, for another six month rotation (Netgazeti 2021d).

Important developments took place in terms of the **relations with the US**. The visit of the Trump administration Secretary of State – Mike Pompeo – is the most noteworthy. This visit re-affirmed that the strategic partnership between Washington and Tbilisi was still on the jointly approved bipartisan agenda. A number of experts addressed Pompeo with requests to start working on the deployment of the US bases in Georgia. However, experts view this as an unlikely advance in military terms even in the context of Biden's active foreign policy (Samkharadze 2021). On the other hand, the US congress approved more than \$132 million in financial assistance for Georgia on November 11. However, this time the document stipulated the possibility of a 15% decrease should Georgia not fulfill the conditions on democratization and the building of state institutions (BM Georgia 2020c). In terms of financial cooperation, there was the January 14 agreement between the two countries on the safety of 5th generation internet, or 5G, which was followed by the statement from deputy Secretary of State Keith Krach that Georgia and the US should start working together on a business plan (1TV 2021b).

Ultimately, certain steps have been taken towards **approximation with the West**. At the same time, the bilateral visits of various high-ranking officials and agreement on a number of official documents affirm ongoing support by the major Western actors – the EU and US – for Georgia's ambitions for integration. However, the uncompromising Georgian Dream stance during the

post-election crisis may threaten the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and initial signs of this are already evident in criticism of Georgia's democratic dynamics from the US and Europe.

In the context of Georgia's territorial and Russian conflicts, several noteworthy events took place after the parliamentary elections. The **Decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg** on the 2008 war was the most important one. The court decided in favor of Georgian in nine out of ten issues and established that Russia was responsible for the events after the August 12 ceasefire agreement and the end of active phase of the war (Civil.ge 2021). This decision is clearly a success for the government. However, according to various opinions, the way the Georgian government uses this event and the degree to which it actively pursues work in this regard will be the determinant of "whether or not we win this war with this battle" (Asatiani 2021).

It is noteworthy that the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden – Ann Linde – officially visited Georgia. Despite the fact that such a high ranking visit must be considered as a very important event on Georgia's track towards the de-occupation, no effective steps have been taken in relation to the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. It is especially true in the context of **developments in occupied Abkhazia**, where there is an internal public confrontation between anti-Georgian and neutral groups after the controversial visit of Benur Kviraia, the former assistant of Bjenia (Civil.ge 2021c). On the other hand, the "Program for the formation of common social and economic space" between the Russian Federation and de-facto republic of Abkhazia was announced (RFE/RL 2020a).

In the context of the post-election crisis, there was another incident in Russian-Georgian relations: Sergei Naryshkin, Director of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, made a noteworthy remark that "the example of Georgia clearly shows that the desire of national elites to enlist the patronage of Washington to solve their current issues quickly leads to the loss of their de facto sovereignty and their ability to pursue an independent policy both on the international arena and domestically" (accentnews.ge 2021). In the view of various experts, the Georgian government is not working with sufficient intensity to counter Russian threats, especially the **hybrid war**, which requires accelerated and result-oriented Western integration. The pace of the government of Georgia's efforts to achieve European integration is not sufficient to deter Russian hybrid threats (accentnews.ge 2021).

Armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia on the territory of **Karabakh**, which ended with an increased number of Russian peacekeepers in the region, created difficult conditions for Georgia's foreign

and security policy in the South Caucasus. Even though Georgia successfully managed to maintain a neutral position in the course of the conflict, the post-conflict geopolitical situation requires some action from Tbilisi. This topic became especially pressing once the so-called **3+3 cooperation format** gained momentum. The format implies the engagement of three countries of South Caucasus - Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia - with the bigger players - Russia, Turkey and Iran - in cooperation and negotiation to restore peace. The frequent recent exchange of visits between these countries is noteworthy: in January the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia unofficially visited Georgia, later the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran paid an official visit to Tbilisi (with Moscow, Baku, Yerevan and Ankara). A month later, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia visited Turkey along with his deputy. The Georgian government has refused to participate in any regional platforms with Russia, on which Turkey has commented that it understands Georgia's position (Netgazeti 2021a).

