POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARTY DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA

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The peaceful coup of 23 November, 2003, otherwise known as the Rose Revolution, proved fatal for nearly all of Georgia's political parties: only one of them—the United National Movement—gained weight at the expense of the others. Some of them were wiped away, while others were too shocked to recover promptly. This slowed down the country's movement toward consolidated democracy, the road to which lies through strengthening several political parties. Despite the freedom of speech and political activity it enjoyed, the country failed to change the government by holding objective and fair elections.

Georgia was not alone in the so-called gray zone: there are other states with no clear dictatorial or democratic biases.[1] The Rose Revolution itself is a product of half-baked democracy and the arrested transition process. It was precisely freedom of speech and political activity, the façade of democracy, that played the key role in the revolution. It is still too early to tell whether, since the Rose Revolution, Georgia has emerged from the gray zone, as the revolution considerably weakened not only the political parties and their political rivalry, but also the first shoots of civil society. The most active representatives of strong (according to Georgian standards) NGOs joined the new cabinet, thus laying bare their political nature. The United National Movement grew stronger, while other parties grew weaker. It was not administrative pressure that was responsible for this: politics followed its natural course due to the parties' inability to catch the mood of the masses and adjust to it. The parties' influence on the public is rather weak—public opinions are spontaneous—it is not the parties leading the masses, it is the masses leading them. The parties are unable to shape electoral behavior, therefore to survive they must readjust their behavior to suit public sentiments. The Rose Revolution amply confirmed this. Mikhail Saakashvili grasped the popular sentiments and shaped his political strategy to match popular discontent and radicalism. This brought him victory.

[1] See: Th. Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy,* Vol. 13, No. 1, 2003, p. 10.

Political Parties and the Political System

The trend toward restricting freedom of the media, which became obvious after the Rose Revolution (although the process has just begun), may interfere with the development of political parties and

political rivalry. The above does not apply to the judicial system: under continued political control the frightened judges cannot do their work properly. Uldis Kinis, Senior Legal Expert of the EU Rule of Law Mission to Georgia, engaged in monitoring judiciary power in our country, pointed out that the problem of judicial independence has still not been resolved and that its dependence is screened by its formal independence. When Mr. Kinis asked judges whether they were independent, they all answered that they enjoyed a high degree of freedom. When asked whether they would be bold enough to pass a fair sentence on those branded guilty by the authorities, none of the interviewed said they would dare to oppose. According to Uldis Kinis, their main problem was fear.[2]

Political dependence of the judiciary interferes to a great extent with the development of political parties and political rivalry. Economic problems can be expected to force the government to try and change the political system in order to prevent snowballing "counter-revolutionary" forces, something that may happen if economic and social policy turns out to be ineffective. In this case, shock among the opposition parties will continue.

The Parties and the Façade of Democracy

Along with freedom of the press, a democratic constitution, and regular elections, political parties and the political struggle form the democratic façade. This breeds the illusion that the government can be replaced through democratic elections. In actual fact, however, democratic institutions cannot ensure a change of government in a democratic way: these institutions just camouflage the way real power is distributed. This slows down the process of strengthening political parties and other democratic institutions and of changing the government through freely expressed popular will. In these circumstances, real power relies on the greater role of the executive branch in state administration, which, in turn, gives more power to the bureaucrats. While the judiciary remains under political pressure, this power is free to extend its authority. This creates conditions for the president's omnipotence and his complete control over the state bureaucratic mechanism. His power, however, cannot be strong if he has no political party at his side able to control the parliament. Under the Georgian constitution, the parliament's rights are enough to stem the process of broadening presidential powers, therefore political influence of the head of state largely depends on the parliament's political composition: it determines the degree to which the president can control the legislature. To ensure cooperation between the executive and legislative branches of power and prevent any sharp conflicts between them, the parliament needs a strong and close-knit political majority. Former president Eduard Shevardnadze was well aware of this: speaking at a congress of his party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG), he pointed out that even if the president could rule the country without a political party, he would be a "lame" president.

