

END TO AN ERA

TRANSFER OF POWER IN GEORGIA

Canan Atilgan / David Aprasidze

In conjunction with the parliamentary elections in 2012, the presidential elections in Georgia in October 2013 marked a turning point in the political history of the young state. By holding free and fair elections on two occasions within one year, the country has passed the test of democracy twice over. And it was not just the observance of democratic principles that was impressive but above all the fact that there was an orderly and peaceful transfer of power for the first time since the country gained its independence 22 years ago. The events have also consolidated Georgia's unique position as a democratic country in a region where most political systems can hardly be considered solid democracies. However controversial the President of the Rose Revolution, Mikheil Saakashvili, may be, he deserves credit for the peaceful transfer of power and it will be his legacy.

However, the election results also illustrate the political crossroads at which the small Caucasus country finds itself. With the departure of President Saakashvili and the swearing in of Giorgi Margvelashvili on 17 November 2013, the era of the Rose Revolution has come to an end. The young, modern, westward-looking political elite, which had formed around Saakashvili, had to hand over power after ten years. The consequences that the departure of this political leadership will bring in the areas of domestic and foreign policy remain to be seen. At the same time there is a power shift taking place in the country's political order. The constitutional changes approved in 2010 have now fully come into force, transforming the political system from a super-presidential to a semi-parliamentarian one. The change of the head of state coincided with the resignation of Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, who occupied the



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post of head of government for just one year. This means that there will be no charismatic figure occupying either of the highest public offices of the country for the first time in Georgia's history. The question remains as to whether Ivanishvili will in fact turn his back on politics or take up the role of "grey eminence".

TWO ELECTIONS THAT ARE CHANGING GEORGIA

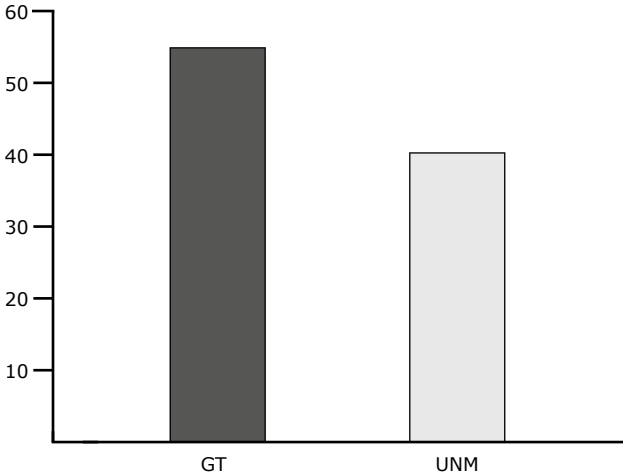
For the first time since the 2003 Rose Revolution, the governing party of President Saakashvili had a serious competitor for the majority in the Georgian Parliament in the October 2012 parliamentary elections. The challenger, the opposition coalition named Georgian Dream (GD) formed around Georgian billionaire Ivanishvili, won the elections and thereby gained the majority in Parliament, much to the surprise of the government elite. Saakashvili's party, the United National Movement (UNM) was only able to attract 40 per cent of the votes and gain 65 seats, while the GD alliance won 54 per cent of the votes and 85 seats.¹ The extreme political polarisation ahead of the parliamentary elections, pointed provocations as well as an election campaign conducted with tough and aggressive rhetoric did not suggest that the election "losers" would be ready to accept the outcome and fulfil their political responsibilities in opposition. President Saakashvili allayed this concern, which was widespread among national and international observers, by conceding his party's election defeat. He thereby confirmed his commitment to democratic rules. Saakashvili, who was still in charge of nominating someone for Prime Minister in the course of the formation of the new government, proposed Ivanishvili for the post, thus clearing the way for the two major parties to "cohabit".

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1 | With respect to the parliamentary elections cf. Canan Atilgan and Christina Schmitz, "Kann Iwanischwili den 'Traum' erfüllen?", *KAS-Länderbericht*, 4 Oct 2012, http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_32328-1522-1-30.pdf (accessed 29 Oct 2013).

Fig. 1

**Official final results of the 2012 parliamentary elections
(proportional representation, in per cent)**



Source: Georgian Central Election Commission (CEC).