Assessment



FIRST 100 DAYS OF THE GOVERNMENT

Main topics:

First 100 days of the new government were unstable and unbalanced and an intensive time for foreign and security policy. However, considering the rhetoric, parliamentary resolutions and reports, deepening of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and the achievement of practical outcomes are irreversible priorities for the government.

On the other hand, the internal political crisis, despite the initial strategy of the ruling party to avoid crises, threaten the country's democratisation and the European integration processes. The Georgian Dream government's harsh policy damages Georgia's already small chance of receiving positive feedback for its application for EU membership by 2024.

Prospects for a pragmatic and balanced policy towards Russia still look uncertain given continued occupation of Georgian territories on the one hand, and the Kremlin's attempts to get involved in Georgia's political crisis, on the other. In general, there is a perception that on rapprochement with Russia, Georgian Dream frequently fails to find a sensible balance and steps are taken at the expense of a disregard of public opinion.

Compatibility with election program:

Overall, the new Georgian Dream government follows the main promises stipulated in the foreign and security policy of its election program more or less accurately. This is evidenced by the post-election rhetoric of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, as well as the resolution and other significant events described above.

However, it should be said that on a long-term perspective the prolonged political crisis and the ruling party's handling of these challenges threaten Georgia's chances for success on European integration, especially for 2024, on the one hand, and its ability to counter Russia's hybrid threats on the other. Additionally, new unforeseen realities in the form of geopolitical challenges in the South Caucasus lead to another discrepancy: while challenges to the relationships in the neighborhood are being overlooked, they are happening, and it is important that Georgia has a principled action plan ready.

Democracy and Human Rights

Election Program

i	<p>10 objectives of Georgian Dream election program in the areas of democracy and human rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthening the role of Parliament ○ Developing and improving the political-party system ○ Strengthening the judicial system ○ Further development of public administration and services ○ Refining institutional mechanisms for human rights protection ○ Civic equality and integration of ethnic minorities ○ Strengthening the role of the Prosecutor's Office ○ Liberalization of criminal justice policy ○ Institutional reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs ○ Further development of the penitentiary system
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Analysis of Georgian Dream party program in the areas of human rights and democratic development

Nineteen pages (out of 97 pages) of the Georgian Dream 2020 election program cover democratic development and human rights in Georgia. However, similarly to the 2016 parliamentary election program (GDDG 2016), Georgian Dream focuses on the steps already taken from 2012 to 2020 and criticism of the previous government.

The program emphasised the **role of the Parliament** in the political life of Georgia and noted the constitutional reform of 2018 and the new Rules of Procedures of the Parliament of Georgia. According to the program, "Parliament's controlling function will be increased and the inclusiveness of the political process will be ensured" if Georgian Dream won the elections (GDDG 2020d, 6). The document also states that active engagement and participation of political parties (parlia-

mentary and extra-parliamentary), the civil sector and other groups would be ensured. Additionally, the program focused on improving the party-political system, stipulating that Georgia Dream "will do everything" to "overcome the challenges caused by the aggressive revenge/revanchism of United National Movement" (GDDG 2020d, 7).

The **focus on the United National Movement** and polarizing rhetoric were evident in public statements by the Georgian Dream leadership as well. On October 1, 2020 during the presentation of Georgian Dream program priorities, Irakli Kobakhidze referred to the governance of the United National Movement as an "authoritarian regime based on evil and lies" (TV Imedi 2020). Moreover, in the video address during the pre-election period, the party founder and

the former Prime Minister, Bidzina Ivanishvili, stated that making a choice against Georgian Dream meant a choice in favor of this power [United National Movement] (GDDG Youtube 2020).

The election program of the ruling party also focused on the judicial system. According to the program, **in order to strengthen the judicial system** and increase public trust, it planned to improve the High Council of Justice of Georgia with regards to substantiated decisions. It also planned to increase the number of judges, improve the infrastructure and continue the digitalization of different activities (GDDG 2020d, 19). Additionally, the program stipulated that Georgian Dream would approve and implement an updated national strategy on human rights for 2021-2025 to ensure citizens' protection. (GDDG 2020d, 17).

