

# Georgia: Rise and Fall of the Façade Democracy

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**G**eorgia’s “revolution of roses,” November 22–3, 2003, brought an unprecedented generational change in post-Soviet political leaderships, based on public support for the democracy. Like every revolution, it tells a story of failed reform.

Gradual weakening of Eduard Shevardnadze’s government has been observed both by national and international analysts who spoke of Georgia as a “failed state.” But, more important, Shevardnadze’s inflexible style of governance acted as a straightjacket for the political environment that grew increasingly complex since Georgia’s independence.

On November 23, Eduard Shevardnadze was forced to resign his office, amid the wave of public protests against rigged parliamentary elections, after ruling the country for twelve consecutive years and being in the country’s top leadership since the 1970s.

Some observers refer to these events as a surprise breakthrough of democracy. Others point out that the leaders who deposed the president were among the top ten leaders of Shevardnadze’s own Citizens Union of Georgia in the 1999 parliamentary elections. Thus, the critics say no significant political change has occurred.

To put Georgia’s “revolution of roses” in a proper context, it is necessary to analyze the pressures that the country’s social and partisan environment put on the political system that personally became associated with Shevardnadze since the 1990s.

Only by fusing both of these observations can we tell a story of emergence of the country’s democratic institutions, party politics, and failed reform.

## Preface

Forty-five political entities, thirteen of which were the party blocs, participated in Georgia’s 1999 parliamentary elections. While the general level of party pluralism

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in Georgia is acknowledged widely, researchers have noted several deficiencies that prevent the political process from becoming a robust and sustainable foundation for the country's democratic development.

Among the most frequently mentioned are:<sup>1</sup>

1. Lack of internal party democracy
2. Little or no effort to develop meaningful party platforms
3. Little attention to membership
4. Weak constituency relations
5. Failure to separate elected party representatives from the management responsibilities
6. Confrontationalism and a propensity to fractionalize<sup>2</sup>

These political party deficiencies are characteristic of many post-socialist countries. In Georgia, however, the party system had to be recreated from scratch at least twice in the country's recent history, leading to abortive development.

The political parties emerged in Georgia in a process broadly reminiscent of similar processes in post-Soviet space. The elitist groups in ideological opposition to communism, commonly known as dissident groups, preceded the modern parties. They did not strive to gain control of the government; hence they cannot, strictly speaking, be characterized as political parties. Many of the dissident leaders have played an active role in the new political parties, and some still remain in the political arena.

The political groups aspiring to power today emerged in the late 1980s and formed a vanguard of the independence movement. They succeeded the Communist regime through elections in 1990 but had little time to develop organizationally. Most of these groups squandered popular support in a bloody coup that ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia in early 1992. As a result, the rules of the political game and the system of political parties have taken shape since 1995.

Different from many other post-socialist states, the Communist Party almost has vanished from the political arena since 1989. The former Communist *nomenklatura* has maintained some of its influence and financial assets, but as an organizational entity, the Communist Party never has recovered, attracting the protest vote.

The development of other political groups has been characterized by several broad trends. Initially, with the tide of the national movement rising, "the simultaneous admission of all social strata and economic groups into post-communist electoral systems has created an incentive to establish catchall parties that appeal to many constituencies."<sup>3</sup> The Round Table—a political bloc that won the 1990 elections in a landslide—exemplified this trend.

As the political system was recreated following the ousting of Gamsakhurdia, this pattern was repeated by the Citizens Union of Georgia (*Sakartvelos Mokalaketa Kavshiri*, SMK) in 1995, which formed the basis for President Eduard Shevardnadze's government.

Since the mid-1990s, the political landscape has diversified as the social cleavages have begun to crystallize following a certain degree of economic recovery. The media, nongovernmental organizations, business elites, and impoverished

citizenry began to emerge as the bases of political power as political party outreach expanded.

Shevardnadze's strong presidential powers have limited the impact of parties on executive decisions. In this sense, "superpresidentialism" acted as a brake on development of the ideological platforms and the parties' links to the electorate.<sup>4</sup> However, as some analysts have argued using the example of other post-Soviet states, a strong presidency was not altogether negative for party development.<sup>5</sup>

The Georgian parliament of 1995 has emerged as an influential forum for the political debate. As the parties, including the ruling SMK, were shielded from executive responsibility, they had the time to develop their organizational structures under relative "greenhouse" conditions. Specifically, in the case of the SMK, this has led to the emergence of several young political leaders who came out on top of the "revolution of roses" in late 2003.

Although the political parties have had limited success securing seats in consecutive parliaments, the individual political leaders have survived the country's many upheavals and still influence the country's political life. But as the institutional histories of most parties in Georgia's political arena are very short, the complex interpersonal relations and alliance-building patterns frequently have to be traced back to the personal histories of the party leaders.

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of Georgia's party development and put it into the context of the country's political life. As the discussion of these issues in academic literature has been scarce, this paper is largely descriptive and does not intend to build the picture of party development into any frozen frame of the political theory.

The discussion of party development trends can be insightful, as the "revolution of roses" heralded the new shuffling of the partisan landscape. The peaceful character of the revolution has allowed for the retention of party institutions that have grown since 1995. Further diversification of the social strata may create a window of opportunity for the crystallization of the resilient party system.

### **A Shadow of Reform**

In April 2001, President Eduard Shevardnadze named then parliamentary chairman Zurab Zhvania as runner-up for prime minister. The president's decision to go back to cabinet ministers, composed largely of the ruling party appointees, was seen as a U-turn. In the mid-1990s the Cabinet was abandoned to increase the powers of Shevardnadze's presidency. The new Georgian constitution created a model similar to the U.S. model, where the president is the head of the executive, and a state minister manages it.

Apart from the institutional overhaul, the generational change seemed inevitable. By 2001, the new leaders of the Citizens Union of Georgia (SMK), also known in the West as the young reformers, started to move beyond their cradle—the parliamentary faction of the SMK—and squeeze the old Soviet *nomenklatura* and Shevardnadze's technocrat appointees out of the executive positions. The ministries of finance, taxes and revenues, and justice went under their control. Ascent

of the young leaders to the ministerial positions largely was known to have been engineered by Zhvania, usually known as a leader of the “young reformers.”

Shevardnadze’s attempt at reform seemed timely and logical. However, after an initial political stabilization and economic recovery in 1995–96, the country has failed to manage an economic breakthrough and political development has stagnated.

In 2000, Shevardnadze won his second, and constitutionally last, term in office. He announced an ambitious program to “knock on NATO’s door” by the end of his term in 2005. Sweeping reforms in inefficient, corrupt executive government could have been seen as his gracious and respectable exit into Georgia’s political history.

In 2001 *The National Interest* published an essay by Charles King that slammed the positive assessments of Georgia’s democratic development and called the young reformers’ talks of increasing influence “wishful thinking” by the international community.<sup>6</sup>

King also spoke of Shevardnadze’s governance as “an effort to balance competing interests to ensure that no single group is able to challenge his authority as head of state, head of government and head of the ruling party.”<sup>7</sup>

Due to the style of leadership that Shevardnadze attempted, or at least declared, the reform of 2001 has failed to materialize. Unwilling to share too much power with Zhvania and his team, the president retained the old cadre of the security services in the government and threw his weight behind the foremost conservatives, Interior Minister Kakha Targamadze and State Security Minister Vakhtang Kutateladze, whose ministries were publicly associated with numerous human rights abuses and rampant corruption.

As a result, by fall 2001 none of the young reformers remained in the government. As they started to strongly criticize Shevardnadze’s policies, the young leaders became increasingly popular. In November 2001 they emerged on top of the first large-scale street protests since early 1990, where citizens stood up to defend the private Rustavi 2 television station against a crackdown from the security forces. These protests gave the new leaders from the SMK and other parties hope for a new political reality—one beyond and, possibly, without Shevardnadze.

In November 2001, the president was forced to send the government into resignation. The SMK has all but collapsed as the young reformers left the party and went on to form their own political groups. The new parties differed from the SMK both ideologically and, more important, by a more open, popular style of campaigning.

The leaders of these new parties led the “revolution of roses.” Their success was due partly to their political and leadership capabilities, but it also responded to the political environment that emerged in the country during the decade of its democratic development.

The departure of Shevardnadze marks the end of Georgia’s “second republic”—understood as a dominant and governing system of political players, rules, and practices. The “first republic,” led by the first freely elected government of

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, survived less than a year and collapsed in December 1991–January 1992 in a bloody military showdown.

The stories of these two transitions are similar in some extent. Both Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze, before the premature end of their presidencies, failed to deliver reforms, alienated the country's elites, and limited the avenues of public political domain to sympathizers. Certainly this happened in different ways and had different reasons.

The tragic end of Gamsakhurdia's government largely has annihilated the dominant political parties and players. Some of them died, others lost popular credibility and were reduced to the political backstage, and others were outmaneuvered by the incoming Shevardnadze, who set out to consolidate his powers. The "revolution of roses" will also herald the departure of some political parties and players, but due to its peaceful character, it may become a step forward in nurturing a new partisan political environment.

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A story of Georgia's transition, its dynamics, social

dimension, and failures, is best told through development of the Georgian political parties and their rise and fall in a stormy decade of Georgian independence.

As the new political landscape is shaping in Georgia, this article will attempt to chart the development of Georgia's partisan political landscape, shared features of the parties, and the main stages of the party development. The process is broken down into several stages: independence movement followed by the 1991 breakdown of the political system, recovery of the democratic institutions since 1992, and emergence of the new political reality since Shevardnadze's attempt at system overhaul were abandoned in 2001.

I trace the paths of the political players who have departed or are still staying in Georgia's politics, and I speak about the challenges ahead for those who emerged as the winners of the November 23 events.

### **First Wave—Independence Movement**

The first wave of groups emerged following the drastic political shifts initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 in the Soviet Union. By 1987 the first informal political unions appeared. The Iliia Chavchavadze Society was among the first groups to advocate openly for Georgian sovereignty.<sup>8</sup>

The national movement grew in the late 1980s and spearheaded a series of widely popular confrontations with the local Communist leadership. Most of these confrontations were civil in nature and contained only an undertone of political demands. The landmark protests called for abolishing the Soviet army artillery shooting range near the historical David Gareji monastery as well as

ceasing construction of the Transcaucasus Railway, which had been opposed on environmental grounds. By 1988, however, the protests became increasingly nationalistic in character, stressing a Georgian “full sovereignty” agenda. The national political movement, conceived largely within a circle of dissident Soviet intellectuals, started to gain popular legitimacy. On April 9, 1989, when Soviet troops forcefully disbanded a peaceful manifestation in Tbilisi, killing twenty protesters, this legitimacy became absolute and the Communist Party lost its grip on power.