After the parliamentary elections, the outcome of the presidential elections was essentially predictable. The new governing coalition and above all Prime Minister Ivanishvili portrayed themselves successfully as “victors over the authoritarian regime” and “the nation’s saviours”. Surveys indicated clearly that the UNM had fallen dramatically in popularity. By the summer of 2013, support for the UNM had dropped to just ten per cent.² This was no doubt partly due to the policy of the new government to uncover the “machinations” of the UNM government under the motto of “restoration of justice” and to initiate prosecutions. This resulted in a selective pursuit of justice, which manifested in politically motivated arrests of individuals from the UNM camp, which has drawn international criticism. The most prominent case is that of Ivane Merabishvili, former Prime Minister and Secretary General of the UNM. Merabishvili had been envisaged as the UNM’s presidential candidate. But he was arrested in May 2013 and thereby removed from the political scene. He has been on remand ever since, accused of abuse of office. And his is only one case

2 | Luis Navarro, “Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of a June 2013 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC”, National Democratic Institute (NDI), <http://civil.ge/files/files/2013/NDI-Georgia-June2013-survey-political.pdf> (accessed 29 Oct 2013).

of many. There are several UNM functionaries in custody. The party puts the number of people being summoned at 2,500.³ The UNM has been generally under enormous pressure since it lost power. 13 Members of Parliament have since left the party ranks, partly under pressure from the GD, partly voluntarily, leaving just 52 MPs representing the party in Parliament. Local authorities that are still controlled by the UNM have also been affected. In Tbilisi alone, the UNM lost twelve of its city councillors to the GD, which now has 25 seats in the 47-strong city council. There is therefore an early transfer of power taking place at local level ahead of the local elections, which are scheduled for 2014. Against this backdrop, it was a great challenge for the UNM to set itself up as an opposition party and make preparations for the presidential elections.



Ivane Merabishvili arrested: Since May 2013 the former Secretary General of the UNM has been on remand, accused of abuse of office. | Source: © Irakli Gedenidse, picture alliance, dpa.

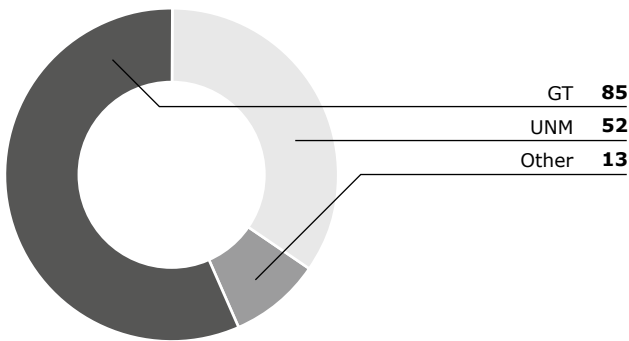
In spite of the strained relations between the parties in government and in opposition, this cohabiting has not resulted in political paralysis. Georgian politicians have used the situation to practice the art of compromise. President Saakashvili and Prime Minister Ivanishvili had been forced into this power sharing, a situation that presents a challenge even in established democracies and represented a totally new experience for Georgian politicians.

3 | Cf. Canan Atilgan and Moritz Esken, "Ein politischer Neubeginn?", *KAS-Länderbericht*, 28 Oct 2013, http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_35870-1522-1-30.pdf (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

Saakashvili's party naturally tried to disrupt the governing coalition's activities in Parliament. While the President himself approved several pieces of government legislation, he also repeatedly used his power of veto. He thus blocked the appointment of ambassadors, who had been nominated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the ambassador to Germany.⁴ Since February 2013, the country's business in Berlin has been conducted by the Permanent Representative. Saakashvili has refused to sign several pieces of legislation.⁵ However, so far the government majority in Parliament has been able to overcome the President's veto in every case.⁶ Having said that, the GD majority had to rely on some opposition voices to approve constitutional amendments. In spite of heated discussions, the opponents succeeded in coming to an agreement even on as controversial a question as the premature curtailment of the President's powers.⁷

Fig. 2

**Seat distribution in the Georgian Parliament
(as at October 2013)**



Source: Parliament of Georgia.

4 | "FM Says President Drags Out Appointing New Ambassadors", Civil Georgia, 16 Mar 2013, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25852> (accessed 5 Nov 2013).

5 | "Saakashvili Vetoes Bill Setting 3-Year Trial Period for Judges", Civil Georgia, 30 Oct 2013, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26639> (accessed 5 Nov 2013).

