



Georgia

Assessment: Poor

Trend: ↔

Capital: Tbilisi

Type of Government: Republic

Head of State: President Eduard

Amvrosiyevich Shevardnadze

(since 26 November 1995)

Foreign Minister: Irakli Menagharishvili

Population: 4,989,285

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 81

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Georgia has a **poor** record of support for democracy abroad whether in terms of responding to flawed electoral processes, promoting democracy in international fora, or dealing with entrenched dictatorships. During the past decade, Georgian foreign policy has been preoccupied with security concerns as the government of President Eduard Shevardnadze confronts serious challenges to central authority and related external threats. The country's political leadership does not appear to draw any causal links between prospective democratic progress in neighboring countries and greater regional stability.

Georgia's disappointing performance is a reflection of formidable domestic challenges to democratic consolidation --including civil armed conflict and secessionist movements-- and a demonstrable lack of interest in democracy promotion abroad despite the country's own achievements on this front, particularly compared to the other countries in the trans-Caspian region. As a new country, Georgia also faced the task of erecting an entire foreign policy infrastructure as well as a steep learning curve in international affairs.

FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

Since gaining independence following the break-up of the Soviet Union, Georgia experienced a sequence of debilitating developments that inhibited the establishment of a rule-based democratic society. The country was plunged into civil conflict and steep economic decline while having to contend with heavy-handed efforts by Moscow to reassert its long standing influence over Georgian affairs. The citizenry was ill prepared to cope with the multiple convulsions engulfing the country. Fledgling democratic governance remains weak and rampant corruption continues to undermine the prospects for second-generation political reforms and economic revival. The present political system in Georgia has many of the formal attributes of democracy, but its institutions and processes are underdeveloped. Ensuring Georgia's security in part by integrating into European structures, establishing central authority, and building a functioning market-based democracy has commanded the attention and resources of the political leadership, leaving little room on the national agenda for democracy promotion abroad.

Georgia is widely acknowledged as the most democratically developed country in the trans-Caspian region but it does little to advance the cause of democratic stability in neighboring countries despite the benefits Tbilisi could be expected to reap.¹ Georgian foreign policy has centered on security and economic cooperation, much of the latter tied to pipeline and transportation routes for the oil and mineral rich trans-Caspian region. Vulnerability due in part to Russian meddling has made Georgia even more inclined to embrace the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. This is the case even where democracy and human rights norms are routinely transgressed and despite Georgia's enthusiastic membership in pan-European organizations such as the OSCE, which is deeply concerned about democracy and human rights standards.

As a small country in a volatile region that has rendered security a scarce commodity, Georgia must constantly take into account the interests of its neighbors: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and above all Russia.



That Georgia does not have any territorial claims against its neighbors eliminates one source of friction in the region and permits Georgia to use its territory as a neutral site for bringing together feuding Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

In addition to its membership in OSCE, Georgia also joined the Russia-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States, perhaps because its physical distance from the West precluded the kind of strategic alliance that the Shevardnadze leadership would prefer. Simple geography preordains that Russia will be a major factor in Georgian foreign policy calculations and provides Tbilisi with every incentive to reach accommodation with Moscow.²

Russia has intervened intermittently in ethnic-regional conflicts in Georgia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Beginning in 1992-93, Tbilisi accused Moscow of lending support to Abkhazian separatists, while ostensibly trying to play a mediating role in the conflict. In South Ossetia, another area threatening secession, Moscow again sought a role that Georgia did not find helpful. The continuing presence of Russian troops in the Caucasus reflects Moscow's determination to safeguard Russia's broader geopolitical and economic interests in the region, particularly in light of the growing involvement of Turkey (which has lobbied for a Baku-Supsa-Geikhan pipeline) and the West because of energy resources.³

Georgia has also managed to attract considerable support --political, diplomatic and financial-- from the West, a testament both to Shevardnadze's earlier role as Soviet Foreign Minister skillfully negotiating a peaceful dénouement to the Cold War and, to a lesser degree, the country's strategic location and credible progress in building a democratic system.

RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

During the period under review, the broadly defined European region did not experience a case of an overthrown democracy, although some nominally elected leaders in the former Soviet Republics resorted to undemocratic measures to retain control. This was of little consequence to Tbilisi. Likewise, coups in major countries such as Pakistan, a country with which Georgia has only weak ties, did not cause any deviation in Tbilisi's international posture. The Georgian government did

not react to the overthrow of the elected government in Pakistan or in more distant countries such as Nigeria and Peru.

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Georgia said little and did even less in the face of electoral malpractice, which was rampant in the former Soviet Union, including Georgia's own share of shortcomings.⁴ Governing elites in many of the former Soviet republics found it difficult to discontinue the tradition of electoral manipulation inherited from the communist period. OSCE, Council of Europe and local monitors dutifully chronicled pre-election and voting day violations but Georgian officials offered neither criticism nor endorsement of the reports.