To weed out small and weak parties and tighten presidential control over the parliament, the election barrier for the parties was raised from 5 to 7 percent. Eduard Shevardnadze, who was brought to power by a coup, tried to add legitimacy to his power and consolidate his position by encouraging political parties to run for parliament. He had no fear of them: the parties were more like political clubs with loose organizational structures, small memberships and no real influence. During the 1993 parliamentary elections, compensation lists had to be used to increase the number of parties in the parliament.

Things began to backslide after President Shevardnadze strengthened his position and acquired a party of his own: the weak parties were efficiently elbowed out of parliament in order to weaken the opposition and increase the influence of the CUG. It was the only party that managed to surmount the 7 percent barrier. Administrative resources allowed the government to control the parliament's political structure; they were used to strengthen the presidential party and help it at the parliamenta-

[2] See: *24 saati,* 28 September, 2004.

ry elections, because real power of the head of state depended on the legislative assembly. In this way, the Citizens' Union of Georgia became, in fact, part of the executive branch that executed the president's will.

Sources of the Multiparty System Today

The multiparty system today is rooted in the republic's Soviet past and the dissident movement. It was in 1981 that a dissident and prominent political figure of Georgia, Georgy Chanturia, set up a clandestine National Democratic Party (NDP).[3] In 1983, it began disseminating anti-Soviet propaganda in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Zestafoni, and Sukhumi. The same year, the party's founder was arrested for anti-Soviet activities (he was set free in 1986).[4] His party played an important role during the struggle for independence and remained prominent in sovereign Georgia. When its leader died, the party lost some of its importance, yet remained afloat until the Rose Revolution seemingly buried it. (It reached the peak of its influence during the first half of the 1990s.)

The Republican Party (founded in the latter half of the 1970s by the brothers Berdzenishvili) was also rooted in the Soviet past. As distinct from the NDP, this party came into the limelight as the junior partner of the United National Movement in the Rose Revolution.

Under Soviet power, the opposition parties were nothing more than scattered underground groups of like-minded persons. Their influence was negligible. Glasnost and perestroika helped society organize itself to express and protect its interests irrespective of the state and communist control. The legal opposition was the product of a strong dissident movement, the widely supported independence movement, collapse of the idea of "real socialism" and a more liberal regime. In 1987, dissidents and the leaders of the national movement set up the first of the legal opposition groups—the Ilia Chavchavadze Society. Its goal was independence and society of the Western type.[5] The entire party development process was strongly influenced by the party and political traditions that survived in Georgia. Some of the parties announced themselves successors of the parties of the early 20th century. The NDP members, for example, restored the party founded in 1917. It was first restored as a clandestine organization and legalized in 1987. It was on its initiative that, in November 1988, a rally openly demanded Georgia's independence for the first time.[6] The Social-Democratic Party regarded itself as successor of the ruling party of the first period of Georgia's independence (1918-1921). The 1990 congress held in Tbilisi restored the Union of Georgian Traditionalists set up in 1942 in emigration by several Georgian public figures (I. Bagrationi, S. Kedia, G. Robakidze, Z. Avalishvili, M. Tsereteli, and others). The Traditionalists appeared after a split in the Conservative-Monarchist Party founded in 1990.[7]

In 1992, the second stage of party development began in Georgia. Eduard Shevardnadze's return to the republic stirred up the old Soviet nomenklatura, which had lost much of its influence under first president of independent Georgia and former dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The communist nomenklatura began frantically restoring its political clout and strengthening its political alliance with the state and economic bureaucracy in the hope of controlling privatization and elbowing out those who had deposed Gamsakhurdia and brought Shevardnadze to power.

In 1993, the former nomenklatura set up the Union of Reformers; this was done on the initiative and under the leadership of B. Gulua, a prominent communist functionary of the past, who sat in parliament in 1993. He obviously expressed the interests of the bureaucracy and the businessmen connected with it

[3] See: *Politicheskie partii Gruzii.* A handbook compiled by V. Keshelava, Tbilisi, 2003, p. 74.
[4] Ibidem.
[5] See: *Fakti, azri, komentari,* 10 July, 1995.
[6] See: *Politicheskie partii Gruzii,* p. 75.
[7] Ibid., p. 252.

and stated, in particular, that privatization might give control over public property (and political power along with it) to criminal groups and clans.[8] The statement made by the Union's initiative group gives a clear idea about its aims: "Those businessmen, business managers, new entrepreneurs, farmers, academics, financiers, and professional civil servants who so far have been in the shadow of others should come to the fore and get involved in building the new state."[9] The list of the Union's founders provided a clear idea of its social basis: out of 54 people, the majority filled top posts in the civil service hierarchy and public, economic, and private structures, such as the first deputy minister and deputy minister of industry, head of the Taxation Department of Tbilisi, and others.