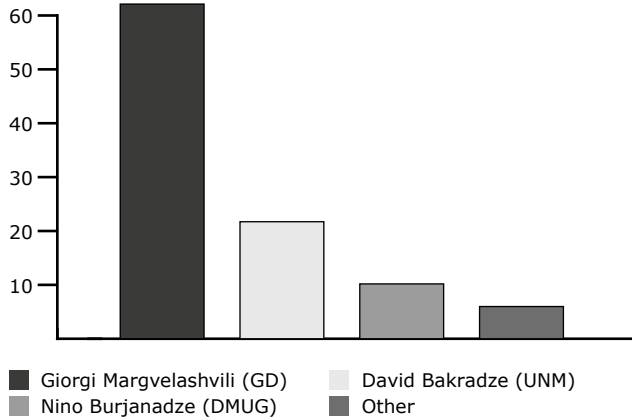
6 | According to the Georgian constitution, laws the President has vetoed can be resubmitted to Parliament and then approved.

7 | "Constitutional Amendment Passed Unanimously", Civil Georgia, 21 Mar 2013, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25873> (accessed 5 Nov 2013).

The presidential election has now brought an end to this difficult, yet instructive phase of transition. Giorgi Margvelashvili, an unknown protégé of Prime Minister Ivanishvili, was elected Georgia's fourth president with 62 per cent of the votes. The UNM candidate, David Bakradze, received 22 per cent of the votes. The third highest result was achieved by Nino Burjanadze from the Democratic Movement – United Georgia party. 20 further candidates attracted less than six per cent in total.⁸

Fig. 3

**Official final results of the 2013 presidential elections
(in per cent)**



Source: CEC.

The UNM realised that its candidate was unlikely to win and tried to present the image of a democratic and consolidated party. One of the main measures it took to this end was to choose the presidential candidate through preliminary elections in different areas of the country with a view to strengthening transparency and democracy within the party. David Bakradze was able to win against three other candidates from his own party. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, who had held the post of Chairman of Parliament until 2012, is known to the Georgian public as a level-headed and pragmatic politician. He conducted his election campaign under the slogan "Let's control the government together". Through the experiment of holding preliminary elections, the UNM distinguished itself very

8 | On the presidential election cf. Atilgan and Schmitz, n. 1.

publicly from the GD, whose candidate had been selected personally by the Prime Minister without any further consultation.

Coming third in the presidential elections may herald a political comeback for Nino Burjanadze. The Chair of the Democratic Movement party is a well-known political figure in Georgia. She had already served as acting head of state and as Chair of Parliament during the period from 2001 to 2008. Until a disagreement with Saakashvili in the course of the 2008 parliamentary elections, she had been one of his closest allies. She subsequently formed a political movement of her own. But her attempts to unite the opposition against Saakashvili failed. In recent years, Nino Burjanadze has fallen out of favour with the public particularly due to her close links to Putin and Russia. However, support for her rallied last year, as many Georgians agreed with her fierce criticism of Saakashvili and his fellow campaigners. These are obviously former GD voters who advocated a harsher approach to dealing with the previous government or who did not rate the political competence of GD candidate Margvelashvili very highly. Burjanadze is thus filling a political vacuum in the Georgian political landscape.

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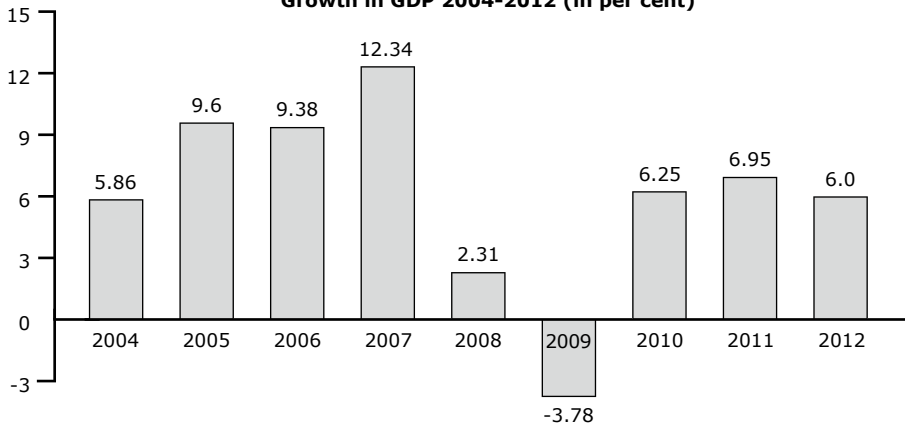
The presidential elections enabled the GD to consolidate its power, while the UNM has been able to establish itself largely successfully as the opposition. This transfer of power has brought the era of the Rose Revolution formally to an end.