With regards to state institutions, the program discussed extensively the **fundamental reform of the civil service**, various activities to support civil service reform, implementation of open governance principles and development of public services (state or municipal) (GDDG 2020d, 10-12).

According to the program reform of the Prosecutor's Office and liberalizing **criminal justice policy** were planned, as well as institutional transformation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. More specifi-

cally, the ruling party planned to harmonise the criminal justice code with international standards, conduct criminal justice policies based on analysis and develop the Ministry of Internal Affairs according to the "systemic upgrade" concept (GDDG 2020d, 20-21).

Development of the Penitentiary System was listed as a separate requirement in the election program. The program stipulated that work would continue on organizing the penitentiary system in accordance with international standards, which implied infrastructure development, construction of new facilities, offering various services to those convicted and training and professional development opportunities for employees within the system.

Nonetheless, the 2020 election program of Georgian Dream focused too much on the steps already taken by the ruling party between 2012 and 2020 and on criticism of the previous ruling party – United National Movement. Furthermore, in some places the program outlined objectives but did not clarify the specific steps to be taken or ways to measure the extent to which the government was achieving the declared objectives. With regards to democratic development and human rights, the program did not put sufficient emphasis on topics such as the media, elections, freedom of speech and expression, restrictions introduced to fight the pandemic and sexual or religious minorities

Assessment



ELECTION PROGRAM

Summary:

The 2020 election program of Georgian Dream focused on a number of areas that were directly related to the process of democratization and the protection of human rights. However, the program, which should outline a specific action plan, discussed at length steps that had already been taken. Some parts of the program were also rather vague, meaning that there are no clear steps identified for achieving the set objectives.

The program did not put sufficient emphasis on topics important for democratic development, such as elections, media independence and freedom, freedom of expression and assembly, inter-relationship between the restrictions introduced to fight COVID-19 and political and civic rights, rights of religious and sexual minorities.

Contradictory topics:

The 2020 program focused on the actions of the former ruling party and stated that it “will do everything to overcome the challenges caused by the aggressive revenge/revanchism of the United National Movement in the party-political system without encroaching the rights of any subjects...” (GDDG 2020d, 7). The official declaration from the ruling party, which had been in power for eight years, that the political-party system needed to be improved and that it “will do everything possible” to overcome the problems caused by the largest opposition party, questions democratic development.

Another contradictory issue in the Georgian Dream program concerned the justice system. The ruling party focused in its statements on how the justice system had been improved. However, the program practically ignored problems related to the politicization of courts and the prosecutor’s office. These problems have been discussed not only by opponents at home, but also by Georgia’s international partners. For instance, according to a report by the US Department of State, “there are significant problems with the independence of the justice system” and with “politically motivated” cases (US Department of State 2019).

Feasibility:

It is important to note that feasibility of some components of the program is hard to assess since no specific steps have been outlined. However, implementation of measures related to democratic development is mainly dependent on the political will of the ruling party. The government’s actions during the first 100 days raised more questions about its political will.

First 100 Days

	10 major events during the first 100 days in terms of democracy and human rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parliamentary elections ○ Opposition parties' boycott of parliament ○ Special police operation at the headquarters of the United National Movement and the arrest of its chairman ○ Controversial judicial cases ○ Political leaders leaving politics/relocating/renewing ○ Downgrading in international rankings ○ Issues with courts and selective justice ○ Disagreements among the ruling party about the arrest of a political opponent and the new (old) Prime Minister – Irakli Gharibashvili ○ Protests and arrests of activists ○ Gap between political opponents and the opportunity for de-escalation through the mediation of international partners
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Analysis

The period after the 2020 parliamentary elections has been characterized by a severe political crisis. One of the reasons behind this is the **controversial elections**, the legitimacy of which has been questioned by most of the opposition. Despite the calls from some international partners (Civil.ge 2020d), the opposition did not participate in the second round of the elections (Civil.ge 2020o). As a result, the voter turnout in the run-off of the elections was 26.9%, which is 11% less than the turnout for the second round of the 2016 elections (Civil.ge 2020p). After the first round of elections, non-governmental organizations published a joint statement in which they declared the 2020 elections as the “least democratic and free” elections held under the Georgian Dream (TI Georgia 2020b). According to a report by Transparency International Georgia, the 2020 parliamentary elections were problematic in terms of abuse of administrative resources for electioneering purposes (TI Georgia 2020a). No less questionable was the way district elec-

tion commissions approached complaints and appeals. According to non-governmental organisations, appeals were not considered by the district commissions for various reasons (Civil.ge 2020c; 2020q). Additionally, according to the OSCE/ODIHR report, the handling of complaints and appeals were mostly superficial, lacking substantive consideration and investigation of discrepancies (OSCE/ODIHR 2021).

