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Table of Contents

Summary 3
Introduction 3
Why Georgia needs a national resilience strategy 4
What Georgia can learn from the best practices of NATO and its member states 5
Views from Georgia’s expert community 8
What should Georgia’s National Resilience Strategy look like? 10
Conclusion 13
References 15
Respondent Profile 16
National Resilience Strategy for Georgia: Lessons from NATO, EU and beyond

Kornely Kakachia, Bidzina Lebanidze, Salome Kandelaki

Executive Summary

This policy paper provides some thoughts on how a national resilience-building process should be organized in Georgia and what the Black Sea country can learn from NATO and its member states. Based on extensive desk research and focus groups with Georgian security experts, it is argued that Georgia requires a comprehensive cross-sector resilience strategy based on a whole-of-society approach. A review of best practices from NATO and EU states and Georgian expert opinion has enabled us to identify four dimensions as important ingredients of resilience-building: institutional/legal, societal, political and public-private. The institutional and legal dimension to resilience-building implies the streamlining of strategic documents and legislation, as well as improved public governance and inter-agency coordination. The political dimension refers to fixing vulnerabilities in the Georgian political system such as low political trust, polarization, radicalization and bad governance practices. The societal dimension implies extending the ownership of resilience-building to include all societal groups to ensure that the whole population is involved in the process of resilience-building. It also involves increasing social trust and psychological resilience among citizens. Finally, public-private partnership refers to extending the ownership of resilience-building to the private sector which often owns a significant share of critical infrastructure and are key to the uninterrupted functioning of public services and society as a whole. Developing a high degree of resilience will not only help Georgia protect itself from present and future crises and conflicts but will also contribute to Tbilisi’s Euro-Atlantic integration prospects as it will turn Georgia into a more predictable and desirable partner.

Key words: National Resilience, Georgia, NATO Resilience Baselines, Risks

Introduction

This paper offers a first attempt to sketch out what Georgia’s national resilience strategy could look like and what Georgia can learn from NATO’s resilience agenda. Resilience has recently become a new key mechanism for states and societies to cope with, withstand and recover from crises. It has become an increasingly prominent area of policy work among international organizations and developmental agencies such as NATO, EU and USAID. Many European countries also have developed national resilience agendas, either as standalone documents (Ukraine) or as a part of broader strategies and national legislative acts (Finland, Sweden, Israel, Baltic States). While resilience-building largely remains a national competence of individual countries, the EU and NATO have made efforts to help their member states as well as partners with close coordination, assessment and exchange of national resilience plans.

Georgia so far has been rather passive in its engagement with the resilience approach. The country has neither unified legislation nor a unified strategic approach towards resilience-building. Individual aspects of resilience-building are scattered across different policy documents and legislative acts. The extent to which these aspects have been implemented is questionable. There are few strategic documents that, either directly or indirectly, address national resilience. The main document is the outdated National Security Strategy of Georgia, which focusses on NATO-Georgia partnership and the strong will of the state to be part of the Euro-Atlantic space for better security guarantees. However, this document does not directly address issues related to national resilience-building (MOD Georgia 2011). A new strategic concept was developed in 2022 but due to the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the geopolitical security landscape, it was not adopted by parliament. An example of a state document of national importance that contributes to national resilience is the Cyber Security Strategy (2021-24) (Legislative Herald of Georgia 2022) that combines specific components aimed at improving the cyber and information security environment, as well as combating cybercrime and strengthening cyber defense capabilities. Another document, developed by the Ministry of Defense – the Strategic Defence Review (2021-25) focusses on the preservation and strengthening of national resilience in cooperation with NATO (Georgia 2022).
Georgia is exposed to numerous existential risks and threats, of both global and local nature. But Georgian authorities as well as the broader political class seem unprepared to manage these risks. As such, the country urgently needs a long-term comprehensive security approach which includes resilience as a multifaceted, cross-sectional and inter-institutional process. Therefore, starting a conversation about the country's long-term national resilience strategy is long overdue.