At this time, two main types of political parties existed:

### *Communist Party*

The Communist Party of the 1980s was intertwined with the system of government and was present in all state institutions. The Communist Party enjoyed absolute control over public service and appointed officials to management positions in every field, from arts to heavy industry.

The main lever of the Communist Party was its “administrative resource”—its capacity to direct and manage all walks of life and use the party and government resources to maintain its influence. The party was the only political group, with enough cadre possessing years (and sometimes decades) of managerial experience.

The Communist Party’s identification with the state institutions, as well as its capacity to muster the country’s administrative resources to its advantage arguably has shaped the archetype for the incumbent party of power in Georgia’s later history.

Most of the early socialist naïveté had evaporated during Brezhnev’s debilitating rule during the 1980s. Deciding to join the Communist Party was based on pragmatic, rather than ideological, concerns. Membership in the Communist Party was the ticket for moving up the bureaucratic ladder. Although membership was voluntary, in reality it was almost universal. Party members also had little, if any, interest in Communist ideology or any intention to fight for the ideas it represented.

With the advent of the independence movement, nationalist demands gained higher moral ground, and public enrollment in the Communist Party started to dwindle. In 1989, most of its members left the Georgian Communist Party. Compared to many other post-Socialist countries, Georgian Communists never have recovered as a potent political force under a pluralistic system. They entered the 1990 parliament but were officially outlawed after the Moscow coup of August 1991. The party lost its organizational structure and never regained electoral support. Its assets were reportedly looted or “privatized” by former party bosses who later started their business in Georgia or Russia. The former Communist *nomenklatura* continued to remain influential in executive government, especially after 1992.

### *National Movement Parties*

The national movement parties were born from the dissident circles of Soviet intelligentsia. We can subdivide them into two, albeit overlapping, types.

The ideology-driven groups of individuals formed the “narcissistic parties,” which frequently had no functional organizational structure. These groups were

shaped for political, and largely theoretical, debate. The parties shaped their projects for the future independent Georgian state and worked to develop the draft laws and a constitution. They did not intend to have candidates run for election or to attract the electorate. Instead, people expected to “graduate” to the intellectual level of these groups. Splits within the narcissistic parties were not uncommon and were mainly due to ideological disagreements. In general, these parties crystallized as groups of ideologically related co-thinkers. The Republican Party, Liberal-Democratic National Party, DASI (Democratic Choice for Georgia), Republican-Federal Party, and Christian Democratic Party can be grouped roughly under this category.

“Revolutionary parties” claimed that independence was of foremost importance, while the constitution blueprints could be threshed out later. Their element was a flamboyant street rally; their intention was to fight and their aim was to achieve “national mobilization.” These groups did not advocate violence but called for the strategy of “civil disobedience.” They spearheaded rallies, hunger strikes, and blockades to sabotage the Communist regime by interfering with the infrastructure. This wing characterized itself as irreconcilable opposition to the Communist system. As the Communist Party was largely synonymous with the state, these groups attacked the institutions of state to carry the seeds of anarchy and confrontation. The ideological platforms of their leaders were glossed over with the call for independence.

A typical “revolutionary party” was led by a publicly recognizable charismatic leader, frequently a political prisoner or someone who had been persecuted in Soviet times. Competition among these leaders was strong, and frequently parties with similar political platforms and demands were locked in fierce, personality-based discord. Splits within the parties happened frequently. The Ilia Chavchavadze Society (*Zurab Chavchavadze*), Helsinki Union (*Zviad Gamsakhurdia*), National Democratic Party (*Gia Chanturia*), and National Independence Party (*Irakli Tsereteli*) were among the leading parties of this type.

Neither the narcissistic nor the revolutionary parties had strong organizational structures. The strength of the revolutionary parties was, especially from 1988 forward, in their broad legitimacy. Their legitimacy largely depended on the personal popularity of the party leader, who could rally tens and hundreds of thousands of people under the party banner. At the same time, the radical nationalistic message of the revolutionary parties alienated part of the intellectual elite. It also excluded ethnic minorities from the political process.

The tragic events of 1989 sent Georgia’s political party development down the slope of radicalization, which did not provide for sufficient time for the narcissistic parties to mature into operational voter-oriented groups or to engage in dialogue with the revolutionary leaders. In the end, the moderates were brushed away, with tragic consequences.

### *Moderates vs. Radicals: Failure of the Popular Front*

The Baltic states have provided Georgia with an example of effective moderate pro-independence politics. The united front of the three Baltic republics managed

to corner the Soviet Communist leadership into recognition of the annexation of their countries.

This example was attractive, and the national movement attempted to imitate its success. Institutionally, the Baltic recipe revolved around the National Front, which acted as an umbrella organization to spearhead the movement to sovereignty. The National Front in its Baltic sense should have had broad popular legitimacy, as well as the support and endorsement of key political leaders. Various movements attempted to unify the nationalist sentiment under one political umbrella in Georgia as well.

The first attempt commenced with the creation of the Rustaveli Society. The Rustaveli Society was established in 1989 and comprised mainly the academic and arts intelligentsia that formerly had close ties with Communist leadership but also claimed to profess the national ideas under oppression of the regime. In this sense their ideology was reformist in character. Well-known writer and philosopher Akaki Bakradze chaired the Rustaveli Society and espoused reform ideas. He called for the spiritual and moral rebuilding of the nation, rather than a formalistic exercise of the country achieving international recognition.

The revolutionary wing of the national movement accused the Rustaveli Society of complacency with regard to the Communist Party in an attempt to wrestle the political initiative from the national movement. This stigma prevented the Rustaveli Society from gaining political prominence.<sup>9</sup>

The creation of the Rustaveli Society triggered an attempt by the rival National Movement to establish a Popular Front that same year. Leaders of both the revolutionary and narcissistic parties attended the inaugural ceremony for the new movement, but their support was half-hearted. The Popular Front never took off as a forum to unite all independence-oriented organizations; it was bogged down by ideological disagreements and bickering among the political leaders. The Popular Front degenerated into a moderate-revolutionary, and fairly weak, party under the authoritarian leadership of Nodar Natadze and has fallen into oblivion since 1993.

Failure of the moderate initiatives shot down any hopes of creating a single voice for pro-independence parties, and the political landscape remained fractionalized.

### *Pragmatists vs. "Irreconcilables"*

The revolutionary wing of the national movement has maintained dominance since 1989. The parties that compose this movement have wrestled Georgia's operational control from the Communist leadership. Decisions of the Communist Party appointees at any level of governance can be overturned by one or several national movement leaders or simply by people who claimed to belong to the revolutionary parties.

The irreconcilable position of the National Movement and a strategy of civil disobedience meant refusal to cooperate with state institutions. As the prospects for achieving independence grew realistic, the plan for a transfer of power shaped up within the national movement. This transfer of power would create a new Georgian state, but it would not make it the legal heir to the Soviet Socialist Republic.<sup>10</sup>

The elections of October 1990 to the Supreme Soviet set a watershed within the “revolutionary” wing. The part of the radical wing of the national movement headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia has opted for hard-nosed pragmatism instead of the initial naïve plan. Gamsakhurdia calculated that the chances of election success for the national movement were high. He argued that the movement should take power as quickly as possible. Gamsakhurdia and his supporters argued that succeeding the Communist Party through elections would also bring higher international legitimacy to Georgian independence.

In October 1990, Gamsakhurdia established the political bloc “Round Table—Independent Georgia,” which won the elections in a landslide. Other pro-independence parties from the narcissist camp, as well as the Popular Front and Rustaveli Society, also participated in elections, along with the Communist Party.

The same year, the National Democratic Party, led by Gia Chanturia, started to implement the “irreconcilable” plan and established the National Congress, a quasi-parliamentary entity. The Congress supposedly was selected through elections, but the polling stations were open for a week, which made observers doubt the voter turnout and the body’s claims of popular legitimacy. The National Independence Party, a splinter faction of the Ilia Chavchavadze Society; the Citizens’ League; Jaba Ioseliani, the leader of the paramilitary group “Mkhedrioni”; and renowned philosopher Merab Mamardashvili entered this parallel parliament. The Congress convened; however, it never became a strong political force. Nevertheless, its boycott of 1990 Supreme Soviet elections put some of the leading revolutionary parties beyond the realm of political life.

#### *Round Table—Success of the Pragmatic Campaigning*

The success of the Round Table was rooted in electoral pragmatism; the party was designed and run to win the elections. This created a new recipe for success in Georgian politics, which largely was repeated later by the Citizens Union of Georgia. The Round Table has moved one step ahead of the national movement parties in several key areas.

The party’s primary motivations were to win elections and come to power, rather than to pursue abstract ideological or political goals. Its ideological position was flexible. Although Zviad Gamsakhurdia professed largely right-wing agendas, some of his public speeches contained calls for social equality that were more characteristic of the platform of the left-wing parties and popular with the post-Soviet electorate. The political stance of the party was pragmatic and conservative. Gamsakhurdia chose to amend, rather than abolish, the Soviet constitution. He did not step up economic liberalization, professing a policy of state capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

The party also tried to establish a broad social base, ranging from intellectuals to workers, and lead an “everything to everybody” campaign. The Round Table also retained the common characteristics and flaws of the revolutionary wing of the national movement. Specifically, it was based on authoritarian leadership, with neither an internal party democracy nor a formal system of membership. The politicians outside the party were viewed with suspicion and met by confrontation, a characteristic feature of the Soviet dissident and political

TABLE 1. Typology of Political Parties, Independence Movement, 1988–1990

Characteristics	National Movement	
	Communist Party	Revolutionary
Main strength	Control over administration	Theoretical background
Political aspiration	Status quo/personal well-being	Becoming the “founding fathers”
Legitimacy	Very weak	Weak
Legitimacy base	Management experience	Knowledge
Public outreach	Weak/compromised	Weak
Leadership style	Authoritarian	Weak/group leadership
Financial resources	Strong	None
Organizational structure	Strong but crumbling	Weak
Inclusion of minorities/minority agendas	Declaratively strong	Moderate
Flexibility to compromise	Weak	Moderate
		Ability to mobilize support
		Independence
		Strong
		Affection for freedom fighters
		Strong (ethnically circumscribed)
		Authoritarian
		Limited support of sympathizers
		Mostly weak, leader-based
		Very weak
		Very weak

prisoner circles. Those who were considered “collaborationists” with the Communist regime were treated with hostility. The list of the “collaborationists” included party members and bureaucrats, but also artists and academia dubbed “red intelligentsia” by Gamsakhurdia.