TAKING STOCK OF THE LEGACY OF THE ROSE REVOLUTION

The 2003 Rose Revolution was an attempt to make a radical break with the Soviet past. The Soviet nomenclature had to make way for a new political leadership of young elites, most of whose members had been educated in the West. Extensive modernisation of Georgia was the motto of the energetic government led by Saakashvili. Georgia did in fact implement comprehensive reforms within months. The radical reforms of the administration that Saakashvili pressed ahead with were praised as exemplary

by international observers. Today, Georgia is ranked 51st in the corruption index of Transparency International, out-doing many EU member states such as the Czech Republic, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania. Back in 2004, Georgia had been ranked 99th. The government abolished some rules and regulations that had become obsolete and were impeding investment, and it initiated new infrastructure projects. As a result, Georgia's economy achieved remarkable growth rates. As far as foreign policy was concerned, the priority was for Georgia to join the European Union and NATO.

Fig. 4

Growth in GDP 2004-2012 (in per cent)

Source: The World Bank.

There is no question that without the approach of radical modernisation, the outlook for Georgia's future development would now be rather bleak. However, the gap between democratisation and modernisation has become ever wider over recent years. The process of political transformation has come to be characterised by inconsistent democratisation efforts and a more authoritarian leadership style. Although the government included the establishment of a liberal democracy and membership in European and Euro-Atlantic structures among its political goals, there were increasing signs of restriction of political freedoms, manipulation during elections and persecution of the opposition. Georgia therefore had to be counted among the group of hybrid regimes. The government suffered a loss of image due to its conduct in the fight against crime. While the policy of cracking down hard had

an impact on the high crime figures, it entailed serious breaches of human rights. The number of prison population rose fourfold within a brief period of time.⁹

In the area of foreign affairs, Saakashvili's government failed to bring a positive dynamic to the separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The President did succeed in bringing the autonomous Republic of Adjara on the Black Sea, which was governed by the authoritarian leader Aslan Abashidze, back under central control. But other, occasionally aggressive attempts to change the status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia merely resulted in escalating the conflicts that had lain dormant since the beginning of the 1990s and ultimately triggered the brief war between Georgia and Russia in 2008. The gulf between the centre and Abkhazia and South Ossetia has since widened even further. Russia was treated mainly as a taboo subject. And discussions about Georgia's stance in foreign affairs were not encouraged either. To strengthen his position, Saakashvili kept referring to the referendum of January 2008, in which 72.5 per cent of the population voiced their agreement with the country joining NATO.¹⁰

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Nevertheless, it can be said that the results of the ten years since the Rose Revolution have been relatively positive overall. When Saakashvili took power, Georgia was considered a "failed state". Today, the country is even seen as a model of modernisation in the region. The differences become more obvious in a regional comparison. After 20 years of independence, Georgia's neighbouring republics are still ruled by old networks based on family ties and patronage and a widespread Soviet-style political culture of individual indifference. Although Saakashvili's leadership style has rightly been criticised, he and his government have succeeded in many respects in making a break

9 | Mariam "Gabadava, Zero Tolerance and (near) Zero Acquittal", Transparency International Georgia, 30 Nov 2010, <http://transparency.ge/en/blog/pzero-tolerance-and-near-zero-acquittalp> (accessed 5 Nov 2013); "Criminal Justice Statistics", National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT), http://geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=602&lang=eng (accessed 5 Nov 2013).

10 | "CEC Announces Plebiscite Results", Civil Georgia, 11 Jan 2008, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16868> (accessed 5 Nov 2013).

with the country's Soviet past and laid the institutional groundwork for peaceful change and transfer of power. There is now a political consensus within Georgia that the country should aim for membership in NATO and in the EU and establish modern political institutions.



Former President with relatively positive record: When Saakashvili took power, Georgia was considered a "failed state". | Source: David Plas, European People's Party (EPP), flickr ©.

THE END OF SUPERPRESIDENTIALISM

On 17 November, when the new President was officially sworn in, constitutional amendments came into force. These will bring about a transformation of the political system from a presidential democracy to one where Parliament and the Prime Minister exert greater influence. The Georgian Parliament and the government have been strengthened. The new President retains key powers in the areas of foreign affairs and security, and the position will continue to be filled through direct elections. Otherwise, the President will fulfil more symbolic and representative functions in future. The Prime Minister now has the most wide-ranging authority, which makes him the most powerful actor in the Georgian state system. He will no longer be appointed by the President, but elected by Parliament.