This paper aims to discuss Georgia's resilience strategy by looking at best practices from Georgia's partners and allies. It particularly focuses on NATO's resilience agenda and how, given Georgia's membership aspirations and close relations with the alliance, NATO could contribute to resilience building in Georgia. The paper also touches on best practices from the EU and national resilience approaches of individual states such as Finland, Sweden and Ukraine.

Basing Georgia's approach to resilience-building on the NATO model would serve several purposes. Firstly, it would increase overall interoperability between Georgia and NATO and enable Georgia to converge with NATO standards. Second, it would diversify NATO-Georgia relations and might somewhat mitigate concerns among NATO countries who are not fully persuaded of Georgia's NATO membership or of a fully-fledged NATO-Georgia dialogue in areas of military and security cooperation. Finally, Georgia can benefit greatly from the best practices of resilience-building from NATO countries and by inclusion in NATO's resilience agenda.

The policy paper utilizes qualitative research methods including desk and field research. Analysis of primary sources (strategic documents of relevant countries and organizations) are supplemented by secondary sources (academic, policy and working papers on resilience, security and sustainable governance). A key part of this study is based on comprehensive field research. The authors organized a focus group of prominent Georgian security experts (7 participants). Additionally, two anonymous interviews and one consultation was conducted with representatives of state agencies. It should be noted that the representability of findings suffered somewhat from the unwillingness of representatives from various state agencies and public authorities to share their insights, even anonymously, with the authors of the study.

Why Georgia needs a national resilience strategy

Resilience-building is an effective approach to deal with the risks and threats emanating from an increasingly complex and interdependent world. This is especially important for smaller/weaker countries which are located on the frontline of heightened geopolitical competition and do not have the luxury of having security or welfare cushions from powerful regional organizations such as NATO and the EU. Georgia is a prime example of such a country. Located in a grey zone between Russia and the EU/NATO, and as a NATO aspirant country, Georgia suffers from existential risks, does not enjoy NATO's military umbrella or EU membership privileges and needs to take care of its own security.

This makes Georgia one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. Georgia is widely considered as high-risk country. Georgia is exposed to several layers of risk (Kakachia and Lebanidze 2020).

The first layer Georgia is exposed to is diffuse risk: risks that are of a universal or regional nature and do not emanate from specific state actors. They include pandemics, irregular migration, global financial and economic crises, climate change and natural disasters.

The second layer is global risks, those emanating from specific state actors or intentionally directed towards the country. The existence of Georgia's statehood, its territorial integrity, and its ability to act as an independent state is permanently questioned by Russia which poses a major security threat to the country. Security-related threats are not limited to military confrontation with Russia, however, but also include the areas of cyber security, economy, energy, education and religion.
The third layer encompasses local risks which could exacerbate the country’s exposure to global risks. Local risks include socio-economic risks: economic underdevelopment, high inequality, widespread poverty, as well as high degrees of commodification and social stratification. Local political risks include the politicization of state institutions, the presence of oligarchic clientelist networks, societal polarization, political radicalization and the high degree of informality that exists at the cost of institutional consolidation. All this results in a lack of social trust, low public legitimacy and damaged power transfer mechanisms which put the country at permanent risk of political and social instability.

A comprehensive resilience strategy can help Georgia deal with these challenges in a more effective and prudent manner. Firstly, the development of comprehensive strategy for resilience-building will lead to the more effective consolidation and use of public and private resources to fulfill important public services both in peacetime and during major disruptions. Secondly, in terms of strategic policy planning, it will contribute to the streamlining of Georgia’s strategic approaches to security, economy, energy, agriculture and many other areas under a single umbrella and avoid counterproductive overlaps, repetitions, and competition among various state agencies. Thirdly, having a comprehensive resilience agenda will improve strategic foresight and risk-scanning capacity both of Georgian authorities and societal actors. A well-designed resilience strategy can help to properly identify and map risks and design strategies for their mitigation. Furthermore, having a clear-cut resilience agenda will help Georgia’s cause on its path towards Euro-Atlantic integration as it will make Georgia a more predictable and reliable partner. Lastly, and most importantly, a comprehensive resilience strategy, will help develop a common national understanding about the country’s general priorities, dangers, risks and opportunities. This can also have a mitigating impact on problems such as polarization, radicalization, political disenfranchisement, and social cleavages.