In 1993, the public organizations Movement of Tbilisi Dwellers, Unity and Welfare, and the Green Movement united into the Citizens' Union of Georgia. Later, the Union of Agrarian Scientists and the Union of Industrialists and Producers joined the newly founded party. Its constituent congress elected Zurab Zhvania its General Secretary. (At the first stage, no efforts were spared to conceal Eduard Shevardnadze's active involvement in the process he himself had initiated.) With the help of the CUG, President Shevardnadze brought together the former Soviet bureaucracy and his numerous supporters, as well as disoriented political structures. In this way, he freed himself from his political obligations to those who had brought him to power and who wanted to exploit his prestige as the president for their own ends. The CUG consolidated his personal power. The very word *"mokalake"* (citizens) in the party's name indicated that it intended to push ethnic, class, and confessional distinctions aside in order to rally all citizens around the president. Then CUG General Secretary Zurab Zhvania, one of the leaders of the Rose Revolution, said in 1995 that undoubtedly the Citizens' Union of Georgia provided absolutely real support for the head of state.[10]

From the very beginning, the CUG brought together people of different generations and different political convictions. The former nomenklatura and the green leaders together were consolidating Shevardnadze's presidential powers and filled top posts in the party. I have already mentioned that Zurab Zhvania, originally a green leader, became the party's general secretary. (In fact, membership in the CUG provided the green leaders with a political future: economic collapse and destitution of the majority of Georgia's population cost the Green Party its popular support.) The former green leaders improved the Union's image as the party oriented toward Western values and played down the presence of the former Soviet bureaucracy in it. It was the authority and administrative resources of President Shevardnadze that kept together the variegated interests, values, and political biases. As an appendage to power, the Citizens' Union of Georgia served as a political basis of the rule of the bureaucracy. Its local representatives (the *gamgebeli,* or district administrators), appointed and removed by the president, headed the local CUG cells, the rank-and-file members of which had no say at all.

As the Shevardnadze cabinet's inability to cope with economic and social problems and corruption became evident, the CUG went into decline because of inner party squabbles. As a result of the conflict between Parliament Vice-Speaker Vakhtang Rcheulishvili and the green leaders, the former left the Citizens' Union of Georgia; in 1998 he founded and registered the Socialist Party. He did this in recognition of the electorate's obvious shift to the left. In response, the second CUG congress held in 1995 passed a decision on joining the Socialist International.[11] Unwilling to let the communists strengthen their position on its left flank, the CUG had to maneuver to detach some of the communist electorate. Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, still a CUG member, said at that time: "We should use the positive sides of socialism to prevent the orthodox communists from exploiting them."[12]

When the Union and the president lost the nation's confidence, the former greens, together with the Union's former general secretary and former speaker of the parliament Zurab Zhvania, left the Union. In 2002, they set up the United Democrats Party, which took part in the Rose Revolution as an ally of the United National Movement. It was then that Mikhail Saakashvili, the future leader and moving force of

[8] See: *Sakartvelos respublika,* 17 August, 1993.
[9] Ibidem.
[10] See: Interview with Z. Zhvania, *The Georgian Times,* 26 January, 1995.
[11] See: *Mokalake,* 2 June, 1995.
[12] *Kavkasioni,* 11 July, 1995.