One more lasting innovation by the Round Table was to run for the elections as a bloc of several political entities. In 1990, the Round Table united five political groups. Since then, splintered parties have tended to unite in election blocs with little discernible ideological unity. Usually, the weaker parties will join the bandwagon with the party of a stronger political leader, referred to in political jargon as a “locomotive”—an engine for election success.

The Round Table also has established a precedent of election blocs falling apart within parliament. Members of Gamsakhurdia’s bloc transferred into opposition by 1991, while some of them (Tengiz Kitovani and Vazha Adamia) took up arms to fight the Gamsakhurdia government.

### *Collapse of the National Movement Party System*

In January 1992, the Zviad Gamsakhurdia government was ousted in a military confrontation. As a result, the party system created by the national movement collapsed. There were numerous reasons for the tragic end of the first democratically elected government. Most importantly, the Gamsakhurdia government was haunted by the complete lack of administrative experience. Secondly, even while retaining high popular support, Gamsakhurdia completely alienated the elites and lost support in the capital of Tbilisi. These facts, along with his inability to preclude dissent in his own camp, proved fatal for his government and the country.

### *Lack of Administrative Experience*

The Gamsakhurdia government proved completely incompetent in running the daily tasks of management. Gamsakhurdia stigmatized the old managerial cadre as collaborationists with the Communist government and sought their dismissal. Political confidence in public servants was negligibly lowered. He could not, however, present an alternative to the cadre of managers, and most of the stigmatized, disgruntled officials remained in their positions. This broke a link between the political appointees to the ministerial positions and their respective agencies. The ministers despised their “collaborator” subordinates and were, in turn, hated as “amateurs.”<sup>12</sup>

Gamsakhurdia and his government personally suffered from a type of “revolutionary inertia” and remained fixated on their nemesis. Gamsakhurdia vowed to continue his struggle until the final dissolution of the Soviet Union, rather than focusing on the issues of the country’s day-to-day management. This prevented pragmatic managerial decisions about the economy from being made. For example, the Round Table—the ruling party in essence—continued the series of protests against the Soviet Union and disrupted the country’s vital communications. This tactic adversely affected the country’s economy and alienated the electorate.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the national movement at large completely failed to present any program for economic transformation and development.

*Alienation of the Elites*

Some critics argued that the Gamsakhurdia government toppled as a result of complete alienation of the elites. Quite understandably, his government was never popular among the Communist managerial cadre that lost a sizable part of its influence as well as possibilities for career growth. This powerful layer of society possessed vital financial resources and was fairly well interlinked through the series of mutual favors and interactions during the Soviet times. By failing to extend favors even to the nationalist sympathizers within this influential group, the Gamsakhurdia government completely lost the “administrative resource.” Gamsakhurdia’s executive appointees largely were stripped of power by the insubordination of the lower-level managers and the shadow power figures.

The arts and academic intelligentsia was initially sympathetic to Gamsakhurdia, heir to the famous Georgian novelist and writer Constantine Gamsakhurdia. The intelligentsia enjoyed numerous privileges under the Soviet system and was willing and able to command the hearts and minds of the population. In his public speeches and through the members of his party, Gamsakhurdia called for abolishing the privileges of the top echelons of this group, the people he called “red intelligentsia.” He also made a series of controversial and populist appointments to high governmental positions of people of lower social classes, frequently from the provinces. These combined factors caused the intelligentsia to withdraw support from Gamsakhurdia.

The interests of the powerful elites had to be channeled into the political realm, however. As Gamsakhurdia’s government did not allow for it, the “narcissistic parties” and, to a lesser degree, the National Congress took on that function. The elite cause found strong support in the media, and soon most of the newspapers were openly opposed to Gamsakhurdia. Dissent within the State Television, staffed largely by the intelligentsia, also was growing due to interference by the political management in their work.

The intelligentsia called for more liberal policies and a higher degree of democracy and participation. They openly voiced discontent with Gamsakhurdia’s disregard for arts intelligentsia and academia, criticized the incapability of his government to manage the daily affairs of the state, and despised appointments to the high governmental positions that bypassed the elite.

When the police disbanded a small rally of the National Democratic Party (Erovnul-Demokratiuli Partia, EDP) in summer 1991, the media and intelligentsia turned their back on Gamsakhurdia.

*Internal Party Problems/Confrontationalism*

The Round Table and Gamsakhurdia himself may have moved toward pragmatism in their political behavior, but intolerance toward the “outsiders” and the opposition remained strong. Dissent within the Round Table was fueled by the authoritarian decision-making style of Gamsakhurdia.

President Gamsakhurdia and the parliament, dominated by the Round Table, were challenged by the polar streams of criticism. If the intelligentsia called for more liberal policies, some parties in National Congress criticized them for

insufficiently radical positions. They advocated immediate withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Georgia, building links with NATO, and a tougher stance on autonomies.

Most of these demands were not feasible, but none of the sides showed any willingness to compromise. On the contrary, the “irreconcilable” style of the national movement led its former comprising parts to consistently escalate the conflict. Gamsakhurdia, an adherent to “irreconcilable” views, chose to fight on numerous fronts instead of engaging in a balancing act that would drive a wedge between the competing political forces.

### *Trigger—The 1991 USSR Coup*

An unusually balanced reaction of the Gamsakhurdia government to the 1991 coup in Moscow made the streams of discontent against the Gamsakhurdia government converge. The Georgian government did not condemn the coup immediately. In addition, the Gamsakhurdia government followed the directive of the coup leaders and disbanded the newly created national guard, while practically preserving these units legally but under the ministry of the interior.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, the national guard mutinied under the leadership of Gamsakhurdia’s former defense minister, Tengiz Kitovani. The mutiny was supported by the National Congress parties. Former Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua joined the protest. This was followed by a television workers strike. Virtually no attempts were made to defuse the tensions, as positions on both sides grew more radical. People gathered constantly on the main streets of Tbilisi in support of each side of the conflict.

In December, armed clashes started that ended with the ousting of President Gamsakhurdia in January 1992. The parliament failed to reconvene. The party system of the Georgian “first republic” had collapsed.

### *Lessons Learned*

The party system created by the national movement collapsed due to several reasons:

- The national movement parties proved incapable of reforming the protest movement into a constructive political force that would represent the electorate.
- In the Gamsakhurdia government, powerful elites had no legal channels to be competitively represented in the political debate. Single-party majority achieved by the Round Table in the parliament proved fatal for development of the political culture.
- Lack of political organization “from below” led to the belief that the political confrontation was fought by and for the elite groups only. Public opinion did not have an impact on this confrontation; it was manipulated by the authoritarian leaders from all sides.<sup>15</sup>

However, the period from 1989 to 1991 did play a part in shaping the political culture and landscape. The success of the Round Table showed the value of populist, pragmatic campaigning. It also demonstrated the practicality of the

political bloc, headed by a widely popular leader. It became clear that alienation of the capital city and its elites could cost the incumbent government dearly. The elites showed their considerable power to influence the government, even in disregard of nationwide public opinion. The power of media, and the importance of controlling it, also became apparent.

As a result of the 1991–92 civil confrontation and the ensuing chaos within the country, the national movement parties and leaders largely have lost popular credibility and legitimacy. A fear of repeated bloodshed has crystallized public support toward stability. After this traumatic period, any disagreement or conflict between the political entities is strongly linked with the possibility of violence in the minds of Georgian citizens.

### **Second Wave—Shevardnadze Period**

The military council took over following the ousting of the Gamsakhurdia government. Eduard Shevardnadze arrived in Georgia in 1992 and became the head of the state council. Parliamentary elections were held in the same year. The aim of this parliament was to render a certain degree of legitimacy to the government that came to power after the coup and to ensure the revival of the “normal” political process. These elections were based on preferential voting—voters had to indicate their first three preferences among the competing parties. As a result, the 1992 parliament had the highest number of parties represented. All pro-Gamsakhurdia parties boycotted the elections.

Several distinct groups took shape in the 1992 parliament:

*President's Supporters:* Two blocs—Mshvidoba (Peace) and Ertoba (Unity)—acted as pro-Shevardnadze groupings and received most of the seats. These unions continued the tradition of the weak parties and even individual politicians, joining the bandwagon with the strong leader (Shevardnadze).

*Narcissistic parties:* They united into a bloc called “October 11” (comprised of the Republican Party, DASI, National Front, and Christian-Democratic Union) and also received seats. They have contributed to the lawmaking process; however, they failed to attract public attention, to cultivate their support base, and to clear the election barrier in 1995.

*The National Democratic Party:* The National Democratic Party (EDP) scored significant success because it was viewed as a political opposition force that did not take up arms but stood for its cause. Moreover, EDP became the first revolutionary party to go a long way toward establishing a strict and strong organizational hierarchy under the strong leadership of Gia Chanturia. But, improved management did not mean an increase in party democracy. It was still based on strong and charismatic leadership with very strict, almost military-like discipline. The political weight of the party grew, as its representatives Irakli Batiashvili and Irakli Kadagishvili were appointed to lead the new Department for Information and Intelligence (heir to the KGB) and customs, respectively. By 1994 the EDP was, by most accounts, the strongest party in Georgia. In the same year, the party withdrew its support from Shevardnadze and left all of the

government posts in protest to Georgia's accession to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). That same year, Gia Chanturia was elected secretary general of the Eastern Europe Christian-Democratic International and declared his willingness to form the opposition. Only a few days later, Chanturia was killed by still-unidentified gunmen near his house. His wife, Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia, who survived the attack, took control of the party, which grew consistently weaker.

*Union for the Democratic Revival* (known as "Aghordzineba" or "Revival"): The Revival was created and backed by the leader of the Adjara Autonomous Republic, Aslan Abashidze.<sup>16</sup> Abashidze was the only Gamsakhurdia appointee to survive the breakdown of the political system. He defended the autonomy from the rampage of militias in 1992–94 and maintained a middleground between Gamsakhurdia loyalists and Shevardnadze supporters. By this maneuvering he amassed significant popularity and established unilateral control over his province, Adjara. Although

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***"People saw SMK setting itself apart from the national movement that was perceived to have plunged the country into chaos."***

his pattern of government in Adjara was strongly authoritarian, Abashidze gained popularity as a person who could manage building new houses and infrastructure, whereas the rest of Georgia was being destroyed. Revival became the first non-Tbilisi-based party to base its strength on the administrative resource of the provincial leadership.