What Georgia can learn from the best practices of NATO and its member states

As a NATO aspirant country, Georgia would benefit greatly from learning from the best practices of NATO’s resilience-building approaches. This has both practical and political importance. While there is no consensus yet about Georgia’s NATO membership, it is important for Georgia to achieve greater proximity to NATO by deepening sectoral cooperation. Being part of NATO’s resilience agenda could offer such opportunity.

NATO defines resilience as “a society’s ability to resist and recover from (...) shocks and combines both civil preparedness and military capacity (NATO 2022). It identifies civil preparedness as “a central pillar of Allies’ resilience and a critical enabler for the Alliance’s collective defence” (NATO 2022). According to NATO, civil preparedness needs to fulfil three core functions: (1) continuity of government, (2) continuity of essential services to the population and (3) civil support to military operations (NATO 2022). Based on these three core functions, NATO’s resilience strategy identifies seven baseline indicators for the national resilience of its allies:

- Assured continuity of government and critical government services;
- Resilient energy supplies;
- Ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people;
- Resilient food and water resources;
- Ability to deal with mass casualties and disruptive health crises;
- Resilient civil communications systems;
- Resilient transport systems (NATO 2022).

1. See more: Wojciech Konończuk, Denis Cenuša and Kornely Kakachia. Oligarchs in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as key obstacles to reforms. 2017. Available at: https://3dcftas.eu/publications/oligarchs-in-ua-mo-and-ge-as-key-obstacles-to-reforms
2. Shocks can include “a natural disaster, failure of critical infrastructure, or a hybrid or armed attack” (NATO 2022).
NATO's strong focus on the civilian components of resilience stems from the acknowledgement of increasing interconnectedness between the military and civilian realms. After the end of the Cold War, critical infrastructure and basic state services (such as energy grids, railways, ports, and airfields) have been moving into the hands of the private sector, making NATO's military structures dependent on civilian and commercial assets and capabilities (NATO 2022). Accordingly, “NATO’s ability to defend itself against an armed attack” depends “not only on its military capabilities but also on the preparedness and resilience of its societies” (Christie and Berzina 2022). Moreover, rapid technological development and economic, financial and cyber interdependence makes societies more vulnerable to both conventional and non-conventional risks (NATO 2022). To remain resilient in such a challenging and complex environment, NATO states need to utilise “a full range of capabilities – military and civilian – and a whole-of-society approach, with active cooperation across government, the private sector and civil society” (Ibid).

NATO's focus on the importance of public-private partnership draws very important lessons for Georgia. As a result of neoliberal economic policies and an often reckless privatization process conducted by Georgia’s current and previous governments, much of country's critical infrastructure ended up in the hands of private investors. Moreover, as of 2022, there are about 17,000 Russian companies in Georgia, more than half of which have been registered since the start of renewed Russian aggression in Ukraine (TI, 2022). The Georgian government needs to ensure that private companies, especially those owned by Russian investors, keep contributing to the resilient functioning of critical services both in peacetime and during crisis and conflicts.

In terms of agency and competences, NATO views resilience first and foremost as “a national responsibility” (NATO 2022) with the alliance itself having coordinating and consulting functions. According to NATO’s understanding of resilience, “[e]ach Ally needs to be sufficiently robust and adaptable to deal with and address the entire spectrum of crises envisaged by the Alliance” (NATO 2022). A decentralized and less top-down process of resilience-building will allow aspirant countries such as Georgia to have a bigger say in their own resilience-building process. This will strengthen local ownership of the process by Georgia’s key stakeholders and allow them to better adapt NATO’s resilience-building best-practices to Georgia’s fragile context.

The downside of NATO’s approach to resilience is that it is fairly technical and policy focused. It mostly focuses on improvements in certain policy areas which perhaps could be achieved through capacity building and policy coordination. Yet, the strategy overlooks some significant political and societal aspects of resilience-building which could also be important for transitional countries such as Georgia.