the Rose Revolution, went over to the opposition. His political biography is also related to the Citizens' Union of Georgia. In October 1995, he obtained a parliamentary seat as a CUG member (the Union controlled the election results). In the same year, he was elected Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional and Legal Issues and Rule of Law. In August 1998, he was elected head of the CUG parliamentary faction, the Citizens' Union. As public discontent with President Shevardnadze mounted, Saakashvili distanced himself from the CUG and became an active critic of the government. He effectively used his post of minister of justice (to which he had been appointed in October 2000): his scandalous exposures of corruption among top civil servants made him widely popular. In 2000, he was elected to parliament for the second time. The former minister skillfully exploited the political context to set up a new party and head it. In October 2001, Mikhail Saakashvili and his supporters founded the National Movement for the Salvation of Georgia (since 2002 it has been called the United National Movement). Its first congress held on 13 September, 2002 attended by 2,000 elected Mikhail Saakashvili the party leader.[13]

The nation's leftward shift created conditions for more left-centrist parties. In 1998, the Socialist Party and the Labor Party were registered. The latter was founded by parliamentary deputy Shalva Natelashvili, who went over to the opposition because, as he alleged, Mikhail Saakashvili was elected as chairman of the committee formerly headed by Natelashvili. At the first stage, he set up the Labor faction in the parliament and then knocked together party cells across the country. The Labor Party itself traces its history back to 1995 when a little known party called State and Legal Unification of Georgia appeared, subsequently renamed the Labor Party in 1998. It described its program priorities as the fight against "wild capitalism," the "dictatorship of transnational companies," and the "oligarchic and clan control over the economy." It favored state control over the country's economy, as well as state monopoly on export, import, and transit of oil and oil products, etc. Its members are convinced that the state should preserve its controlling interest in mining, they insist on complete land tax exemption for peasants and farmers, and support the idea of the country's foreign policy neutrality.[14]

The Labor Party and the United National Movement are courting the same social groups: peasants, small and petty businessmen, and people with low incomes. The Rose Revolution sent the Labor Party into a decline: within a short period it lost a large part of its membership and supporters and failed to prevent some of its members (who preferred the radicalism and unconstitutional methods of the National Movement to Natelashvili's parliamentary methods) from taking part in the revolution. At the rallies of the United National Movement, these people tore up their Labor membership cards in public.

Political Parties of the Business Community

Development of the market economy has considerably altered the social and economic context of political processes in Georgia. The economic factors of electoral preferences have come to the fore. Being fully aware of their economic interests, businessmen shape their political preferences accordingly since political decisions affect business activities in a very tangible way by increasing or decreasing profits. The business community tries to politically organize itself in order to directly control the political decision-making process. Its economic weakness, however, and criminal past do not allow it to put economic pressure on the government. This prompts another way out: independent political organizations of the business community. To achieve this, businessmen have to rally the people around their business interests. The Industry Will Save Georgia Party appeared because of the discrepancy between weak industry and the integration process into the world economy now underway. This party claims protection of the domestic market and creation of privileged conditions for Georgian industry, which is regarded as the

[13] See: *Politicheskie partii Gruzii,* p. 58.
[14] Ibidem.

cornerstone of the country's future revival, as its main aims. The party has called on society to "Save Our Industry and Industry Will Save Georgia."[15] It objects to borrowing from the IMF and World Bank because, it says, they impose crippling terms on the country. The party leader, Georgy Topadze, stated: "Georgia has been caught in the neocolonialist trap." The party born in 1999 overcame the 7 percent barrier during the 1999 elections and created its own parliamentary faction.

In 2001, another party appeared on the Georgian political scene—Akhali Memarjveneebi (The New Right)—which described itself as a right-centrist party.[16] Based on the "new faction," "new movement," and "new conservatives," it was set up by two young businessmen and parliamentary deputies Levan Gachechiladze, a big wine manufacturer, and David Gamkrelidze, who works in insurance. The party is oriented toward the West and NATO and (as distinct from the industrialists) indulges itself in anti-Russian statements; it is campaigning for the liberalization of the economy and a state ruled by law.[17]