Most of the opposition boycotted the election results and therefore the 10th term of parliament. In addition to the ruling party, four members from the Alliance of Patriots party list entered parliament, (Civil.ge 2020g), and two members of the Citizens party (Civil.ge 2020l). Most opposition parties have continued to boycott parliament to this date, regardless of calls by international partners. (Civil.ge 2020r). Georgian Dream did not suspend the mandates of delegates boycotting Parliament (Civil.ge 2021i) but registered in response adraft law that would

have terminated state funding of **parties boycotting parliament** (Civil.ge 2020j). Local NGOs and the Ombudsman criticised this initiative and deemed it non-compliant with democratic norms (Civil.ge 2020b). In the end, the draft law was not approved by the ruling party and was sent to the Venice Commission (RFE/RL 2020c).

The political crisis culminated with the government carrying out a special **police operation** in the head office of the largest opposition party in electoral terms – United National Movement – and arresting its chairman, Nika Melia. This event was met with severe criticism domestically as well as from international partners (Civil.ge 2021g), and according to international feedback, was assessed as a step backward on the path to democracy (Civil.ge 2021a). The arrest of the UNM chairman was preceded by the suspension by parliament of Nika Melia's immunity as an MP and a court decision to place him in preliminary detention.

Controversial judicial cases that are considered by numerous critics of the government to be politically motivated remained problematic during the first 100 days of Georgian Dream's third term. In this regard, the detention of two cartographers has been especially noteworthy. According to a number of NGOs, the arrest of these two individuals was likely to have been aimed at manipulating patriotic feelings in society (TI Georgia 2020b). It is also noteworthy that the court freed these individuals (Iveri Melashvili and Natalia Ilichova). The court also freed two other individuals who were considered to be "political prisoners" by the opposition (Civil.ge 2020n). However, there are multiple cases in Georgia that are considered to have political shadows over them – the case of TBC Bank, the case of Omega Group, and cases against the director of "Mtavari Arkhi"

and a family member of the founder of "TV Pirveli" (TI Georgia 2020c). The opposition parties who have been taking part in boycotting parliament consider Giorgi Rurua and Nika Melia to be political prisoners.

Therefore, issues with the judicial system and **selective justice** still remain problematic for Georgia. The US Embassy in Georgia published a statement saying that it was disappointed by the judiciary's rushed decision on holding the Conference of Judges. According to the Embassy, the Conference of Judges, held under the "shadow" of the 2020 parliamentary elections, created a risk of undermining public trust in the judiciary (US Embassy Georgia 2020). The Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary, uniting around 40 local NGOs, criticized the draft ordinance by the High Council of Justice of Georgia and expressed its concern that one of the provisions in it "aims to relieve candidates loyal to the clan from unpleasant questions related to the existence of informal influences in the court system and the general state of the justice system" (Coalition.ge 2020). According to the statement issued by the People's party in February 2021, Georgia "returns to prosecution of political opponents, selective justice and instrumentalized judiciary" (Civil.ge 2021f). The Public Defender of Georgia also issued an Amicus Curiae Brief on the Cartographers' Case, stating that the "present case clearly has a political or other motive that outweighs the legal motive in the light of the shortcomings identified in the case" (Ombudsman.ge 2021b). Moreover, according to the US Department of State in a March 2021 report, Georgia has "serious problems with the independence of the judiciary" (US Department of State 2021).

After the parliamentary elections, there have been significant shifts in the political land-

scape. The founder of the ruling party and the former Prime Minister – Bidzina Ivanishvili – declared that he was leaving the party and politics (Civil.ge 2021b). The first in the party list of Georgian Dream and the Prime Minister – Giorgi Gakharia – resigned from his position (Civil.ge 2021d).