*Greens Party*: The Greens Party campaigned as a vestige of the political activism that preceded success of the revolutionary wing of the national movement. Many Georgians harkened back to the early days of the national movement in the 1980s that were motivated by civil demands and did not take part in the violence of the 1990s. The young leader of the Greens, Zurab Zhvania, took part in the first landmark protests in David Gareji. He did not participate actively in the revolutionary party politics of the national movement later on. With slogans of nonviolence, the Greens attracted most of the third preferences in the preferential ballots and won seats in parliament. After the death of Gia Chanturia, Zhvania formed a pro-presidential majority consisting of the Greens, EDP (now led by Irina Sarishvili), and Ertoba blocs.

The "reformed" Communists found their way back into the political arena after the collapse of Gamsakhurdia's government. Some joined Shevardnadze's Citizens Union of Georgia (SMK). More often, the *nomenklatura* and technocrats found employment at the president's office (state chancellery). Two of Shevardnadze's state ministers, Niko Lekishvili and Vazha Lordkipanidze, represented the former Communist cadre.<sup>17</sup>

However, the party itself never recovered. Under the leadership of the Stalinist Panteleimon Giorgadze, the party reminded the population of its formal presence by holding small-scale rallies on Stalin's birthday in his hometown of Gori. The protest-vote niche was occupied in the mid- and late-1990s by the populist Labor Party.

*Comeback of Pragmatism: Citizen's Union of Georgia*

After Eduard Shevardnadze became the head of state, he started to consolidate his political position, while challenged by the warlords Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani. Shevardnadze drew on support from the administrative and industrial elites who knew him from Soviet times. Shevardnadze also used the police as a core of his loyalists to curb the violence of the semi-criminal militias. This process was backed politically by the creation of the official pro-presidential party—Citizen's Union of Georgia (SMK)—in 1993.

The SMK drew heavily on the elites who were alienated by Gamsakhurdia government. One of its influential parts was composed of the Tbilisi intelligentsia, the former core of the Rustaveli Society, later known as Society "Tbiliseli." The Union also attracted some of the older Communist functionaries and managers who knew Shevardnadze from his past career as Georgia's Communist leader. There were no national movement leaders in the SMK, but the party featured some younger faces. One of these startup politicians, Zurab Zhvania of the Greens Party, unexpectedly became a secretary general of SMK with the endorsement of Shevardnadze.

The design of SMK was similar to that of the Round Table. Its primary motivation was election success rather than an abstract ideological or political goal. Its ideological position consisted of flexible, pro-strong state ideas usually associated with right-wing ideology and neighboring the social agenda. The core of its ideology revolved around the idea of stability rather than independence. The SMK social base and campaign was universally acceptable, as it promised to get rid of the chaos based on the personal strength of its charismatic leader, Eduard Shevardnadze.

In contrast to the Round Table, SMK started to enhance membership and inclusiveness. This idea was reflected in its name: it was a citizens' group, rather than an ethnically circumscribed "national" entity. SMK also positioned itself as a movement rather than a party, which meant it emphasized unity over the factionalism that was a characteristic of the national movement.

SMK won 22 percent of the votes, which, together with the MP seats from single-mandate districts, was sufficient to form the majority in 1995. This success was based on support from the core elite groups. But sympathies of the electorate toward SMK also were strong. People saw SMK setting itself apart from the national movement that was perceived to have plunged the country into chaos. In the same year, SMK made an ideological statement by joining the Socialist International, but its agenda was still mixed. Drawing on national and international support, Eduard Shevardnadze received a warrant for cracking down on Gamsakhurdia supporters, as well as his own former allies.

By 1995, notorious “Mkhedrioni” paramilitaries were sidelined, and Tengiz Kitovani, former head of the national guard, lost his influence. Kitovani was arrested in 1994 for an attempted unauthorized military invasion into Abkhazia. Ioseliani, an MP at the time, was arrested in 1995 on charges of high treason and conspiracy against the president. The political scene for Gamsakhurdia supporters was shut. The only party of the national movement that remained active on the political scene was the weakened EDP.

### *SMK as a Party of Power*

Since 1995 SMK has established itself as a ruling party, capable of mobilizing administrative resources—support for the presidential appointees in the provincial governments, police, public services, etc.—for its own electoral success. Thus, a pattern of close linkage between public service and the party of power that had vanished with the Communist Party was restored.

Nevertheless, the SMK was not a ruling party in a classical sense. The 1995 Constitution established a strong presidential republic in which the president heads the government. The president submits the ministerial candidates for approval by the parliament, and the parliament cannot dismiss the government but can only cast a vote of “no-confidence.” The final word belongs to the president. Thus, according to the constitution, the SMK could not participate actively in forming the cabinet or appoint the prime minister.

Shevardnadze rarely appointed his ministers according to their party membership. The president’s office–state chancellery was seen as more influential in executive matters than any political party. State chancellery was staffed by the former Communist functionaries and younger technocrats, frequently with no party affiliation. With this layout Shevardnadze was the only person to guarantee the linkage of SMK with the vital “administrative resource.”

The 1995 parliament, dominated by SMK, had little influence on the political process managed by Shevardnadze and the executive government. Nevertheless, young leadership of SMK, headed by now parliamentary chairman Zurab Zhvania, was instrumental in passing some vital legislation and gaining international credit for the fast democratic changes in the legislature. In the meantime, the executive government was busy keeping Gamsakhurdia supporters at bay, hunting the former militias, and rebuilding the system of country management to mixed success.

The period of 1995–1997 was marked by undeniable progress as stability increased, influence of the armed militias subsided, and the economy showed signs of recovery. As a result of general growth and stability, new groups in the electorate started to take shape. Simultaneously, the ambitions of SMK leadership to impact executive decision-making increased.

The social and political processes of these years unleashed forces of disintegration within SMK that led to its fall in 2001–02. As the country regained some stability, SMK was expected to develop more specific policies rather than simply curb chaos. This exposed the eclecticism of the political forces contained within SMK and discrepant interests of its comprising parts. Insider

reports suggest that by 1998 the party underwent serious soul-searching, realizing that it was failing to deliver on its electoral promises of one million jobs and rapid economic recovery.

### *Diversification of the Social Bases of Power*

Stabilization within the country coincided with crystallization of the distinct social groups with political and policy interests. In 1990–92 the political texture of the independent country was not formed yet. Most of the population sincerely supported the calls for independence; however, the debate on specific arrangements in politics or economy never moved beyond the narcissistic parties or the intelligentsia debate.

Bloody confrontations of 1991–92, as well as armed conflict in Abkhazia in 1992–94, undermined public trust in politics. Impoverishment of the majority of the population led to political apathy. However, the relatively healthy political process that started after 1995 has given life to the interest groups with power to affect politics. These groups, fairly limited in membership, became the real constituencies of the political parties.

### *Intelligentsia*

The fate of Gamsakhurdia's government, as well as that of the people who toppled him—Mkhedrioni, the national guard, the national movement parties—was decided by the Tbilisi-based intelligentsia, which united arts, academia, and former Communist functionaries (known as *nomenklatura*). Most of these people had self-interest in supporting the Communist Party, as they received quite tangible economic privileges and public respect.

As inertia from the old days, this interest group, largely localized in the capital, supports the incumbent government, from which it expects benefits. Thus, the intelligentsia proved to form a noteworthy bellwether for the parties and, especially, the presidential candidates.

Its wide access to media and public recognition helped the intelligentsia effectively shape public opinion. The movement “Tbiliseli,” formed in the days of civil confrontation in the capital, featured some picturesque characters of the known artists and poets with Kalashnikovs. The Union of Writers and the movie studio Georgia Film—both Soviet-time corporations—were in the background of this interest group. In the 1990s these groups strongly supported Shevardnadze.

The members of intelligentsia within SMK—Giga Lordkipanidze, Marika Lordkipanidze, Tamaz Tsvitsivadze, Revaz Mishveladze—have lobbied actively for the budgetary transfers to their own theaters, institutions, and newspapers, and the Writers Union in the 1995 and 1999 parliaments. As a result of economic collapse and the new rules of the game created by the market economy, the state could no longer support this group financially via the state budget, even with the endorsement of the president. As a result, a conflict emerged within SMK between the younger, more pragmatic leaders and the intelligentsia, who joined a conservative wing of SMK.

*NGOs and the Young Intelligentsia*

The NGOs started to emerge with a substantial degree of help from international donor organizations. However, the roots of NGOs can be found in the early days of the national movement within the environmental groupings, as well as some of the Soviet-time academic research institutions and narcissistic national movement parties.

The NGOs rose to prominence in 1995–97 and found common language with the younger reformer wing of the SMK. Because Parliamentary Chairman Zurab Zhvania had supported NGO-related legislation, he, in turn, gained sympathies from NGO leaders. Some of the NGO leaders have participated actively as legal experts in drafting the 1995 constitution and election laws.

The NGOs, largely neglected by the government, grew in the mid- to late-1990s into strong organizations with professional, well-paid cadre. Using their intellectual and logistical resource, NGOs are able to influence public opinion directly and through the media.

NGOs were among the first to start lobbying to draft legislation of their own design and to register as lobbyists with the parliament after appropriate laws were passed. Young reformers, who found many persons of their age and background in NGOs, actively supported them. As a result, the perception has emerged that NGOs are active supporters of young reformers. Indeed, in the 1999 elections the SMK leaders drew on the support of the few NGO representatives, mostly in their private capacity.

As being supported by NGOs (and implicitly by the international organizations funding them) became politically fashionable, the government (executives and SMK conservatives) started to create its own NGOs, known as GONGOs (government-backed NGOs). The massive meetings of the NGO congresses took place before the elections, although none of the member groups showed signs of activism between the elections.

Young intelligentsia—theater artists, pop artists, and young and popular writers—also have emerged as a counterpoint to the old intelligentsia. Most of these people distance themselves from party politics but express their citizenship position on the most pressing social issues, such as corruption, crime, and state building.

*International Organizations*

President Eduard Shevardnadze drew some of his national credibility from being close personal friends with foreign diplomats and having prestige within international organizations. Georgia's accession to the United Nations and the international recognition of the Georgian state by other international organizations resonated well with the calls for sovereignty that were characteristic of the national movement and helped build the reputation of the president.

In addition, the crisis-ridden economy of the country became dependent on humanitarian aid and later on financial assistance from the World Bank and the IMF. The ability to perform to the expectations of these institutions has become a tool for measuring the performance of the government.