Achieving a high degree of resilience in Georgia could also depend on the quality of political institutions and good governance systems as defined by the extent to which they possess sufficient levels of transparency, representability, accountability and inclusiveness. Therefore, technical criteria provided by NATO should be supplemented by political criteria. These could include a more transparent and inclusive process of resilience-building. Good examples of inclusiveness are provided by the Nordic countries. Finland and Sweden, two countries which recently decided to join NATO, utilise a whole-of-society approach towards resilience and national security, and are considered to have “valuable national best practices, notably in terms of coherence, robustness, quality of cooperation across government and society, and engagement with the population” (Christie and Berzina 2022). Particularly, the Finnish Comprehensive Security model provides a good example of a closely coordinated public-private partnership which does not only include businesses but all critical stakeholders in the country. According to the Finnish government, “Comprehensive security is the cooperation model of Finnish preparedness, where vital societal functions are handled together by authorities, businesses, NGOs and citizens” (The Security Committee 2022). The Security Committee of Finland is in charge of developing and implementing the comprehensive security plan and coordinating inter-agency work (Garriaud-Maylam 2021). It consists of around 20 senior state officials and representatives from the private sector and business community (Garriaud-Maylam 2021).

Sweden and Finland also have a stronger focus on fighting misinformation and hostile propaganda. Sweden has recently established its own Psychological Defence Agency “to safeguard [Sweden’s] open and democratic society [and] the free formation of opinion” (Swedish Psychological Defence Agency 2022). Psychological defence aims to identify, analyse, prevent, and counter malign foreign influences including “attempts from foreign actors to weaken national resilience and the population’s will to defend the country” (ibid). Observers expect the new agency to “equip the Swedish population with the skills to spot fake news and to take in information with a more critical eye” (Washington Post 2022).

The Finnish version of psychological defence is called psychological resilience and is part of Finland’s comprehensive security strategy. It is defined as the “ability of individuals, communities, society and the nation to withstand the pressures arising from crisis situations and to recover from their impacts” (The Security Committee 2017, 22). It “is expressed in the citizens’ will to defend their country’s independence as well as in the determination to maintain the livelihood and security of the population in all situations” (ibid). To this day Finland also possesses one of the most comprehensive warning and shelter systems with an ability to host 3.6 million people in 45,000 civil defence shelters (Garriaud-Maylam 2021).

Finnish society is famous for digital literacy skills and a multi-layered approach to fighting disinformation and propaganda. Finland has occupied first place in the Media Literacy Index for quite some time (CNN 2019). “Thinking critically, factchecking, interpreting and evaluating all the information” has been a focus of the Finnish education system in order to tackle hostile propaganda and misinformation campaigns (Henley 2020). Georgia can learn a great deal from the Scandinavian countries in terms of boosting digital literacy skills. While Georgian society has relatively consolidated views about the main risks and threats the country faces, a significant part of the population is still highly exposed to propaganda and fake news both via traditional and online media.

In areas of cyber security and hybrid warfare, Georgia can also greatly benefit from the experiences of the Baltic States which show many similarities in terms of exposure to conventional and non-conventional local and global risks. Estonia in particular can be seen as a good example of a successful digital society on Russia’s doorstep. The country has been praised for its successful digitalization strategy despite Russia’s constant propaganda and disinformation campaign (NATO PA 2021). Estonia is a country with exemplary digital infrastructure such as X-Road. Estonia’s approach to combat disinformation also includes psychological defence (efforts to raise public awareness), strategic communication (consistency in public messaging) and situational awareness (monitoring of information spaces in Estonia, Russia and allied countries) (NATO PA 2021).

Georgia is well-advanced in terms of the digitalisation of public services and it is even ahead of many Western countries. But, as in case of Estonia, digital openness must be accompanied by the increased prioritisation of digital literacy among the population and civil servants and the establishment of secure digital platforms. Priority should be given to the creation of a compartmentalised open-source national digital infrastructure for public services (modelled on Estonian “X-Road”) and the constant training of public servants. To ensure the safety of sensitive data, additional back up servers outside the country’s borders (a digital embassy) should be created (NATO PA 2021). The digitalisation of public infrastructure should also be subjected to independent audits and should include measures such as data trackers for citizens to see which public authority accesses their data (NATO PA 2021). The provision of more digital transparency should contribute to creating an atmosphere of political trust (legitimacy of public institutions) and social trust (trust among people) - two core components of state and societal resilience.