"Nationals" and Democrats Locked in a Struggle for the Party

In the wake of the Rose Revolution, the United Democrats and the United National Movement merged (the former functioned as an independent structure for only two years, from 2002 to 2004). The process was much more painful than their leaders could have imagined. Before the congress that took place in November 2004, some of the local cells of merging parties were locked in a struggle for control over the party organizational structures, which in places developed into open conflicts. For example, on 10 June, 2004, information appeared about a conflict between the old and new "nationals" of the Ozurgeti organization. It split into two camps, each accusing the other of usurping the party structures. There were two offices in Ozurgeti, each of which claimed the name of the National Movement, even though one of them was occupied by former democrats, while the other belonged to the old members of the United National Movement.[18] In the Bolnisi District, unification took an even more dramatic turn: the conflict developed into popular disturbances when voters, party members, and their relatives, divided into "democrats" and "nationals," poured into the street to "sort things out." Neither the party leaders, nor the presidential representative in Kvemo Kartli, Soso Mazmishvili, were able to defuse the conflict.[19]

The confrontation spread to the Kakheti Region where conflicts between "democrats" and "nationals" had begun even before the merge was announced. Even though the United National Movement won the elections, the Democrats tried to usurp power at the local level. The response of the "nationals" was dramatic; in Kiziki they went as far as a hunger strike.[20] In the Gurjaani District, the democrats and the "nationals" failed to come to an agreement about the district head. At first the "nationals" wanted to appoint one of their own representatives; later some of the members moved to the democrats' camp. To defuse tension, President Saakashvili, the leader of the United National Movement, dispatched his representative to Gurjaani. Before he reached the district, there was a scuffle between the two groups in the administrative building. This brought David Kirkitadze, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Defense and Security, to the region, who laid the blame on I. Kardanakhishvili, chairman of the local cell of the United National Movement. Later, even though a secret meeting appointed Saakashvili (the president's namesake) as the new leader of the local party organization, the former chairman preserved real power

[15] *Industry Will Save Georgia. The Key Program Principles and Charter,* Tbilisi, 1999, p. 13 (in Georgian).
[16] See: *The New Right Political Association. Charter,* p. 1 (in Georgian).
[17] See: *Politicheskie partii Gruzii,* p. 94.
[18] See: *Akhali Taoba,* 14 June, 2004.
[19] See: *Akhali versia,* 19-21 November, 2004.
[20] See: *24 saati,* 15 November, 2004.

and continued functioning as before. The "nationals," however, retreated out of respect for President Saakashvili, as they insisted.[21]

In Gurjaani, confrontation was rekindled as the merge began. At a district conference convened to discuss the merge of the local organizations, the "nationals" lost their patience and beat I. Kardanakhishvili, who supported the merge. The "nationals" were worried by the fact that the democrats, who had lost the local elections, were still seeking control over the local united organization and the district. They were convinced that the merge could undermine their influence and boost the rating of the defeated party. One of the local "nationals," Z. Kvirikashvili, pointed out: "The elections have shown that the leader of the democrats failed to get enough votes in his native village. It looks as if we are rescuing a party that was thrown onto the refuse heap of history and boosting its rating. Nothing good will come of it."[22] Some of the members of the United National Movement preferred to keep silent and refrained from sharp comments until the congress scheduled for 22 November, 2004. They too were convinced that the merge would deprive the party's district national organization of any meaning. Its local office remained closed for over a month, while Saakashvili, its member, said: "Our continued party membership is senseless, therefore the party leaders should react before the situation spins out of control."[23]

At the conference of the United National Movement in Telavi, the district *gamgebeli* announced that the "nationals" and the democrats should unite to form a single party. This caused a veritable storm in the audience; there were shouts and ultimatums, yet fighting was avoided. The response in other districts was more or less the same.[24] One of the old members of the United National Movement and chairman of a parliamentary committee, G. Kheviashvili, did not attempt to conceal the fact that "somebody tried" to leave the old and active members outside the movement.[25]

The confrontation and conflicts that accompanied the merge can be explained by the two parties' different social bases and different program priorities. As distinct from the United Democrats Party, which had no following in the countryside, the United National Movement enjoyed the support of the workers and peasants. It resolutely objected to Shevardnadze's rule and was more clearly guided by Georgian values. The "nationals" and democrats were the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks of the Rose Revolution. The United National Movement clearly stated its aim as "deposing Shevardnadze's nomenklatura government" through political mobilization of the nation. This was done during the Rose Revolution.