Closer integration with the West is a popular idea among the electorate. Hence, there has been no influential political force in Georgia to oppose closer links with Western institutions and international organizations. As a result, all political forces and leaders try to prove their track record in foreign affairs and try to demonstrate their close relations with foreign leaders.

### *Business*

The early 1990s and the period of civil confrontation were characterized by widespread looting of public and private property. Economic crisis has led to the impoverishment of the Soviet middle class—mid-level technical and academic intelligentsia—and the subsequent redistribution of wealth. Small business, mainly petty retail trade, has prevailed.

Starting in 1994, some businesses began to emerge with more long-term aims. This included Georgian Wines and Spirits (GWS), the insurance company Aldagi, TBC Bank, and, later, the beer company Kazbegi and Coca-Cola Bottlers Georgia. Growth of these companies was related, in one way or another, to their links with the government and the SMK. The founders of the GWS and Aldagi, Levan Gachechiladze and David Gamkrelidze, joined the SMK in 1999 and were expected to provide strong financial backing for the party. In absence of relevant legislation, these links were non-transparent. However, in his recent statement, President Shevardnadze reminded Aldagi of the preferential treatment the company enjoyed in the 1990s.<sup>18</sup>

Gachechiladze and Gamkrelidze split from the SMK and created their own faction in 2000 because of their disagreement with Zhvania and his wing of young reformers. In 2001, they established the New Rights Party, which was perceived as a pro-presidential group before November 2001.

Another, and perhaps more prominent, case of business moving directly into politics is the Industrialists (whose full name is “Industry Will Save Georgia”), headed by beer baron and founder of Kazbegi, Gogi Topadze. Topadze was the first to blend national business interests with rightist ideology. His alliance gained fourteen seats in the 1999 parliament. Topadze initially enjoyed broader popular support as a “self-made, simple man” than the New Rights, popularly seen as elitist big shots.

Significant economic strength was vested in several state and semi-state companies. These included Georgian Railways (led by Akaki Chkhaidze), Rustavi chemical company Azoti, and the Poti Port. Later this group also included the Georgia International Oil Corporation (GIOC), led by Giorgi Chanturia. These entities traditionally were known to support Shevardnadze personally. Possibility of Chanturia’s appointment as state minister was rumored through much of 2002 and 2003. Akakhi Chkhaidze joined the pro-presidential election bloc in 2003.

### *Media*

The media, like the intelligentsia, proved its degree of influence on politics during the crisis of the Gamsakhurdia government. Independent television channels with news programming began to form in 1992. The first non-state channel with a widely popular news program was Ibervisia.<sup>19</sup> The currently popular Rustavi 2

was established in 1996. Electronic media became an important vehicle for achieving popularity and exposure to public opinion. Access to the media still remains one of the major elements of electoral success.

As a result, the owners of the independent media outlets have vast possibilities for influencing the political life of Georgia.<sup>20</sup> To a lesser degree, this also applies to the printed press, which has minimal political influence.

#### *Administrative Resource*

President Shevardnadze has introduced a vertical system of governance in Georgia's provinces. Appointed officials, rather than elected ones, control the levers of real power. This situation increases the importance of the administrative resource as a tool for election success. The parliamentary elections of 1995 and 1999 showed that the Kvemo Kartli region (center of Rustavi) and Samtskhe-Javakheti (Akhaltzikhe-Akhalkalaki) usually vote pro-Shevardnadze. This is largely because ethnic minorities in these areas, under pressure from the local administrations, are urged to support Shevardnadze as a guarantor of stability or risk revival of Georgia's aggressive nationalism.

In Adjara, administrative resource is used in favor of another "party of power"—the Revival Union customarily was getting higher than 90 percent of the votes in the area. The electoral outcome in these three provinces is considered clear before the election. This gave both the SMK and the Revival a possibility to clear the 7 percent threshold comfortably in the parliamentary elections.

In other provinces, such as Samegrelo-Imereti, the administrative resource was exercised in a more subtle way, with local governors doing pre-election favors for the voters in the name of the leading party or campaigning to increase votes for the SMK. Numerous irregularities were recorded by observers in these areas during the elections.

#### *Rise and Fall of the SMK*

As the social bases diversified and the country's political texture developed, tensions within the parts that compose the SMK started to manifest. From 1995 to the 1999 second parliamentary elections, the SMK leadership, headed by Zurab Zhvania, concentrated mainly on legislative issues. In the process, several young leaders, such as Mikheil Saakashvili, Mikheil Machavariani, Gia Baramidze, and Elene Tevdoradze, started gaining visibility.

The 1999 election battle was planned and fought by the younger wing of the party. The main election agenda was to depict the SMK as a pro-Western force and position it against the Revival Union, which was portrayed as a pro-Russian and authoritarian party. Attempts by the EDP to obstruct these bipolar elections and create the "third center of power" did not bear fruit, and the party failed to gain seats. Most of the weaker parties chose to join the bandwagon with either the SMK or the Revival in election blocs to clear the 7 percent threshold. The Revival bloc was extremely eclectic, including the Traditionalists, whose leader Akaki Asatiani was the parliament chairman in Gamsakhurdia's times, as well as one wing of the pro-Gamsakhurdia movement (XXI Century), and the Socialists.

The pre-election slogan of the SMK was “From Stability to Prosperity.” The party promised economic development and a million jobs by the end of its new term in the parliament. As a result of the November 1999 vote, the SMK got the majority, and Revival represented the major opposition party to make it into the parliament. Industrialists also made it into the parliament independently. The Labor Party fell a few percentage points short of 7 percent.<sup>21</sup>

The SMK faction in the parliament started to fall apart several months after the election. Nino Burjanadze, vice chairman of the Committee on Constitutional, Legal Issues and the Rule of Law in 1995–98, and the head of the same committee since 1998, was the first to leave the faction. According to observers, this decision was triggered by support of Shevardnadze and Zhvania for the Socialist Zurab Butskhrikidze in Terjola, single-mandate elections against Burjanadze’s father, and the appointment of the Socialist leader Vakhtang Rcheulishvili as the vice-speaker of the parliament. Burjanadze regarded Rcheulishvili as a pro-Russian politician.

In 1999, the New Movement (later known as the New Rights), led by Levan Gachechiladze and David Gamkrelidze, quit the SMK. This new faction has swayed some members (Fikria Chikhradze, Irakli Batiashvili) from the Industrialists faction. The New Movement was positioning itself against the Zhvania team, but in support of Eduard Shevardnadze.

By fall 2000, the influence of the Zurab Zhvania team, known as the “young reformers,” reached its peak of influence and extended into the executive government. In 1999, Mikheil Machavariani, by that time secretary general of the SMK, assumed the position of minister for taxes and revenues. Mikheil Saakashvili was appointed the justice minister in October 2000. Zurab Nogaideli was appointed later as the minister of finance. Success inside the country was backed by the foreign victory success in 1999 as Georgia joined the Council of Europe—an accession seen as a personal success of Zurab Zhvania, who was leading the negotiation process.

Although this was a high time for the “young reformer” team, its increased executive authority and political ambition triggered a counteroffensive from two main quarters. The older generation of the SMK members, specifically arts and academic intelligentsia, became increasingly irritated by the pressure from NGOs and young reformers to relinquish their privileges and tone down their demands for special treatment—budgetary transfers, a prominent place at the official events, etc.

On the other hand, President Shevardnadze attempted to balance the young reformers in the government. Kakha Targamadze, the interior minister, became the pillar of this counterweight, together with Minister of Economy Vano (Ivane) Chkhartishvili. Ambitious Mikheil Saakashvili was a justice minister and was balanced by the also young, but more conservative, Gia Meparishvili as the prosecutor general. In 1999 the Zhvania team launched an information offensive through the media and official statements against Targamadze and Chkhartishvili, as well as Security Minister Vakhtang Kutateladze, accusing them of corruption. Mikheil Saakashvili was at the forefront of this confrontation. Young reformer

statements were backed by independent inquiries by watchdog NGOs and journalists and were perceived as credible by the public opinion.

By the beginning of 2001, the Zhvania team was at odds with Targamadze to win Shevardnadze's favor. Observers claim that in this game, Zhvania was supported by the shadow figure of the Georgian politics—Secretary of the National Security Council Nugzar Sajaia—who had his candidates in the positions of the interior and security ministers.

Throughout 2001, an intense, behind-the-scenes confrontation took place between rival forces within the SMK and the government. In the meantime, popular skepticism toward the government grew, as the country's development stagnated and poverty rate increased.

In late April 2001, Shevardnadze seemed to have yielded to the pressure from Zhvania team. He announced plans to reform the government and reinstate the cabinet of ministers, headed by the prime minister. Shevardnadze also hinted that Zurab Zhvania was considered favorably for the prime minister position.

This announcement indicated the anointment of Zhvania as Shevardnadze's successor. As a result, Zhvania attracted fire from all political forces. Dissent grew within the reformer team itself, where Mikheil Saakashvili started to gain popularity with his anticorruption stance and developed political ambitions of his own.

The hopes of success were dashed for the SMK reformer wing, as president Shevardnadze announced he would keep the military and security ministries under his personal supervision even after the appointment of the prime minister. This meant that young reformers would not get rid of their main political rivals—Targamadze and Kutateladze. Moreover, these ministers would get a higher degree of presidential support, while the prime minister would be left responsible for taxation and the failing economy.

In summer 2001, young reformers started to move into opposition to the president. By late summer, Finance Minister Zurab Nogaideli submitted the draft budget to Shevardnadze, which substantially reduced the funding of the power ministries under conservative control. The draft was rejected by the president in favor of Chkhartishvili's proposal, which projected revenues at a level that Minister of Taxes and Revenues Mikheil Machavariani regarded as unrealistic. Having been presented with a budget that maintained the power of the conservatives and obliged him to collect an unachievable level of tax revenue, Machavariani resigned on August 15, 2003, accusing government conservatives of bribery and extortion.

This was followed by an open letter from Zhvania to Shevardnadze in which he spoke about appalling levels of corruption and called on the president to take drastic action, threatening to join the opposition. Justice Minister Mikheil Saakashvili openly accused Targamadze and Chkhartishvili of corruption and misappropriation of funds in an August 24, 2003, government session, and subsequently resigned his post on September 19.

As a result of this reshuffle, the young reformers had left the government completely. Mikheil Saakashvili openly moved into opposition to Shevardnadze. He went on to win the by-elections to the parliament in October 2001, which confirmed his popularity. He then established the "New National Movement," a

conglomerate of political parties with its core formed by the young members of the SMK MPs but with the addition of the Republican Party (former narcissistic party of the national movement) and a wing of a pro-Gamsakhurdia movement, led by Zviad Dzidziguri.