The constitutional amendments were drawn up by a state commission, which was convened under the Saakashvili government to review the country's constitution. That had been adopted in 1995 and amended several times since. Significant amendments were made in 2004, after the Rose

Revolution. The President was given extensive powers, which attracted criticism both at national and international level. The remit of the Constitutional Commission of 2009 was to restore the disturbed balance between executive and legislative branches. Critics frequently complained that the government was attempting to extend Saakashvili's rule by shifting the centre of power from the President to the Prime Minister, i.e. that it had a Putin model in mind. According to the constitution, Saakashvili was barred from standing again in presidential elections, but could have taken the post of Prime Minister.

In 2010, the Commission presented a plan that was approved by the Georgian Parliament. The new political system strengthens the position of Prime Minister, with the President still occupying an important political role, particularly due to the direct mandate. The one-year period of cohabitation has shown, however, that while the institutional framework is important, the way it plays out in a specific political context is crucial. The loss of the parliamentary majority curtailed Saakashvili's scope for political action although he was still the most powerful figure in Georgia's political system according to the constitution. While he succeeded in delaying a number of processes through his veto, there was not much he could do to influence the political agenda.

The majority situation in Parliament will therefore play a more significant role than in the past. 52 seats had given the UNM just enough influence to prevent new constitutional amendments. With the previously approved constitutional amendments coming into force, the proportion of votes required for constitutional amendments has been increased further so that future decisions will require the approval of 113 Members of Parliament. More far-reaching plans will therefore always require cross-party cooperation in future.

DEPARTURE OF CHARISMATIC POLITICIANS FROM THE SCENE

While the new political system strengthens the role of the Prime Minister compared to that of the President, it also makes him dependent on parliamentary majorities and

forces him into cooperation and possibly into coalitions. In conjunction with the election results, this diminishes the relevance of charismatic leaders, who used to be instrumental in determining Georgian politics after independence.

All three presidents – Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze and Mikheil Saakashvili – had had some experience at a national level as well as an international reputation and broad support before they took office. They all had clear ideas about the country's direction in terms of domestic and foreign policy, and they all left a legacy. The legacy of the first President Gamsakhurdia, who stood out mainly because of his nationalism, was a country torn by two separatist conflicts and a civil war. Shevardnadze's legacy probably included Georgia's corrupt structures. We must, however, give him credit for the adoption of the 1995 constitution and the strategic decision in favour of a pro-Western stance in foreign policy. Saakashvili will enter the annals of history as a radical moderniser and challenger of Russia.

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By comparison with these three presidents, President Giorgi Margvelashvili and Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili have neither great political experience nor special political charisma. Margvelashvili studied philosophy and

has worked for various international organisations operating in Tbilisi. He came to public prominence as rector of the "Georgian Institute of Public Affairs", a private institution of higher education, and as a political commentator. His political career started when Ivanishvili brought him into his cabinet as Minister for Education in 2012 after the parliamentary elections. The new Prime Minister Garibashvili is also a close confidant of his extremely wealthy predecessor Ivanishvili, and his political career also began just under a year ago – as an election campaigner for Ivanishvili. Since then, he has not only replaced his mentor as Prime Minister but also as Chairman of the GD. The 31-year-old Garibashvili previously worked as a manager for Ivanishvili's companies and for his foundation.¹¹

11 | Official biography: "Irakli Garibashvili", Government of Georgia, http://government.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=124&info_id=200 (accessed 6 Nov 2013).

Both the Prime Minister and the President are thus totally dependent on their patron Ivanishvili, who has seen his mission to elbow Saakashvili out of the political scene, which he had announced two years ago, come to fruition. During his term as Prime Minister, Ivanishvili's leadership style frequently drew criticism. He took all important decisions on political appointments by himself. It is quite obvious that his primary criteria were not political experience and competence but loyalty and personal trust. His family doctor became Minister for Health and he elevated his solicitor to the position of Chief Public Prosecutor; the latter in the meantime has resigned his position to coincide with Ivanishvili's resignation. Similar criteria were applied for the nomination of the presidential candidate Margvelashvili and the appointment of Prime Minister Garibashvili. Although the coalition presented the appointment decisions as the result of internal and democratic consultations, it was an open secret from the start that proposals put forward by Ivanishvili were not up for discussion. Minister of Defence Irakli Alasania, Chairman of the Free Democrat coalition partner, was ousted from his position of First Deputy Prime Minister because he had discussed the possibility of his candidacy for the presidential elections within the party.¹²



"The Nation's Saviours"? President Margvelashvili (right) and Prime Minister Ivanishvili at a press conference on 28 October. | Source: © Zurab Kurtsikidze, picture alliance, dpa.

12 | "PM Ivanishvili Demotes Alasania", Civil Georgia, 23 Jan 2013, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25670> (accessed 7 Nov 2013).