This was not all: the "nationals" promised that when they came to power all top officials would be deprived of illegally gained property and would be brought to trial; small and middle-sized businesses were promised tax amnesty, and peasants and farmers, land tax exemption. The temperamental political leaders promised to restore the country's territorial integrity and planned to take "resolute measures" "in the shortest time possible" to return the breakaway territories to Georgia's jurisdiction. The party program paid particular attention to strengthening the economic basis of the Georgian Orthodox Church; it promised to return the lands and buildings the Bolsheviks had taken away from it, which have remained in public property since then. The program also spoke about saving Georgian culture, reviving the country's intellectual potential and educational system, switching paperwork in state offices to the Georgian language, paying for teaching the Georgian tongue across the country, etc. The sections dealing with the Georgian Church and Georgian culture betrayed the philosophical closeness between the movement's leaders and the supporters of deposed president Gamsakhurdia.

As distinct from the "nationals," the United Democrats professed more moderate ideas. They did not want to depose Shevardnadze and confiscate illegally gained property, they did not promise to restore the country's territorial integrity "in the shortest time possible," which obviously excluded "resolute measures." Their program documents found in the *Politicheskie partii Gruzii* (Political Parties of Georgia) handbook do not mention the word "Georgian."

[21] See: Ibidem.
[22] Ibidem.
[23] Ibidem.
[24] See: *Akhali versia,* 19-21 November, 2004.
[25] Ibidem.

Active opposition staged by the old "nationals" did not prevent the movements' merge with the United Democrats. As could be expected, the congress of the United National Movement held on 22 November, 2004 went smoothly. This betrayed the weakness of inner party democracy: the party leaders were seeking unity among the members not so much through freedom of expression of the local structures and rank-and-file members, as by applying the administrative resources the leaders controlled as the heads of state and government. On the eve of the congress one of the active "nationals" told journalists that district heads *(gamgebeli)* and governors (the president's representatives in regions) would prevent troublemakers from attending the congress.[26]

Organizational Structures of Political Parties

They would best be analyzed as actors on the political stage and as "political bodies." In the former case, we are interested in how the parties fight for power and what they do to retain it; and in the latter, we are interested in the way power is distributed inside the parties; how they are organized; how its membership functions; and how it is connected with the organization, its viability, inner party democracy, etc.

The organizational structures of the political parties of Georgia are described in their charters, which are normally adopted at the congresses empowered to amend them. Formally, their structures are democratic, yet this merely hides the real distribution of power inside the parties. More likely than not the leaders and relatively small groups of trusted people wield power. The leader's domination is explained by the fact that it is the leader who sets up the party, not vice versa. As a rule, the parties depend for their success on the leader's rating. It is for the leader to present his party to the nation, to describe its positions on all key issues. The leader attracts the media and creates an interest in his party and its image. All the parties which remained active after the Rose Revolution were set up by their leaders: Mikhail Saakashvili founded the United National Movement; Shalva Natelashvili founded the Labor Party; David Gamkrelidze and Levan Gachechiladze, the New Right; Georgy Topadze, Industry Will Save Georgia; and Akaki Asatiani, the Union of Georgian Traditionalists. The parties eclipsed by the Rose Revolution also owed their existence to political leaders: Vakhtang Rcheulishvili set up the Socialist Party; Zurab Zhvania, the United Democrats; Georgy Chanturia, the National Democratic Party; Eduard Shevardnadze, the Citizens' Union of Georgian; and Aslan Abashidze, the Union of Revival of Georgia. In Georgia, the party leaders do not change—this might trigger a split.

Out of the 11 leaders of the 10 parties enumerated above, five were members of parliament when they set up their parties; two—Shevardnadze and Abashidze—were top state figures. As such, they were well known in the country and had administrative resources at their disposal. These five parties appeared due to the active efforts of parliamentary deputies after 1995. This shows that the legislators are increasing their impact on the party-forming process. A seat in the parliament gives a politician enough resources to form a party and become its leader. Daily discussions of key issues of national importance and systematic involvement in political activities attract the media; the deputies are well informed about the functioning of the state mechanism and about domestic and foreign policies. They obviously know more than common people about the corridors of power, etc. Deputy immunity protects them against encroachments from the executive power and police. A deputy has much more opportunity of receiving material support from the business community. All this increases the parliament's role in the party system development process.