The first 100 days of the third term of Georgian Dream were followed by **protests**, government responses to which raise questions on the abuse of force and compliance with democratic norms. At one of the protests, held after the first tour of the parliamentary elections, the police used water cannons and detained 19 activists (Civil.ge 2020m). The use of water cannons against the protesters was criticised by Transparency International Georgia, while the leader of the short-term OSCE Parliamentary Assembly mission stated that the police must respect the fundamental freedoms of the protesters (OSCE PA 2020). Meanwhile, the opposition has been holding regular protests in 2021 in Tbilisi as well as in the regions (Civil.ge 2021h). Despite the fact that the protests are organized by opposition parties or civil movements, activists are frequently detained during the demonstrations (Netgazeti 2021c).

Problems are evident in other areas as well. For instance, during the first 100 days of the Georgian Dream government representatives of the **Public Defender's Office** were not allowed to properly fulfill their jobs in penitentiary establishments. In January of 2021, the Ombudsman issued a statement, according to which the administration of the penitentiary establishments and the so-called "prison watchers" have been preventing the Public Defender's Office from carrying out their responsibilities (Ombudsman.ge 2021a). In her statement, the Public Defender calls on the government to take immediate measures to "change the model

of managing the criminal subculture in prisons" and asks that the Minister of Justice should immediately raise the issue of the liability of the directors of the penitentiary establishments (Ombudsman.ge 2021a). As in previous periods, there was again criticism of the Public Defender's Office from Georgian Dream during the first 100 days (RFE/RL 2020b). For instance, commenting on the Ombudsman's report on the detention of the leader of UNM, one of the leaders of Georgian Dream called the Ombudsman a "protector of UNM" (IPN 2021a).

Finally, during the post-election period and first 100 days of the Georgian Dream's government, the **efforts of international partners** to de-escalate confrontation and defuse the polarized environment is especially worthy of attention. After the 2020 parliamentary elections, the inability of the ruling and opposition parties to hold any constructive dialogue without the involvement of international partners became evident once again. In order to overcome the deadlock several rounds of negotiations were held in Georgia with the mediation of the ambassadors of the US and the EU (Civil.ge 2020h). These negotiations failed to bring about any important change and ended with mutual accusations, with the ruling party referring to the opposition as "radical" (Civil.ge 2020i). An opportunity to renew dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition came when the President of European Council – Charles Michel – visited Tbilisi (Civil.ge 2021e). However, his special representative, – Christian Danielsson, who was mediating went back to Brussels without achieving any agreement between the opposition and ruling parties. After the first failed visit, Christian Danielsson visited Tbilisi a second time, however the Georgian political players were still unable to find common grounds.²³ In this con-

text, it is not clear how the political parties will manage to reach any future compromise or agreement that would be positive for Georgia's democratic development.

Assessment

	FIRST 100 DAYS OF THE GOVERNMENT
i	<p>Main topics:</p> <p>During the first 100 days, a set of events took place that questioned Georgia's prospects for democratic development over the next four years. The storming by a special operation of Georgia's police of the headquarters of the largest opposition party in terms of electoral support, detention of its leader, the boycott by most of the opposition of parliament, the protests and detention of activists, selective justice (Civil Georgia 2021m) and politically motivated court cases (TI Georgia 2020b, 2020c) – all these are highlighted by both the opposition and international partners. These events have a significantly negative impact on the country's democratic development.</p> <p>Compatibility with the election program:</p> <p>Developments in the first 100 days of the Georgian Dream government are largely incompatible with the party's 2020 election programme. For instance, the election program focused on strengthening the role of parliament (GDDG 2020d, 6). The boycotting of parliament by the majority of the opposition, with only six opposition delegates in the legislative body goes directly against the officially declared objective of the ruling party. While the ruling party does not have any influence over the decision of the opposition, it is not clear if, now that it is the party in power, the ruling party is ready to reach a compromise with the opposition.. The failure of two rounds of negotiations led by the special representative of the president of the European Council raises even more questions about the readiness of the ruling party to diffuse the political crisis.</p> <p>The party program of Georgian Dream also highlights the importance of improving the political-party system (GDDG 2020d, 7), and this in itself can be assessed as a contradictory statement since in democratic systems it is not up to a political party to determine the political spectrum of the country. Despite this, the existing political crisis, invasion of the office of UNM and the detention of its leader instead of developing and improving the political system, may be assessed as a step towards polarization and radicalization.</p> <p>Another issue that makes the Georgian Dream's 2020 program look contradictory with the events taking place during the first 100 days is the politicization of the ju-</p>