Ivanishvili has announced his intention to become active in civil society in future without giving greater details about this new role. It is not clear whether and how he will exercise some power in an informal manner. This will determine to a large extent whether the new President and the new Prime Minister will be able to establish themselves as independent actors or whether they will be demoted to "Georgian Medvedevs".

A NEW BEGINNING OR OLD AUTHORITIES?

Georgia's party political landscape is reorganising. The GD as coalition is composed of groups covering the entire ideological spectrum from socialist to liberal to ultranationalist. The GD Members of Parliament include both functionaries of the new government and a relatively large number of former bureaucrats and businesspeople from the Shevardnadze era, who saw the transfer of power as an opportunity to return to power themselves. Given the GD's composition, it looks less like a coalition of new political strategists and visionaries than an alliance of committed Saakashvili opponents, who have little in common beyond this antipathy. The liberal party of Defence Minister Alasania or the Republican Party, who is said to attract many intellectuals, must get along with staunch conservatives. The one factor that unites this disparate group is no doubt Ivanishvili. Without him as the binding force, the coalition will find it difficult to maintain the alliance and retain its capability to govern. Much will depend on whether Ivanishvili will indeed turn his back on politics. Without collaborating with the GD, its coalition partners cannot take any effective political action.¹³ The GD as the strongest part within the coalition may depend on its coalition partners formally to form the parliamentary majority, but if the coalition were to break up, a number of MPs from the other parties would join the GD.¹⁴

13 | The coalition comprises the following parties: Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia, Republican Party of Georgia, Free Democrats, National Forum, Industry Will Save Georgia and the Conservative Party of Georgia.

14 | Shortly after the parliamentary elections, the National Forum announced it would join with Ivanishvili's party. The party leadership subsequently abandoned this idea. Cf. "National Forum' joins 'Georgian Dream'", Prime news, <http://prime-news.ge/?p=87865&lang=en> (accessed 6 Nov 2013).

The future of the UNM is uncertain, although this has been the first time in the history of the young republic that a governing party did not immediately sink into oblivion after being voted out. The party has survived the first wave of attacks by the new rulers and stabilised its core vote. Members of the party estimate its popular support at between 20 and 25 per cent. The 22 per cent of votes attracted by the UNM presidential candidate David Bakradze confirm this assumption. Having said that, the UNM lost access to administrative resources after the presidential elections, which is of great significance in emerging economies such as Georgia. Provincial governors, who were appointed by Saakashvili, resigned after the presidential elections. In line with the constitutional amendment, their successors are now determined by the government. Against this backdrop, it is not yet clear whether the governing coalition will allow the UNM opposition room for action in the political arena or in fact intends to marginalise the political opposition. After all, Georgia has known nothing other than one party exercising its power at all levels since its independence. The decisive factor in this context will be the way that Saakashvili is dealt with, whom the UNM confirmed as Chairman at the latest party conference. There have been various indications, from Prime Minister Ivanishvili among others, that criminal proceedings will be initiated against Saakashvili. The outcome of those proceedings will determine not only the chances of the UNM's political survival but also its capability to regenerate and to communicate this fact to the country's citizens in a credible manner.

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The elections have illustrated several structural problems in Georgian politics. The campaigns were dominated less by political ideas than the personalities of Ivanishvili and Saakashvili. The GD did not win the elections because it offered a convincing programme but mainly because large sections of the population saw Ivanishvili as the new saviour. The focus on personalities thus represents a major challenge for the consolidation of a democratic political culture. The departure of the charismatic leaders Saakashvili and Ivanishvili could create a power vacuum, which the poorly developed party landscape may not be able to fill. Political parties will either have to learn to place

their programmes and convictions centre stage, engage in cross-party cooperation and form coalitions, or this vacuum will be filled by a new charismatic leadership. The latter would entail the risk that ultraconservative forces in particular and their radical ideas would receive greater support. These forces are themselves subject to influence by Georgia's powerful Orthodox Church, which is increasingly fomenting conflict within Georgia's heterogeneous society with its intolerant views.