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4. According to the latest public opinion polls commissioned by the IRI, 89% per cent of population consider Russia as a main political threat, and 80% per cent of population considers this state as economic threat. See: Accessed 11 November 2022. https://www.iri.org/resources/public-opinion-survey-residents-of-georgia-september-2022/.

5. According to the NATO PA report on Estonia, “X-Road system is a secure information and data sharing software that ensures interoperability between the different organisations and information systems that provide roughly 3,000 online services to Estonian citizens” (NATO PA 2021, 4). For more information about X-Road and other digital services in Estonia, see: Anthes, Gary. 2015. “Estonia: a model for e-government.” Communications of the ACM 58 (6): 18-20.
Georgia can also learn a great deal from its immediate neighbors and regional partners who find themselves in a similar situation in terms of vulnerabilities, risks and threats. Recently Ukraine started to actively incorporate resilience-building approaches in its strategic documents and a broad strategic vision of domestic and foreign policy (Shelest 2022, 2021). The 2020 National Security Strategy, the 2021 Foreign Policy Strategy and the 2021 Military Security Strategy all incorporate national resilience-building as an important pillar of Ukraine’s national security (Shelest 2021).

In response to Russian aggression in Ukraine, Ukrainians demonstrated cross-society resistance through the joint effort of the military and security agencies and a high level of societal responsibility and support. The example of Ukraine became a vital lesson for the Euro-Atlantic community (Shelest 2022). However, in the case of Georgia, defective state strategies and weaker institutional resilience causes weaker public engagement with resilience. The example of Ukraine shows that Georgia should build strong intersectoral strategic communication and closely engage the civil society sector to develop strategies, action plans and nationally-tailored resilience objectives.

Another problem is lack of a legislative base as well as the gap between policy adoption and policy implementation. As Gotsiridze (2022) noted, Georgia has strategic documents and legislative acts in place in some areas, such as cyber security, but implementation remains shallow⁶. Examples of practical inconsistencies include Georgian ministries’ use of services provided by Russian companies such as Beeline and Lukoil (Mchedlishvili 2022). Weak economy and dependence on such an unstable market as Russia prevents the strengthening of national resilience (Sharashenidze 2022). Additionally, the lack of a coherent long-term strategy in many areas as well as incoherence and lack of coordination among key stakeholders often leaves Georgia at mercy of just-in-time management in times of crisis (Darchiashvili 2022). Better integration of Georgia’s minority groups (ethnic, religious and sexual) in the resilience-building process is also important. Minority groups are often ignored by policymakers and the failure to include them in a national project jeopardizes Georgia’s comprehensive security and resilience-building (Gotsiridze 2022).

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From NATO’s seven baseline requirements, Georgian experts highlighted the importance of the first requirement - assured continuity of government and critical government services (Dzebisashvili 2022, Muchaidze 2022). They also critically assessed Georgia’s performance in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic and underlined the need to improve pandemic management (Muchaidze 2022). However, when talking about 7 baseline criteria, the experts mostly focussed on political issues. For instance, the non-transparency of Georgian policymaking makes it very difficult to assess performance, identify gaps and provide recommendations on how to improve governance (Muchaidze 2022). The performance of Georgia in the seven areas also depends on the effective organization of public-private partnerships and the government’s ability to involve the private sector in resilience-building (Dzebisashvili 2022). Georgia also needs an improved foresight and risk-scanning mechanisms both at the level of the political elite and the public. Economic and political rationales often overshadow security considerations which may backfire in the long-term (Gotsiridze 2022). Security should be depoliticized and prioritized (Gotsiridze 2022). Apart from the 7 baseline criteria, the experts also added one more criterion – societal will – because they believe that without societal will, institutional preparedness is not enough (Kapanadze 2022). Societal will comes very close to what Finland calls psychological resilience and it can be only achieved by adopting a whole-of-society approach and increased openness of public agencies to include private actors and citizens in the resilience-building process.