Congresses elect the ruling structures of the parties, yet this produces little impact on the real distribution of power in any party: it is the party leaders who keep an eye on the congress' makeup and the

[26] See: *Akhali versia,* 19-21 November, 2004.

important decisions it is expected to pass. Normally this starts from the very beginning, at the constituent congress attended by only those who trust the party's founder and are prepared to follow him. This explains why the founder, who does a lot to create the party's backbone, is always elected the party leader. Once elected, he acquires control over the party's organization. This is most clearly seen in the Labor Party (its congress elects the chairman and approves his report). The elected chairman controls the elections to all ruling structures; he presents candidates who are elected by the congress to the general congress and has the right to approve those suggested by the congress. The congress elects the party's political committee from among the elected members of the general council; the political bureau is elected from among the members of the political committee. The political committee (with a membership of 25, including the chairman) plays the role of the executive structure in the Labor Party. In this way, the party remains under strict control; the same can be said about how the charter and program are observed. The chairman also heads all the leading bodies: the political committee and its bureau, as well as its general council.[27]

It looks as if the chairman of the United National Movement has less power than his colleague in the Labor Party. The leading structures of the United National Movement are formed under the control of the party's political council of 33 members elected by the congress. The political council controls elections to the party's secretariat and approval by the congress of the presidential candidate, as well as the party lists for parliamentary and other elections. The congress is left to approve all candidates nominated by the political council. It is for the political council to choose the party's political course and pass decisions on all issues outside the congress' competence. It also controls all problems related to the party's development and enlargement (including setting up its local cells). The political council is made up of members of the secretariat, parliamentary faction, and chairmen of branch commissions. It serves as a link between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary party structures, thus involving the deputies in party life. The party chairman heads the political council: this makes it possible for him to control the decision-making process on all key political and organizational issues. The party leader has specific executive functions, like making statements, issuing orders, instructions, etc. Together with other party functionaries of the United National Movement (the general and political, regional, and executive secretaries, and the chairman of the youth organization), he is a member of the secretariat. This structure meets once a week. There is no time limit on the powers of the party's ruling structures (the chairman included), which exempts them from control of the primary organizations and makes it impossible to call the top functionaries to account or to change the composition of the ruling structures contrary to the leader's wishes.[28]

As distinct from the "nationals," the New Right elect their top party leaders (the chairman, two cochairmen, general secretary, members of the main committee, and the auditing commission along with its chairman) for a term of four years. The congress nominates the party's presidential candidate. At the same time, the local party structures (regional and ten district cells) enjoy vast powers when it comes to choosing candidates for all the elected posts. This is obviously a much more democratic procedure than those used by other parties. This is the congress' only privilege: the political council endorses the party lists for all other posts, as well as the list of candidates running in the single-member constituencies. The main committee, which offers the lists to the political council, controls the process of candidate selection. At first glance, the political council is a fairly representative body. A closer inspection, however, reveals that its membership is limited to the party leaders of various levels: the party chairman, members of the main committee, chairmen of regional and district organizations, parliamentary deputies, as well as elected, appointed, or approved officials of the executive structures recommended by the party (ten members being appointed by the main committee), the chairman of the youth organization, and its board members. The political council sets up commissions, passes decisions on forming blocs or coalitions with other parties and on boycotting elections or going over to the opposition, listens to the reports of regional organizations and endorses them, etc.

[27] See: *Politicheskie partii Gruzii,* p. 181.
[28] See: Ibid., p. 61.

The New Right concentrated all real work and real power in the executive committee headed by the party chairman. It consists of 17 members, including the chairman, the cochairmen, and the general secretary empowered to make statements in the name of the party. It is on his suggestion that the structure of the executive committee is endorsed and the chairmen of the regional and district structures are appointed. In this way, he has control over the leaders of the local structures. It is his mission to convene special congresses and conferences, to compile party lists to be approved by the political council, and to coordinate the work of the central, regional, and district structures. The party chairman, in turn, chairs the meetings of the political council and the main committee, nominates the candidate for general secretary, and presents this nomination to the congress, etc.