Also in that summer, Shevardnadze relinquished leadership of the SMK, signing a death warrant to the party created around his leadership. Zurab Zhvania attempted to maintain control over the crumbling party.

By fall 2001, the political situation was tense. Former young reformers had wide public support and rallied against the president. At the same time, Shevardnadze was relying more heavily on the unpopular minister of the interior. In October 2001, the controversial incursion of the Chechen-Georgian guerillas into Abkhazia took place, widely believed to have been orchestrated by Targamadze. This attempt at destabilization increased public resentment toward the minister of the interior.

A major crisis struck in the last days of October 2001, when security forces went into the Rustavi 2 television company, claiming financial mismanagement, and attempted to take the independent station off the air. This move was seen as an attack on free press, and people hit the streets demanding resignation of Targamadze, Kutateladze, and Meparishvili. These were the first protests of this scale since 1991–92. Students also returned as a political force, supported by some civil society leaders and politicians from the young reformers, namely Saakashvili and his allies. The president sought to escalate the crisis: he offered full support to Targamadze and Meparishvili, and threatened to resign if parliament attempted to impeach key officials. Shevardnadze's resignation would have left Zhvania as acting president—a scenario that was unacceptable to many. To break the deadlock, Zhvania submitted his resignation. Shevardnadze then dismissed the entire government, rather than simply Targamadze and Meparishvili, adding that his own resignation would not be prudent in the current circumstances.

From this point forward, the last person from the original leadership to remain within SMK, Zurab Zhvania, has openly moved into opposition to Shevardnadze. Zhvania failed to maintain control over the SMK, which was taken over by the wing of a conservative governor of Kvemo Kartli, Levan Mamaladze. Later, State Minister Avtandil Jorbenadze was appointed the leader of the SMK, and the party symbolically regained status as the party of power. In reality, the SMK's parliamentary power weakened significantly. Shevardnadze maintained a feeble majority in the parliament by a ramshackle alliance of the former SMK conservatives, majoritarian MPs (the ones elected from single-mandate constituencies), and a part of the former Revival Union members.

In the June 2002 local elections, the SMK failed to clear the 7 percent threshold in Tbilisi city council elections.<sup>22</sup> The elections were won by the Labor Party, the National Movement, and the New Rights. The team led by Zurab Zhvania, which was forced to leave the SMK a few weeks before the elections, still managed to make it onto the city council. These elections were seen as final proof of the death of the SMK.

### **Third Wave—“Revolution of Roses”**

The “revolution of roses” was a logical, if somewhat radical, step in the country’s political development. The SMK and President Shevardnadze failed to deal with the emerging groups of interest and underestimated the power of public opinion. As a result, smaller, but better prepared and more media-savvy, political players managed to create a formidable offensive.

The revolution did not happen overnight, it was preceded by a process that changed the playing field and the rules of the game for all parties. Those that adapted more quickly and more effectively won the ticket to future.

#### *Evasion of Shevardnadze Governance*

The playing ground for the ruling SMK started to shrink following the parliamentary elections of 1999, but President Shevardnadze consistently ignored the warning signs.

From 1995 to 1999, the Citizens Union of Georgia maintained their integrity. The main political confrontation took place between the two parties with administrative resource: the SMK and the Revival. Although locked in fierce competition, these two alliances shaped the rules of the game and monopolized the political scene.

Competition between these alliances entrenched the importance of controlling the executives in the minds of Georgian politicians. Their cooperativeness was rewarded with favorable legislation and by preferential treatment for processing transfers from the central budget.<sup>23</sup>

Mistrust in the election administration also became widespread, as party members appointed to the election commissions were expected to falsify the results in favor of the party whose administrative powers extended to the given precinct or province.

Although the administrative resource carried the primary value for achieving the election success, the importance of party membership and constituency outreach, as well as the need for developing sophisticated election platforms, had diminished. Campaigning grew to be sophisticated, though, aiming to sway the votes right before the elections.

In the course of 1995–99, political parties felt the need to enhance outreach to the new strengthening bases of power—NGOs, media, and international organizations. These external relations were mastered by the young reformer wing of the SMK that based its popularity on active participation in public politics. Behind-the-scenes maneuvering and reliance on old intelligentsia and functionaries remained the main lever for the SMK conservatives and the Revival, whose media and public relations capabilities were underdeveloped.

The 1998 local elections were not awarded high importance by either of the major players. For the reasons described above, control over local government was regarded as politically unimportant. However, these elections rang a warning bell; the unexpected success of the Labor Party, which pursued a largely populist/socialist agenda, showed that the country was stagnating and the value of the protest vote was growing. The Labor Party capitalized on the niche of the

“ordinary voter”—impoverished people all over Georgia. The same votes helped the Labor Party nearly clear the threshold in the 1999 parliamentary elections and propelled the Industrialists, with their leader’s “rich peasant” naivete, into the parliament. The leading political parties, who relied on elite support, largely have neglected this voter base.

Since 1999, the main political confrontation took place within the SMK. This fractured the political scene and made it difficult to follow, as the statements and positions were not made public and basically were contained within the closed in-party meetings and debates. A “battle for the SMK” that took place between the reformers and the conservatives weakened the party’s management, shattered its public image, and diminished its capabilities. Both political life and the economy stagnated. Several achievements of the pro-democratic legislation were sacrificed in the political haggling.<sup>24</sup>

The NGOs and international organizations warned of the deteriorating democracy and development profile and, also, the growing corruption. In the background, the weight of a “protest vote” increased, and the threat of extreme nationalism and populism became apparent. MP Guram Sharadze and the radical orthodox groupings (Jvari and Basili Mkalavishvili’s group) started to slam publicly and then assault physically religious minorities and NGOs, who were described as “Western agents” and “traitors of the Georgian values.”

As the SMK collapsed, the break-off young reformer parties, the New National Movement and the United Democrats, have moved quickly into the political void.

### *2002 Local Elections*

The new political spectrum took its new shape largely in the local elections of June 2, 2002. The success of the two most populist parties—the Labor Party and the New National Movement—in the Tbilisi city council has formalized a few new political realities:

*Competitiveness increased.* Several smaller, but equally strong, political parties competed for power. There is no clear leader with this overwhelming power, like the SMK of the old days. Hence, it does not make much practical sense to join a bandwagon. Only the weakest parties, fearing to fall into oblivion, use this tactic.

It became clear that the competition was on for the post-Shevardnadze period, and ambitious party leaders positioned themselves for the executive leadership. Each of the parties, much like in the old national movement days, had a publicly recognizable ambitious leader. The political parties had to balance two contradictory incentives. On one hand, it made sense to cooperate in shaping the rules of the game in the interim period and ensure a peaceful transition of power. On the other hand, there was a need to compete for the voter sympathies.

*Competition was on for the protest vote.* The growing protest vote became the most solid base for electoral success. There was an incentive to create voter outreach mechanisms. More frequently than ever, party leaders talked personally to the ordinary voter. Party membership also became important, but the procedures to manage membership were still in their infancy.

*Television was a vital medium.* Political debate went live on television in numerous popular news programs and evening talk shows. The parties tried to make their pre-election events as media friendly as possible. It became hard to imagine a political party that stood a chance in the national elections without a media-savvy leader. Parties lacking the administrative resources tried to balance that with publicity and broad public awareness. In localities, where the MPs are elected in single-mandate districts, television and media played a lesser role and the administrative resource was still vital. As a negative side, although the media funding was nontransparent, the political and interest groups were able to exercise control over these outlets.

The June 2002 elections have shown that the real political power was no longer vested with Eduard Shevardnadze, but was held outside of the SMK and the executive echelons.

#### *November 2003 Parliamentary Elections*

After his return to Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze established the rules of the game that connoted his personal involvement in every aspect of country management. He positioned himself as a supreme arbiter in all matters of political life and above individual political parties, but the changing political landscape made his position hard to sustain.

By November 2003, the competition was for the political system beyond Shevardnadze, thus, the president's involvement was perceived as distorting. With the protest vote at its height, any presidential decision risked alienating significant parts of the population.

Shevardnadze, much like Gamsakhurdia, failed to channel the strengthening political opposition into the political domain. Instead, the parliamentary chamber dominated by the president's loyalists was used to stall the opposition initiatives for improved electoral administration.

#### *A Desperate Bet on the SMK*

The SMK factions tried hard to obstruct acceptance of the new election code and maintain majority representation in the Central Election Commission (CEC). These efforts were seen by the opposition and the populace largely as preparation for effectively rigging the vote.

The SMK based additional hopes for the electoral success on administrative resource. Avtandil Jorbenadze, the state minister, was put in charge of the revived SMK. Most of the meetings in the provinces to re-establish the party branches were ridiculed by the opposition, because they were starkly reminiscent of the Communist Party gatherings with local *nomenklatura* present.

The party desperately lacked media-savvy representative political leaders. The SMK met the elections as a core party of the election bloc Alliance for the New Georgia. Apart from the SMK, the Alliance for the New Georgia contains the Socialist Party, the Greens, and the National Democratic Party. Although ideologically eclectic, neither of the political leaders of these smaller parties has added credibility to the party of power.

Younger faces of the SMK include Irakli Gogava, leader of the New Alliance parliamentary faction, and Levan Mamaladze, governor of Kvemo Kartli. Their political profile is rather amorphous. Gogava rose high in the ranks of the SMK by siding with the conservative wing against Zhvania's team. He was promoted to show that the conservatives also have young supporters. Mamaladze brings in an important administrative resource—Kvemo Kartli votes amount to 12 to 14 percent of the total votes. The governor of an economically depressed region, he has been criticized by the opposition for alleged corruption and vote rigging during the preceding elections.

On the eve of the elections, Shevardnadze, in a desperate move to strengthen the party, further undermined the positions of the SMK by inviting financial backing from the controversial media tycoon Badri Patarkatsishvili and his political protégé Vazha Lordkipanidze. Patarkatsishvili, the former right-hand-man of the Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky, is wanted by Russia for fraud allegations and has sought refuge in Georgia.

### *Winning Opposition*

Confirming the old habit of fragmentation, the opposition failed to unite as a single bloc on the eve of the elections, although negotiations continued almost until the last moment. Nevertheless, the opposition parties looked positioned for the electoral victory.