Georgia also lacks a basic level of resilience regarding civil-military preparedness in cases of major disruptions. The country has no warning and shelter systems in place (Kapanadze 2022). This is especially problematic in towns other than Tbilisi (Kutaisi, Batumi, Poti) which do not have underground transportation systems either (Kapanadze 2022). Civil preparedness as a part of total defence in cases of major disruption should also be integrated into the curricula of primary and secondary education (Kapanadze 2022). The military reserve system also needs further reform, and the country lacks properly organized, effective territorial defence units (Kapanadze 2022). Currently Georgia has an Emergency Management Agency which is subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (Ministry of Internal Affairs 2022). But in cases of national emergencies the Agency is often overburdened and requires assistance from other governmental agencies (Kapanadze 2022).

Surveyed experts also mentioned importance of regional resilience since in a time of need “a neighbour comes first for help” (Kapanadze 2022). In this regard, coordinated actions with NATO member Turkey and Azerbaijan is especially important since these countries are tightly integrated with each other in areas of energy and transportation connectivity (Kapanadze 2022). Therefore, the three states have a natural interest in dealing jointly with energy and transportation disruptions. But Georgia should aim at cooperating with all its neighbours and regional partners. As we live in an increasingly complex and interdependent world, cross-border resilience should be an important component of national resilience plan of any state.

Regarding NATO assistance on resilience-building in Georgia, next to support in capacity-building and knowledge-sharing, the experts also underlined the importance of proper political communication with the Georgian public and political elite (Muchaidze 2022). For resilience-building to succeed in Georgia both external push and domestic pull factors are needed. NATO can play a key role here by properly delivering messages to the Georgian public, perhaps in tandem with other Western actors. This, coupled with public pressure, would create an incentive for the political elite to cooperate and to commit to a resilience-building agenda (Muchaidze 2022).

While NATO’s resilience approach mostly focuses on specific policy areas and is depoliticized, Georgian experts also underline the significance of political communication and an engagement in a broader democratization agenda as a part of resilience-building.
What should Georgia’s National Resilience Strategy look like?

To cope with the challenges that arise from the combination of existing in a high-risk environment and limited response capacity, Georgia needs a holistic approach to resilience. The main objective should be protecting and preserving the vital functions of society in times of crisis or a major armed attack. The comprehensive nature of resilience means that every member of society should be involved in resilience-building and crisis prevention, and in case of crisis everyone must have clear guidelines for action. Both state institutions and the private sector, as well as individual citizens must know what to do during a crisis (Milne 2022).

Based on best practices from Finland, Sweden and other NATO and EU countries, Georgia’s national resilience strategy should incorporate four areas: improved legislation and institutional design (legal and institutional governance), improved coordination among key political actors to achieve higher levels of trust (political governance), improved coordination among state authorities and private businesses on strategies to boost resilience (public-private governance), and inclusive governance which is about improved communication with, and proper incorporation of, a wide array of societal actors in the resilience-building process (societal governance).

Legal and institutional governance refers in the first place to the coherent and consistent development of strategic documents and respective legislative acts. Nowadays Georgia has an outdated National Security Concept from 2011 and a number of ad-hoc documents in various policy areas from cyber security to agricultural management. However, as many interview partners within this study confirmed, there is a lack of a cohesive and holistic strategy on the country’s security and resilience building. A new strategy should start with updating the National Security Concept, as well as adopting comprehensive military and defense strategies followed by respective legislative acts. In doing so, the country’s main foreign and domestic political objectives as well as main risks, threats and vulnerabilities should be identified in line with national interests and included in all strategic documents across the sectoral policy areas. Georgian authorities also need to improve the quality of the country’s key resilience-building institutions, such as establishing a more effective system of military reserve and territorial defense units and better coordination mechanisms among different branches and agencies of government.

Improved political governance refers to improved coordination among political actors, most notably – the government, the opposition and the population. While party-political competition is a necessary condition for a well-functioning democracy, Georgia’s political life has been paralyzed for more than a decade by party-led radicalization and polarization which has also alienated a large share of the population from political processes and diminished the country’s resilience. Therefore, establishing the rules and norms of more inclusive political governance and overcoming political radicalization and societal polarization should be a part of the country’s resilience agenda.