The Orthodox Church plays a special role in Georgian society. While the authority exercised by formal political institutions is waning, the Church is the country's most popular social institution.¹⁵ It also enjoys a special position vis-à-vis the state as it relies on state funding. According to Georgian experts, the Church was instrumental in driving the change in political mood during the 2012 presidential elections.¹⁶ The Church and its Patriarch Ilia II do not shy away from commenting on political matters. But the political ideas of the Church do not always follow the line of logic. The idea of the Georgian monarchy being restored may seem absurd, but the Church thinks otherwise. In 2007, the Patriarch publicly advocated the restoration of the monarchy. A few years ago, he was heavily involved in arranging a wedding linking two Georgian royal houses and he recently baptised the new-born son from this marriage. The ceremony had all the hallmarks of the baptism of a successor to the throne.¹⁷

The far-reaching influence of the Church can be felt at all political levels today. The Church tolerates national radicalism, anti-Western views and intolerance of minorities

15 | According to the latest surveys, Patriarch Ilia II is the most authoritative person in Georgia, receiving support from 92 per cent of respondents. Ivanishvili only received 69 per cent. Navarro, n. 2.

16 | Interview with Prof. Gigi Tevzadze: Maya Chalaganidze, "ოცნების გამარჯვების მნიშვნელოვანი ფაქტორი იყო ეკლესია" (The Church was an important factor in the victory of the Georgian Dream), 24 Saati, 14 Oct 2012, <http://24saati.ge/index.php/category/news/interview/2012-10-14/32683> (accessed 6 Nov 2013).

17 | "ბაგრატიონების შთამომავლის ნათლობას პატრიარქმა ისტორიული უწოდა" (The Patriarch described the baptism of the successor to the Bagrationi dynasty as historic), Netgazeti.ge, 3 Nov 2013, <http://netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/25112> (accessed 6 Nov 2013).

and partly even encourages them. One striking example is the violence perpetrated against people taking part in a demonstration against homophobia in May 2013, where agitators included representatives from the Church.¹⁸ The values the Church advocates are not always in line with the principles of a liberal, democratic and free society. When the Patriarch lauds Stalin as a great Georgian and religious person,¹⁹ it is no wonder that new statues are being erected to Stalin in the country. Thomas de Waal, who knows Georgia well, is correct in stating: "Over the past year, Georgia has become, for want of a better word, more Georgian. It is simultaneously more democratic, more open, more nationalistic, and more Christian Orthodox. It now looks as though Saakashvili's 'mental revolution' was mostly a mirage."²⁰ The Saakashvili government did indeed occasionally use undemocratic methods to enforce liberal principles. The question now is how to find a compromise with tradition without relinquishing liberal achievements.

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CONSOLIDATED DEMOCRACY OR MERE LIP SERVICE: IVANISHVILI'S BUSINESS PLAN

Back in 2011, when Ivanishvili announced his entry into politics, he promised the development of a democratic system, which even Europeans would admire.²¹ He spoke of his intention to control his government from within civil society. As a responsible citizen, he saw education and the strengthening of civil society as his new principles.²² How the separation of powers, transparency and

18 | Silvia Stöber, "Georgien: Zwischen Moderne und Mittelalter", Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 31 May 2013, <http://boell.de/de/node/277339> (accessed 6 Nov 2013).

19 | Maya Metskhvarishvili, "ილია მეორე: რუსეთი ძალიან მიყვარს, სტალინი მორწმუნე იყო" (Ilia II: I love Russia. Stalin was a religious person), Netgazeti.ge, 31 Jul 2013, <http://netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/22214> (accessed 5 Nov 2013).

20 | Thomas de Waal, "So Long, Saakashvili", *Foreign Affairs*, 29 Oct 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/10/09/so-long-saakashvili/grk6> (accessed 5 Nov 2013).

21 | "Ivanishvili's First-Ever TV Interview", Civil Georgia, 17 Oct 2011, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24039> (accessed 5 Nov 2013).

22 | Ivanishvili's open letter to society (unofficial translation): "PM on His Intended Pre-Term Resignation", Civil Georgia, 2 Sep 2013, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26408> (accessed 6 Nov 2013).

Now that Ivanishvili has officially withdrawn from politics, he will no longer have to account for his actions to the Georgian voters. He could therefore build up an “autonomous power” that is independent of the state.

accountability could be guaranteed in such a system remained open. Ivanishvili has a fortune that is vast by Georgian standards. It was estimated at 5.3 billion U.S. dollars in 2012,²³ one third of Georgia’s GDP.²⁴ Now that he has officially withdrawn from politics, he will no longer have to account for his actions to the Georgian voters. He could therefore build up an “autonomous power” that is independent of the state. Without holding public office, he would not be subject to any formal restrictions. He would not have to deal with the day-to-day tasks of government, nor could he be held to account for any government failures. On the contrary, he has a free hand in keeping the government under control by informal means. Shortly before his resignation, Ivanishvili said he would leave it to his successor to determine the composition of the new government, but that he would be prepared to make himself available as an advisor to both the Prime Minister and the President. As the incumbents are some of his closest confidants, they will hardly be in a position to reject the offer.

