

9th Annual Democracy Conference Agenda

#GEODEM2024: June 25, 2024



2024 Georgia's Slide to Authoritarianism: How to Withstand Antidemocratic Pressure

Venue: The Biltmore Tbilisi-Grand Royal Ballroom

9:30 – 10:00	Registration, welcome coffee
10:00 – 10:20	<p>Welcoming remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prof. Kornely Kakachia, Director, the Georgian Institute of Politics <p>Opening remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• H.E. Meline Arakelian, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Georgia
10:20 – 11:50	<p>Panel 1: Conversation with Parties: Concerns and Perspectives After Turmoil</p> <p>Moderator: <u>Nino Gelashvili</u>, Senior Editor, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty</p> <p>With the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party's recent decision to reintroduce the controversial Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence (referred to by many as the "Russian Law") and the subsequent outbreak of mass protests, Georgia stands at a crossroads once more. Georgia's European future has become increasingly uncertain, and in spite of the protests, GD aims to cling to power for an unprecedented fourth consecutive term. Moreover, ruling party leaders have built a narrative marked by mistrust, polarization, and scapegoating, primarily targeting civil society, media figures, and their political opponents. Public dissatisfaction is high, and citizens are demanding concrete solutions from political parties to address ongoing crises. However, opposition parties face significant hurdles to electoral success. They must navigate a political landscape—one of GD's making—defined by mistrust, polarization, and the scapegoating of civil society, media, and opposition party members. Moreover, they must balance the need for unity against GD with the realities of voter sentiment. If left unaddressed, deep public distrust, government pressure, and internal divisions may hamper their ability to challenge GD's dominance.</p> <p>The panel is focusing on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do voters expect from the parties?• How do Georgian political parties see the pre-election environment and the perspective of multi-party democracy in preparation for the 2024 elections?• How will political parties answer to the public demands and expectations in the current context?• What major factors may hinder the democratic process before and during the elections?• What are the key challenges that Georgian political parties face in the context of the ongoing political crisis? <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Nino Japaridze, Senior Advisor, Edison Research• Irakli Kupradze, Lelo for Georgia

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Giorgi Noniashvili, European Georgia● Teimuraz Papaskiri, Ahali● Dimitri Shashkini, United National Movement● Boris Chele Kurua, Girchi More Freedom
11:50 - 12:15	Coffee break
12:15 – 13:45	<p>Panel 2: The Future of Georgian Democracy and the Role of the International Community</p> <p>Moderator: <u>Rayhan Demytrie</u>, BBC correspondent</p> <p>Responding to democratic backsliding in Georgia, key strategic partner countries like the US, as well as supranational organizations like the EU and NATO, have issued a series of statements expressing their concern regarding Georgia’s slide into authoritarianism. International partners warn that, if Georgia continues on this path, it risks international isolation. At the same time they openly supported the Georgian people's fight to secure a European future for their country. Yet, unflinchingly, GD party leaders have ignored the warnings of the West, and are accusing them of intervening in Georgia’s sovereign affairs. One of the most striking features of the current political crisis is the prominence of conspiracy theories in the public discourse of the Georgian government, accusing the West is behind a powerful force called the “Global War Party,” responsible for creating conflicts and dragging countries into wars with Moscow. In an increasingly tense political environment, this panel addresses the role of the international community in safeguarding democracy in Georgia.</p> <p>The panel is focusing on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● What strategies can the international community employ to help Georgia to return to the path of democracy?● What are some ways that civil society can be supported in this challenging context?● How can the international community contribute to ensuring fair and democratic elections in Georgia? <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● H.E. Bergljot Hovland, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway to Georgia● H.E. Andrius Kalindra, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to Georgia● H. E. Riina Kaljurand, Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia to Georgia● H. E. Anne Toft Sørensen, Ambassador of Denmark to Georgia● Prof. Julie George, Associate Professor of Political Science, City University of New York; Adjunct Associate Professor, SIPA, Columbia University
13:45 – 14:30	Lunch