Within public-private governance, the role of public-private partnership should be prioritized and become a key pillar of Georgia’s resilience agenda. The Georgian authorities should ensure the proper inclusion of private business in the planning and implementation of resilience-related measures. Furthermore, while Georgia enjoys an image of being a business-friendly country with liberal procurement policies, the authorities should ensure that companies that hold critical infrastructure assets remain committed to the country’s resilience-building, especially in times of crisis. This is also where the seven baseline criteria of NATO’s resilience agenda can prove most useful. Georgia can utilize the knowledge generated from NATO member states to implement steps to meet these criteria and boost its civil and military preparedness for risks and crises.

Finally, societal (inclusive) governance should also be part and parcel of Georgia’s resilience agenda. It should be based on the idea of a whole-of-society approach. This means that joint ownership of the country’s resilience strategy is shared by all key state, business and societal actors. These should include a wide range of epistemic communities from different policy areas including the security, military, energy and climate sectors. Based on our focus group survey and interviews of security sector experts, we identified that so far there has not been much inclusion of society and expert communities in designing and implementing resilience-building strategies. In order to develop a comprehensive resilience strategy,

all important non-state stakeholders should be involved. The authors of this study also attempted to include the views of representatives of state institutions in the policy paper, but most of them were reluctant to share their views either privately or publicly.

An important part of inclusive governance is the establishment of stronger societal bonds in the form of generalized social trust which is very low in Georgia (Kakachia, Legucka, and Lebanidze 2021)\(^8\). By contrast, personal or group-based social trust is much higher, but it does not contribute to national-level resilience-building to the same extent (ibid). The significance of generalized social trust as a major source of resilience has been widely discussed in the literature on resilience-building (Stollenwerk, Börzel, and Risse 2021; Christie and Berzina 2022; Bargués and Morillas 2021). In table I, we identify certain benchmarks or steps that Georgia needs to meet in order to increase its resilience.

Table I: Recommendations for Georgia’s resilience strategy based on best practices from EU and NATO states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Dimensions of resilience-building</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(I) Legal and institutional governance</td>
<td>Develop a national resilience strategy and national implementation plan and communicate it with NATO’s Resilience Committee.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ask NATO’s Resilience Committee for regular assessment of Georgia’s national resilience plan (alongside member states) and for Georgia to become a part of NATO’s alliance-wide strategic resilience assessment and to improve interoperability between the civilian and military infrastructures of Georgia and the alliance member states.</td>
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<td>Expand sectoral cooperation areas within resilience-building with NATO. For instance, conduct a climate change and security impact assessment within NATO’s Climate Change and Security Action Plan.</td>
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<td>Improve interagency coordination and revive the National Security Council to avoid functional overlaps and competition among different agencies.</td>
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<td>Establish a well-functioning military reserve system; Create a critical mass of well-trained, well-equipped and standby mode reservists.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Establish a system of stand-by self-organized territorial defense units which could assist the Agency of National Emergency in dealing with major disruptions and crises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Political governance</td>
<td>Establish a political coordination unit for permanent dialogue between the ruling party, members of the government and opposition parties to agree on objectives of national security and resilience, as well as risks and threats.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Design ways to increase political trust (trust in authorities and public institutions).</td>
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8. According to the World Values Survey from 2010-2014 only 8.8 per cent of the surveyed population in Georgia showed features of generalized social trust (sum of positive responses to the statement “Most people can be trusted.” In contrast, the same figure for Ukraine was 23.1 per cent). See: World Values Survey Association. 2021. “World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014.”
| (3) Public-Private governance | Establish permanent coordination councils with companies who hold critical assets (electricity grids, water supply, pharmacy, food supply, hospitals, telecommunications, defense industry).

Establish an agency for strategic reserves (for food, water, pharmacy, blood, fuel etc.). In case of need, private companies should be expected to contribute to maintaining strategic stockpiles in times of crisis or armed attack.

Develop a strategic plan for easy conversion of underground public spaces such as car parks, tunnels, metro stations and swimming pools into evacuation centres.