The exit polls and the parallel vote tabulation conducted on November 2, 2003, showed that the two opposition parties, the New National Movement and the Labor Party, were ahead in the polls. However, attempts by the ruling party to rig the vote in favor of the pro-presidential Alliance for the New Georgia and its new ally, the Revival Union, have triggered massive public protests.

An alliance of the two political forces—the more radical New National Movement and moderate Burjanadze-United Democrats bloc—emerged on top of these protests and forced Shevardnadze into resignation. Once again, the recipe for success in Georgian politics was based on support of the intelligentsia and media. In particular, the New National Movement of Mikheil Saakashvili managed to channel the dominant protest vote into a peaceful rally that led to a change of government.

The New National Movement [*nacionaluri modzraoba*] was seen as an opposition front-runner. Established in 2001 around the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili, the Movement unites the Republican Party (one of the former narcissist parties), under leadership of David Berdzenishvili, with Zviad Dzidziguri's faction of Gamsakhurdia's supporters (the Union of National Forces).

The New National Movement supports a revolutionary radical change in government and vows to eradicate corruption. Saakashvili bet on high media visibility and aggressive campaigning while borrowing heavily in style and rhetoric from the National Movement of the mid-1980s. The New National Movement is based on its charismatic leader, Saakashvili, who favors rallies and protests and can address the crowd. Since its creation, the Movement has grown more radical in its statements and ran a successful election campaign in the 2002 local elections under the slogan "Tbilisi without Shevardnadze."

The party draws heavily on a protest vote, however, and, along with the national ideas, its leader frequently uses more leftist social justice terminology and ideas. Success in the June 2002 local elections was a landmark event for the Movement. Mikheil Saakashvili left the MP position to chair the Tbilisi city council. As chairman, he runs campaigns for improving the city logistical facilities and banning unsanctioned construction in old city districts.

The party draws on membership and pays attention to creation of the local offices in Georgia's provinces. Saakashvili claims to have a party with the best-developed regional infrastructure.

The electoral base of the party is mixed. It includes part of the nationalist protest voters, part of the generation that participated actively in the National Movement, part of the Gamsakhurdia supporters, and radical young intelligentsia and NGOs.

Saakashvili's campaigning has revived an old confrontation between the radicals and the moderates. For this reason, the most likely electoral alliance with Zurab Zhvania's failed to materialize until after November 2, 2003, when the election fraud became apparent.

Zhvania's United Democrats [*gaertianebuli demokratebi*] were joined by the popular parliamentary speaker Nino Burjanadze to create a formidable force. The party united some of the most visible SMK young reformers. Zurab Zhvania himself is known to possess considerable political weight, both in public politics and, especially, behind the scenes.

The United Democrats professed centrist liberal-democratic values. Burjanadze's popular election slogan was "revolutionary changes without the revolution." Compared to Saakashvili, both Zhvania and Burjanadze are known as team players and are able to attract capable thinkers and advisers to guide the party.

It is not surprising that it was Zhvania and Burjanadze who were backed vocally by the Georgian intelligentsia. A pre-election meeting of arts and science intelligentsia of the old generation with Burjanadze showed that the presidential voter had shifted away from Shevardnadze.

It was the alliance between these two political forces after the elections that led the "revolution of roses," and the two are currently sharing the power in Georgia. Their unity after the elections had many reasons including that the leaders know each other and have worked together for a long time, which adds to the predictability and confidence in each others' actions. On the other hand, Zhvania and Burjanadze saw the public protests rapidly radicalizing and, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the narcissistic parties a decade earlier, decided to join the leading radical force, rather than risk political alienation.

Moderate participation in the revolution also has helped keep the events largely in-line with the constitutional framework, with Burjanadze, the parliamentary chairperson, succeeding Shevardnadze after his resignation.

### **Post-Revolution Politics**

After November 23, Nino Burjanadze emerged as the interim president and appointed Zhvania as the state minister. Mikheil Saakashvili was nominated as a

shared presidential candidate from all three leaders. As the November 2 elections were cancelled by the supreme court, the New National Movement and the United Democrats also decided to run in the upcoming parliamentary elections under a shared party list.

Under these circumstances, there is a real risk of the re-emergence of the single-party radical government with control of the parliament reminiscent of the rule of Gamsakhurdia. This seems hardly possible though, as there are many influential political forces left beyond the current power-sharing arrangement.

### *Emergence of the New Opposition*

The interim government took steps to avoid monopolization of the political spectrum, aware of the tragic consequences that this brought to the governments of both Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze. Specifically, it is likely that the minimum threshold for entering the parliament will be decreased from 7 percent to 5 percent of the nationwide vote. In addition, the parliamentary elections will be postponed until late spring, giving the opposition time to reshape and put forward their program.

### *Challenge from the Right*

One of the main contenders for the position of the new opposition movement is the New Rights Party, created June 15, 2001. This is one of the few parties that professes a distinct ideological stance. The New Rights positions are closer to the agendas of the Republican Party of the United States than to the European Christian Democratic tradition. The party advocates for the strong state, development of the national economy, strong ties with the United States, and Georgia's membership in NATO.

Party leaders David Gamkrelidze and Levan Gachechiladze both come from business. Gamkrelidze headed the Aldagi Insurance Company, while Gachechiladze was one of the founders of the Georgian Wines and Spirits (GWS) Company. Both companies have enjoyed privileges and favorable treatment from the Shevardnadze government. Initially, the New Rights Party was created to counterbalance the young reformers of the SMK and represented a pro-presidential force. Insiders argue that discord was triggered by the fact that Zurab Zhvania did not support David Gamkrelidze as state minister in 2000—a position that allegedly was promised in return for the business support of the SMK in elections.

The New Rights Party has moved into opposition to the president as the new political setup emerged after the November 2001 protests that ended in the government's resignation. The party cooperated with the United Democrats and the New National Movement, however, decided not to back the "revolution of roses." After almost one week of silence after November 23, the party condemned the unconstitutional tools used by the leaders of the revolution but expressed willingness to run in the parliamentary elections.

The party enjoys support of the business circles, especially from the financial and banking sectors. In some regions of Georgia, the New Rights has scored important victories in 2002 local elections, mainly due to the wise investments of

their individual candidates' campaigns. They are also popular among the younger generation of Tbilisi businessmen and try to go for the youth that just got their voting rights.

The party's position is solidly pro-American and pro-NATO. Its leaders have established and are backing the non-governmental movement "Georgia for the NATO." David Gamkrelidze frequently visits the United States and claims to enjoy the support of the US Republican administration.

The party is expected to enter the new parliament and, if Saakashvili continues to slide toward the leftist agendas, will have a good chance of creating the locus for the right-wing forces.

The New Rights will face a stringent, if somewhat unexpected challenge. Akaki Asatiani, one of the leaders of the revolution and the leader of the Traditionalists Union, refused to endorse Saakashvili's candidacy and moved to the opposition of the interim authorities.

Traditionalists are the second party from the former national movement, along with EDP, that managed to retain its place in the political arena. Akaki Asatiani chaired the parliament in 1990–91.

Traditionalists are a single-issue party lobbying for the federal territorial arrangement of Georgia. Their general ideological stance is center-right moderate, although the party originally supported restoration of the monarchy in Georgia.

In the post-revolution environment, they announced a merger with the EDP that sent its leader, Irina Sarishvili, into resignation after her unsuccessful electoral alliance with Shevardnadze. Negotiations with the Industrialists are reported to be under way.

Industrialists were created as a Georgian business lobby. The party is led by Gogi Topadze, owner of the Kazbegi beer brewery. He is widely respected for being able to create his own business and succeed in difficult conditions. This is in contrast to the New Rights, where business leaders are not popular, as their companies are perceived to have succeeded thanks to government support. Topadze is an intuitive, concise, and sincere speaker, in contrast to verbose and sleek new wave politicians. This naivete appeals to many voters across social boundaries.

Ideologically, the Industrialists support a strong state and protectionism to encourage national producers. With independent expert assistance, the party has developed a draft of the new tax code, which substantially reduces the profit taxes. It is argued that the code will help bring businesses out of shadow and boost the economy. Currently, the primary agenda of the party is to lobby for the tax code, which was adopted already by the parliament at its first hearing. As a result, the Industrialists became a single-issue party, willing to lend its political support to the ongoing majority in the parliament in exchange for adopting the code.

An alliance of Traditionalists, EDP, and Industrialists may form a strong right-wing opposition to rival the New Rights in popularity. In case of an alliance between all right-wing forces, they can count on shaping a considerable opposition within the new parliament.

*Challenge from the Left*

The Labor Party is the strongest force on the left of the political spectrum. The party enjoys very high popularity of 15 to 22 percent according to the exit polls conducted during the November 2, 2003, elections. Professing the classic leftist/populist ideology, the Labor Party won the local elections in both 1998 and 2002. The popularity of the Labor Party is strongly tied to the rhetoric of their leader, Shalva Natelashvili.

Natelashvili entered the parliament in 1992 as a member of the National Democratic Party and chaired the legal committee. He left the EDP to join the majority faction after the EDP decided to leave their government positions in 1994. In 1995, Natelashvili entered the parliament as a majoritarian MP from one of the mountainous provinces. His party, "National Rule of Law Union," was operational in this locality only. Since 1995, curiously, after the success of the Labor Party in England, Natelashvili renamed his party as the Labor Party of Georgia.

The Labor Party fills the niche left behind by the Communist Party and appeals to the protest vote by the use of social equality rhetoric. Most recently, Labor appealed to the supreme court against the increase of the electricity tariff and won the case. They also called upon Tbilisi residents not to pay for electricity. Natelashvili positions himself as real opposition, someone who has never been part of the corrupt government.

Despite high popularity and a stable base of support, the Labor Party is notorious for its extremely weak organizational structure. After success in the local elections of both 1998 and 2002, the Labor faction fell apart. Shalva Natelashvili is the only publicly known face of the party.

The Labor success has attracted other parties to its voter base. In the 2002 elections, the New National Movement managed to sway some of the Labor votes. The pro-leftist policies of Saakashvili, who is most likely to become the president after the January elections, may continue to erode the power base of the Labor Party. Much would depend on pre-election maneuvering of the Labor Party, as they refused to recognize the "revolution of roses" and are speaking of boycotting the parliamentary elections. In this case, the party risks being sidelined in the post-Shevardnadze political era.

*Challenge from the Past*

The Revival Union is a crux of the problem in the postrevolution environment. Beset by public rallies, Shevardnadze has appointed his nemeses—Adjara and Revival leader Aslan Abashidze—as his envoy to the regional powers and Russia to solicit support for his presidency.