Ivanishvili’s concept resembles a business plan for managing a company. This concept of a politically bland and technocratic government can make for a certain degree of efficiency. But one cannot expect it to consolidate democratic institutions. Instead, power is transferred to the informal level, which makes it more difficult to control.

CONTINUITY OR A CHANGE OF COURSE?

A further challenge arises from the country’s foreign policy orientation. Since it came into office, the new government has ruffled feathers both at home and abroad. After an entire year of GD government, there is still no clarity as to how the government defines the country’s strategic interests. Under President Shevardnadze, a Western orientation came to dominate Georgian foreign policy. Georgia took part in various regional economic projects, some of which had geopolitical implications, including the construction of

23 | “Bidzina Ivanishvili”, Forbes, Mar 2013, <http://forbes.com/profile/bidzina-ivanishvili> (accessed 7 Nov 2013).

24 | “Gross Domestic Product (GDP)”, GEOSTAT, http://geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=119&lang=eng (accessed 7 Nov 2013).

oil and gas pipelines. Under the Saakashvili government, the Western orientation was formalised in security and foreign policy concepts. Among other things, Georgia made joining NATO one of its objectives and it participated in peacekeeping operations organised by the Alliance. Georgia's Western course was clearly defined and communicated to the outside world with equal clarity.

At first glance, it appears that the GD government is staying true to the course set by its predecessors. New President Margvelashvili called foreign policy the only area in politics where he can envisage collaborating with the UNM.²⁵ In March 2013, Parliament approved a cross-party resolution on foreign policy and confirmed Georgia's Euro-Atlantic course. According to this resolution, Georgia will not seek membership in regional organisations whose members do not acknowledge its territorial integrity. These include in particular the CIS and the Eurasian Union, which are dominated by Russia.²⁶ The Association Agreement with the EU was initialled in November, and the prospects for it being signed next year are looking good.

At the same time, the GD is striving for a rapprochement with Russia to improve the poor relationship between the two countries, which was badly disrupted by the war in August 2008. Shortly after he took office as Prime Minister, Ivanishvili appointed Georgia's former ambassador to Moscow, Zurab Abashidze, as his special representative in negotiations with Russia. It is no secret that Ivanishvili, who lived in Russia in the nineties and built his fortune there, is far more open towards the big neighbouring country than his predecessor Saakashvili. His reluctance to voice any criticism of Russia and Vladimir Putin has been noticeable. Undoubtedly, the new rhetoric style represents a significant prerequisite to a normalisation of relations. But even with Ivanishvili on its side, the

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25 | "გიორგი მარგველაშვილს 'ნაციონალებთან' თანამშრომლობა მხოლოდ საგარეო საკითხებში წარმოუდგენია" (Giorgi Margvelashvili can only envisage collaboration with the UNM in the area of foreign policy), InterPressNews, 28 Oct 2013, <http://interpressnews.ge/geo/politika/258046> (accessed 29 Oct 2013).

26 | "Parliament Adopts Bipartisan Resolution on Foreign Policy", Civil Georgia, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25828> (accessed 29 Oct 2013).

degree to which the Georgian government can influence the Kremlin remains limited. Although the government was successful in persuading Russia to lift the 2006 embargo on wine and mineral water, further breakthroughs in Russian-Georgian relations are unlikely. On the contrary, Russia has caused a further escalation. Russian troops have strengthened the borders with the separatist Republic of South Ossetia with barbed wire, in places cutting right through Georgian villages.

There is no clear strategy on the Georgian side. It would be naive to believe that Georgian politicians can improve the relationship with Russia without making political concessions to Moscow. The same applies with respect to Euro-Atlantic integration. Normalisation of the relationship with Russia and integration into NATO are aspirations that are mutually exclusive in the medium term. It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which a future government would be able to bridge this chasm.

With the parliamentary and presidential elections, Georgia has passed a significant litmus test of democracy. The international community should acknowledge this achievement and take it into account in the course of the process of Georgia aligning more closely with European structures. At the same time, the international community should be vigilant and see to it that the achieved democratic standards are not reversed. This will require constructive and close cooperation with the new government, but also efforts to strengthen political elite figures within the government who make a clear commitment to Western values. Georgia represents a special case in the region. While there are still some structural problems in its political system, important prerequisites to democratic consolidation are present. A further strengthening of the party landscape, the establishment of a political culture of cooperation, and consolidation of the Western orientation can make the country into a model for development in the post-Soviet region.