Adopt new legislation to oblige construction companies to construct new buildings in a way that underground infrastructure can be easily transformed into evacuation centres.

Private businesses should be involved in strategic scenario planning in their respective fields (e.g. how to avoid food shortages in times of blockades or droughts).

Establish countrywide warning and shelter systems for cases of major disruptions or armed attacks.

Introduce investment screening mechanisms to tightly control investments in critical areas. Identify a list of investors from non-friendly or suspicious countries (Russia, China, Belarus, Iran) and put their activities under permanent screening. |
| (4) Societal (inclusive) Governance | Establish a permanent consultation council between state agencies, NGOs and expert communities to discuss various resilience-related issues, identify gaps and further improve the country’s resilience.

Establish a permanent coordination council with the Georgian Orthodox Church as well as with other religious communities. Use the societal networks of the Church and other religious communities to increase awareness in the population about importance of resilience and facing risks.

Design ways to increase [generalized] social trust (trust among people) in population and decrease polarization, especially in times of crisis.

Design a strategy to better integrate minorities (ethnic, religious, sexual) into a national resilience-building agenda. A wide gap in perceptions about Georgia’s national priorities and vulnerabilities among some of Georgia’s minority groups and the rest of the population should be narrowed, civic-national consciousness should increase, and all discriminatory practices removed and replaced by more robust inclusion-based integration policies. |
Introduce a cyber-conscious curriculum in primary and secondary education (it should include how to identify fake news and propaganda, how to filter information, and how to avoid digital and/or physical harm when using digital tools).

Focus on civic and political education, in both primary and secondary schools, with a focus on resilience. Specifically, it should include education on risks and threats to Georgia, the objectives and goals of the Georgian state and society, ways to improve societal resilience in Georgia, and self-organization in times of major disruptions or armed attack.

Introduce bi-annual National Defence Courses (including crisis simulations) for members of Georgia’s political, business and church establishment. The courses should convey the main risks, threats, and the country’s level of preparedness and resilience in various areas.

Conclusion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has pushed the issue of resilience into renewed focus, especially for frontline states. There is now an urgent need to boost their security and statehood against external and internal risks. Resilience is often used interchangeably with national security and defense strategies, but conceptually it goes beyond the security sector and encompasses all key sectoral policy areas. NATO’s comprehensive approach to resilience highlights the complex and well-entrenched nature of the concept.

Even though Georgia is not yet a NATO member state, Tbilisi should be active and take initiatives to develop its own resilience plan and to follow the NATO resilience agenda. Overall, NATO can assist Georgia's resilience-building in two crucial ways – technically and politically. Firstly, NATO can assist the Georgian authorities and private stakeholders in terms of supporting capacity building and knowledge exchange to meet the seven baseline indicators. If Georgia implements NATO baseline resilience requirements it will not only increase the country’s resilience but also provide domestic stability and more predictability in the eyes of regional and international partners.

Second, NATO can assist in raising public awareness among the Georgian population and civil society about the importance of having a comprehensive resilience strategy. Understandably, political and communication support is a lower priority in NATO’s approach towards its own member states but countries such as Georgia need an external push to understand the importance of resilience. NATO can be central part of this process.

With the assistance of NATO and other strategic partners, Georgia should aim to strengthen itself along multiple dimensions of resilience in order to mitigate its biggest vulnerabilities. We have proposed four dimensions with a non-exhaustive and partly overlapping list of indicators (figure 1, see also table 1). The implementation of reforms in the four areas will help Georgia to fully utilize the potential of a whole-of-society approach to comprehensive security, defense and resilience building.
Dimensions of Resilience-building in Georgia

**Societal**
- Social trust
- Digital literacy
- Inclusion of Minorities
- Inclusion of civil society
- Inclusion of population

**Legal and institutional**
- Coherent, cross-sectoral resilience-building strategy and legislation
- Improved inter-agency coordination

**Public-private**
- Dialogue with private businesses
- Strategic Reserves Agency
- Investment screening

**Political**
- Political trust
- Depolarization
- Deradicalization
- Transparency
- Accountability

*Figure 1: Four dimensions of resilience-building in Georgia (authors’ compilation)*
References