Not only did the Georgian government refrain from any criticism of electoral irregularities or outright fraud in countries such as Belarus, Uzbekistan, Ukraine Azerbaijan and Armenia, but in many instances it willingly congratulated the perpetrators on their tainted victories.⁵ Georgia was even less inclined to take any action, such as joining in sanctions imposed on any of these countries, especially its fellow members of the GUUAM alliance. For example, Georgia supported the Kuchma government in the face of international criticism on democracy and human rights issues, appreciative of Ukraine's constructive efforts to mediate conflicts in the Caucasus.⁶

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

The newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union were eager to become integrated into the international political system, which also meant membership in regional and global institutions. Aware that the country's successful transition would depend in large part on support from the international community, Georgia's political leadership wanted to play an active role in these institutions, a number of which have a mandate to promote democratic political development and adherence to international human rights norms.⁷

Georgia has signed numerous conventions and multilateral agreements in the democracy sphere but has done little to distinguish itself as an active promoter of democracy strengthening on an international basis. In 1999 Georgia became the first among the three Caucasian countries states to be admitted into the Council of Europe, which required



the Georgian parliament (regarded as one of the most reform minded in the former Soviet Union) to ratify various European conventions on human rights and to bring domestic law in conformity with its international legal commitments.⁸

Georgia's weak record on democracy and human rights, a fact documented in the U.S. State Department's annual report and findings by the Council of Europe, explains some of the reluctance on the part of the Georgian government to judge the democratic shortcomings of other countries. Even in the egregious case of Russia's resort to indiscriminate force in the war in Chechnya, Georgia considers it an internal matter and voted to restore Moscow's voting rights after they were suspended by the Council of Europe over the conflict in Chechnya.⁹

Georgia's poor record of promoting international democracy comes against the backdrop of substantial development assistance flowing to Georgia from the U.S. and the European Union, a modest portion of which was to support programs to bolster the rule of law, strengthen the judiciary and parliament, empower civil society, and fight corruption. This assistance did not translate into meaningful Georgian support for democracy promotion efforts in international fora. For its part, Georgia's comparatively well developed non-governmental sector also has been inwardly focused in terms of pressing for deeper political reform. It is only just beginning to explore opportunities to encourage the government to use Georgia's participation in regional and global organizations to work on behalf of democracy beyond the country's borders.

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

Since attaining independence, Georgia has taken few if any steps aimed at loosening the grip of dictatorial regimes in its region. Despite ample opportunities given the democracy deficit in the region and Georgia's membership in organizations

involved in democracy building, Tbilisi has issued no statements condemning entrenched dictatorship.

For reasons discussed throughout this essay, the Georgian government has not moved to criticize or otherwise undertake measures to confront authoritarian leaders and regimes in the region or elsewhere. Concerns over security and economic relations trump any thought that Tbilisi might have about lending support to efforts to create more open societies in countries such as Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. It is not clear that the political elite feels any sense of responsibility to help promote democracy, even rhetorically, despite the external assistance Georgians have received to help them move away from communist authoritarianism.

With regard to Belarus, Georgia did not criticize Lukashenko's repressive rule and never countenanced following the lead of Western countries in imposing sanctions. On the contrary, the Georgian government has publicly congratulated the leader on the occasion of his dubious electoral victory and looked to broaden discussions on economic relations.¹⁰

Democracy-related crises in Ukraine, a country like Georgia that had registered substantial progress in constructing a democratic political order, did not elicit any comment from Tbilisi other than these were internal matters and that Georgia hoped the resignation of reformist Prime Minister Yushenko would not lead to any change in Ukraine's policy toward Georgia.¹¹

In the case of Yugoslavia during the dictatorship of Slobodan Milosevic, Georgia did observe sanctions imposed by the international community and Georgian military forces did participate in the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo within the framework of collaboration with NATO. President Shevardnadze welcomed the demise of the Milosevic regime and expressed Georgia's readiness to collaborate with democratic Yugoslavia while acknowledging the importance of the democratic choice made by the Serbian people.¹²

¹ Karatnycky, Adrian. Nations in Transit: Civil Society, Democracy, and Markets in East Central Europe and the Newly Independent States. New York: Transaction Pub, 2001.

² Smith, Graham. The Post-Soviet States: Mapping the Politics of Transition. Edward Arnold, 1999.

³ Glonti, Georgi. Georgia at the Crossroads. Demokratizatsiya, 2000.

⁴ Daily News. 17 April 2000. President Clinton sent a letter to his Georgian counterpart expressing the hope that President Shevardnadze "will cooperate with the OSCE to review all remarks on the violations. ...and will make the appropriate adjustments to the [electoral] legislation."



⁵ Daily News. 10 September 2001.

⁶ Sarke. 4 April 2000. According to the head of the Georgian delegation, M. Saakashvili, Georgia assured Ukraine, as its strategic partner and a friendly nation, that Georgia would lend support on the question of Ukraine maintaining its membership in the Council of Europe.

⁷ Foreign Minister I. Menagarishvili speech at press conference. 10 January 2002.

⁸ Statement made by the Chairman Hans-Christian Kruger at press conference, Tbilisi, 30 March 2000.

⁹ Georgia will hold an active position on Chechnya at the forthcoming OSCE summit - Statement from the Georgian Foreign Ministry's Public Information Department, 12 Nov. 1999; Daily News. 26 January 2001.

¹⁰ Sarke Info 27 June 2001, 10 September 2001.

¹¹ Sarke Info 27 April 2001.

¹² Radio Interview of President Shevardnadze. 9 October 2000.