The mission has failed, however. Abashidze refused to cooperate with the interim government and has engaged in consultations in Moscow about Georgia's two secessionist provinces, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Adjara Autonomous Republic long has been a flashpoint for the Georgian democracy. The leader of Adjara Autonomy, Aslan Abashidze, is known to have established a non-transparent system of rule that does not tolerate internal opposition.

Abashidze has wrestled with a significant degree of autonomy in taxation and an internal policy—that takes advantage of the Georgian constitution, which fails to delimit the powers of the autonomy. Adjara is the only Soviet-time autonomy that has not seceded from Georgia. Abashidze has never implied the possibility of secession, which would be extremely unpopular in Adjara. A showdown with Adjara remains an implicit threat in Georgian politics and is greatly feared.

Relations between then SMK reformers Zurab Zhvania and Mikheil Saakashvili and Abashidze have been tense. Abashidze even accused the reformers of a conspiracy to assassinate him.

The Adjara Autonomous Republic reported that 269,000 voters out of 284,000 who went to the polling station in the November elections cast their votes for the Revival. The results were sent to the Central Election Commission past the official deadline. Observers claim that both the turnout rates and the support rate for the Revival Union were grossly inflated.

In a close race on November 2, this rate of support briefly gave the lead in the nationwide ballot to the Revival Union and will mean it finished second, only a few thousand votes short of the pro-governmental For the New Georgia (FNG) alliance.

Being one of the most apparent losers after the revolution, Abashidze chose to challenge the new authorities. The new leadership was determined to engage in negotiations, and both Interim President Nino Burjanadze and State Minister Zurab Zhvania have visited Adjara's capital of Batumi to find a compromise. So far, there has been no breakthrough.

Revival counts on its own votes in Adjara, as well as significant support in the other provinces of Georgia. The provincial voters support Adjara, and Aslan Abashidze, as an example of insubordination to the oppressive Tbilisi center. Abashidze is seen as a benefactor, a father figure of admittedly authoritarian style, but still better at building (new buildings of Batumi, including schools and kindergartens) than destroying the infrastructure, which has been blamed on Shevardnadze and Tbilisi politicians.

Abashidze's open support of closer ties with Russia and his backing of the Russian military base in Batumi resonates well in Samtskhe-Javakheti, where local ethnic Armenians fear the withdrawal of Russia's Akhaltsikhe military base, the chief employer in the region. In Javakheti, Adjara is also seen as a sought-after example of stronger autonomy from Tbilisi.

Revival is a scarecrow for the old and especially new Tbilisi intelligentsia and for most of the human rights NGOs that point at the authoritarian character and appalling human rights record of the Abashidze government. These fears are shared by most international organizations. The only political party that declared its intention to challenge Revival in Adjara is the National Movement, which includes David Berdzenishvili of the Republican Party, who was exiled by Abashidze.

Revival is expected to perform well in the parliamentary elections, if it chooses to participate, and would be the wildcard in the new parliament. Thus, the new

government is forced to compromise with a remnant of the ancient regime or risk the country's further disintegration.

A positive side of engaging Abashidze could be testing the new approaches of the government to finding a mutually acceptable compromise with strong regional leadership. This can serve as a testing ground for the intentions to move along the road of federalization of Georgia, with the aim of concluding federal or confederate agreements with secessionist Abkhazia and South Ossetia leaderships.<sup>25</sup>

### Conclusion

In the last ten years, the party and political systems of Georgia have developed significantly. Parties have shown a tendency of moving from the charismatic, leader-dominated revolutionary popular movement to more inclusive civic entities with defined policy agendas. Political space tolerates differing visions without branding the opponents as traitors.

However, the tense aftermath of the November parliamentary elections painted a dualistic picture. On one hand, it showed the popular preference for the peaceful protest and certain confidence in democratic institutions. Many Georgians celebrating the resignation of Shevardnadze prided themselves on the democratic way in which the change was achieved. Thus, democracy becomes a value that guides public politics. The new government that came on the wave of pro-democratic, anti-corruption slogans will find itself under closer scrutiny of the new opposition, civil society groups, and the media, and will be held to higher standards than the Shevardnadze government.

On the other hand, the protests in Tbilisi showed the potential momentum of the protest vote, which can become explosive if the new leadership fails to deliver on high public expectations. In these circumstances it becomes vital to channel all political forces within the public domain and encourage wide discussion on the country's future and specific policies.

The backlash is possible insofar as the lack of economic progress and social protection impoverishes the population and increases the weight of the protest vote. Both rightist and leftist parties are keen to draw on this powerful constituency, thus sliding into populist rhetoric.

Secondly, Aslan Abashidze's Revival Union still has no motivation to develop a comprehensive party program. Their political behavior is not voter-oriented but draws on administrative pressure, thus distorting the playing field.

Partially linked to this is the third phenomenon of fragmentation of Georgia's democracy, both institutionally and geographically. Some institutions and geographic areas of the country moved well ahead and toward pluralism with Westernized value systems, while others still lag behind.

This patchwork of democracy would be extremely difficult to govern, and the sweeping reforms that the new government promises are likely to encounter resistance from the local elite and the numerous shadow players. An intention to push the reforms through based on public support and pressure, visible in Mikheil Saakashvili's pre-election rhetoric, raises fears of the excessive revolutionary

spirit that, similar to the early 1990s, may direct the popular zeal for change against the institutions of state and the rule of law.

More important, however, is that the majority of the population voted for change and acted to bring it about. This provides an option for the changing country's style of leadership and for building a system where the power is sought and acquired in a competition of ideologically and organizationally cohesive political parties.

## NOTES

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9. However, in 1993, the core of its membership formed the Citizens Union of Georgia—a ruling party under President Eduard Shevardnadze.

10. According to this idea, the new Georgian state should not have been a legal heir to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, but to the 1918–21 Democratic Republic of Georgia. Thus, no national party should have participated in any of the institutions created under the Soviet constitution. Instead, it was suggested to invite the National Congress to reenact the 1921 constitution and declare independence. Then, the Supreme Council and Communist government should have relinquished their powers in favor of the National Congress, thus abolishing the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia.

11. There are clear indications of Gamsakhurdia's statements getting more moderate after his party came to power. During his campaign, Gamsakhurdia called for abolishing South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Adjara autonomies. After he came to power, Gamsakhurdia sought compromise both with Abkhazia and Adjara and refrained until the last moment from sharp actions on South Ossetia. His statements on minorities also have softened considerably.

12. Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua, member of the Rustaveli Society and a technocrat, was the Gamsakhurdia government's only link with industrial elite. In summer 1991, Sigua stepped down from the prime minister position and joined the rebellious opposition, bringing financial backing from the industry.

13. The most notable example was the blockade of the Samtredia railway terminal, the biggest in South Caucasus, in March–April 1991 allegedly as a lever of pressure on Russia. This blockade has, by most estimates, caused multi-million dollar damage to the Georgian economy.

14. Later, the commentators claimed Gamsakhurdia had received a credible threat from the Russian generals that the national guard would be annihilated unless the orders were followed.

15. The so-called “Tbilisi Civil War” of December 1991–January 1992 did not form out of the massive civil confrontation. Irregular militias from both sides fought it. To denote public indifference to this war, it is sufficient to recount that the armed confrontation took place on a few central avenues, and ordinary citizens would gather on the side streets to “watch the show.”

16. Adjara, one of Georgia’s historical provinces, was accorded an autonomous status within Soviet Georgia. The region reunified with the country from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 following the Russo-Turkish war. Adjarans are Georgian ethnically, but as a result of the historical upheavals, they are predominantly Muslim and not Orthodox Christian by faith.

17. The state minister essentially acts as the president’s deputy, managing the government and the president’s office (state chancellery). The power of the state minister is based on administrative resources rather than on political support. He is not the head of government and has no say in selecting the ministerial candidates. The state minister is approved by the parliament but may be dismissed by the president. This is an administrative, rather than political, position and is much weaker than that of the prime minister in other countries.

18. In 1994, the insurance company Aldagi was authorized as a monopoly in providing obligatory car and fire damage insurance to the companies, as well as insurance of the transit goods in the territory of Georgia.

19. Giorgi Targamadze, popular news anchor of Ibervisia, established in 1992, later became head of Adjara TV at the age of twenty-one and then led the Revival Union faction in the 1999 parliament until he decided to revert to journalism in 2003.

20. Live broadcast by Rustavi 2 of the assault of the state security forces at its headquarters triggered public protests that toppled the government and resulted in resignation of the parliamentary chairman in 2001.

21. It was argued later that the election fraud in 1999 mainly discriminated against the Industrialists and the Labor Party. The Labor Party sued the election committee for fraud.

22. Elections to the Tbilisi city council were conducted by party lists; therefore, they make it possible to judge the level of support enjoyed by the political parties in the capital. In most other constituencies, voters elected individual candidates.

23. This is why transformation of the cumbersome and inefficient three-level local government was not high on the political agenda until the past year. It is more convenient politically to keep the bulk of the authority in the hands of executive local government, rather than the elected councils. Control over the local government is enhanced by the fact that the financial base of the local governments is formed by the transfers from central budget, rather than by the local taxes.

24. For example, the conservative lobby managed to withdraw progressive amendments to the criminal code that were accepted on the eve of accession to the Council of Europe.

25. The idea of Georgia’s federalization is not new to Georgian politics, although it has strong opponents. Proponents of federalism argue that feudal Georgia has been governed as a coalition of distinct provinces; hence the examples of German lands or Spanish provinces can serve as an appropriate model for the independent Georgian state. This idea, which was popular with some narcissistic parties of the 1980s, was abandoned in favor of stringent centralization by Gamsakhurdia. Failures of centralization policies and de facto secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia brought the idea of federalism to the forefront of political discussion in the late 1990s. A moderate, and more popular, view on federalism professed by the Traditionalist Party, as well as by some leaders of the Republican Party (now within the New National Movement), foresees changes in territorial arrangement toward increasing the size of administrative districts to the proportion of the historical provinces; increasing the powers of local governance in Georgia proper;

and various degrees of federal arrangement with Adjara, Abkhazia, and former South Ossetia. Proponents of this view argue that delegating significant powers to the Georgian provinces and finding a mutually acceptable and legally binding compromise on distribution of powers with Adjara would pacify the Abkhaz and South Ossetian elites and provide political incentives for finding a political solution to these “frozen” conflicts. Opponents argue federalism would further undermine Georgia’s territorial integrity, leading to the secession of Adjara and the strengthening of the secessionist tendencies in other provinces, such as Samtskhe-Javakheti.