²³ (Radio Liberty 2021)

diciary (TI Georgia 2020c). The declared objective of the ruling party is to reinforce trust in the judiciary and strengthen the role and transparency of the Prosecutor's office (GDDG 2020d, 19). In this context, according to the statements made by NGOs (Erkvania and Lebanidze 2021), the Ombudsman (Ombudsman.ge 2021b) and numerous international actors (US Embassy in Georgia 2020), multiple questions arise with regards to the independence of the judiciary and selective justice. All these have negative impacts on Georgia's democratic development and directly contradict the ruling party's stated objectives of increasing the trust of the public towards the judiciary.

Conclusion

This report is an attempt to assess the government's work during the first 100 days after the 2020 parliamentary elections. The research identifies the government's opportunities, as well as the risks and challenges it faces over the next four years. The report assesses the work of the Georgian Dream government during these 100 days on two criteria: to what extent were the government's actions in line with its election campaign promises (compatibility with the program) and how did the measures implemented contribute, or failed to contribute, to the country's economic and democratic development (main challenges). The work of the government is divided into four wide categories: economy, social welfare, democracy and human rights, and foreign policy.

- **Major global challenge: COVID-19.**

COVID-19 remains a major challenge for the world, which is a particularly heavy burden for developing countries like Georgia to bear. The success of the Georgian Dream government will be highly dependent on how fast and how effectively the country can overcome the pandemic. For this to happen, it is important to accelerate the vaccination process and thus to avoid the reintroduction of social restrictions.

- **Main internal political challenge: political crisis and democratic development.**

As has been the case for the last four years, the main internal challenge in Georgia has been the political crisis, and this continued

during the first 100 days of Georgian Dream's latest term of government. The state of affairs remains due to four key elements: political and media polarization, mistrust towards the political institutions, and the gap between the government and the opposition. While the social-economic challenges are partially the result of exogenous factors, resolving the political crisis is largely the responsibility of the Georgian Dream, as it is dependent on the ruling party's will. This is in regard to the implementation of judicial and electoral reform, and in the first place to the taking of steps towards restoring public trust in political institutions.

- **Social and economic challenges.**

The rapid revival of the economy and Georgian business to post-crisis levels, the creation of jobs and overcoming poverty were the main promises/messages in the Georgian Dream election program. The newly elected Georgian Dream government continued to partially implement measures to minimize the economic losses of COVID-19 pandemic during its first 100 days. However, according to assessment for this report, the Georgian Dream government's post-election economic policy lacks the vision to provide either any short or long-term response to the crisis or to the restructuring of the economy. In addition, the social-economic risks caused by

the pandemic are not sufficiently reflected in government plans, and the current political crisis makes forecasts of its ability to do so even more pessimistic.

- **Foreign Policy.** With regards to foreign policy, the Georgian Dream has not taken any risky actions. However, it did take an important and bold step by setting the target in a parliamentary resolution of a four-year deadline for formal application for EU membership. Yet, the success of Georgia's application by 2024

will mainly be dependent on what democratic and judicial reforms will have been implemented by the Georgian Dream and the country's democratic development. There is also the question of the geopolitical changes taking place in the region following the war in Nagorno Karabakh and Russia's increased role, and in this regard the Georgian government should be more active in its responses. These changes may threaten Georgia's security, its economic and transit role in the region.

Interviews with Experts

Independent expert on social issues. Private communication. March 18, 2021.

Independent healthcare expert. Private communication. March 18, 2021.

Member of Parliament, Georgian Dream majoritarian candidate. Private communication. March 19, 2021.

Healthcare expert from the opposition party. Private communication. March 24, 2021.

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