The local structures form the core of the party organizations, yet they cope poorly with their function of rallying the masses around the party. Their role in promoting the party ideas among the masses is minimal: not only the primary cells, but also the leaders are obviously unwilling to pour efforts into disseminating the party ideas, explaining its position, and creating its image. The public gets its ideas about the party from bits and pieces of its leaders' pronouncements on topical issues.

The local structures of most Georgian parties are developing and working under the supervision of the central structures. The political council of the United National Movement, for example, passes decisions on setting up local organizations, which are thus allowed to show initiative in planning their activity. (The rules on local organizations, however, have to be endorsed by the political council.) In the Labor Party, the city, district, zonal, village, and precinct centers are its local structures, the heads (coordinators) of which are endorsed by the political committee (the minimal membership of the primary cells is three persons).[29]

The New Right Party too, has regional, district, and primary structures. The district structure is set up on a decision of the main committee in towns and districts of constituencies with no less than 100 party members. The conference is its supreme body. It elects the chairman of the district organization; discusses and compiles lists for elections to the country's legislature and local self-administration bodies; and elects (for a term of two years) the bureau of the district organization. The bureau offers the main committee a candidate for the single-member constituencies at parliamentary elections to be endorsed by the political council; collects party dues; and convenes party conferences. The district organizations are headed by chairmen.[30] Regional structures are formed on the initiative of the main committees in regions with no less than 500 party members, while the primary cells appear on a decision of the district bureau.[31]

Party membership is the cornerstone of the party's viability and functioning, its main organizational and political resource, which forms the party's ruling structures, compiles (on the whole) party lists, and is engaged in public relations. The party's financial well-being depends on its membership: it mainly functions on membership dues. At the same time, members of various parties are unable to pay dues because of the economic problems plaguing the country. This largely undermines the parties' legal material basis and interferes with their activities. For this reason, the ties between the parties and society remain slack.

While in the early 1990s, parties were mainly small groups of like-minded people with no ramified organizational structures, since the latter half of the 1990s, they have been strengthening their structures and increasing their memberships. In 2003, for example, the United National Movement boasted a membership of 30,000; the New Right, 13,845; the Industry Will Save Georgia Party, 94,000; the Labor Party, 55,000; the Socialist Party, 70,000, and the National Democratic Party, 6,000.[32] We should bear in mind, however, that the parties tend to overstate the size of their membership in order to pass for strong and influential political organizations. A comparison between the votes cast for the parties at the repeat parliamentary elections of March 2004 and the officially stated figures of party membership reveals the follow-

[29] See: *Politicheskie partii Gruzii,* p. 18.
[30] See: Ibid., p. 99.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] See: Ibidem.

ing picture: the Socialist Party with a claimed membership of 70,000 got 7,229 votes at the elections of March 2004. This suggests that either the official figure was an inflated one or that the lists did contain 70,000 names, but most of its former members had either lost contact with the party or did not have any contact with it in the first place. In the beginning, the Socialists were busy building up membership, which more often than not was formal: the number of votes cast for the Socialists is the party's real numerical strength. Indeed, there is greater possibility of a party obtaining the vote of its own member than of any non-party voter.

The New Right claimed a membership of 13,845; and the Industry Will Save Georgia, 94,000 (their combined officially claimed membership was 107,845). They formed a bloc for the repeat elections and received 113,313 votes. In other words, their electorate is larger than their formal membership, which raises no questions. Both parties mainly represent the interests of the business community, which explains their members' loyalty and the support of non-party voters. This allowed the parties to overcome the 7 percent barrier and obtain seats in the parliament. The Labor Party (with a claimed membership of 55,000) received 89,941 votes; and the United National Movement (30,000 members) and the United Democrats (10,000 strong), which formed an election bloc, received 992,275 votes.[33]

It should be noted that the parties vest their members with broad rights and impose easy duties on them, which require minimal efforts. For example, any citizen who recognizes the charter of the United National Movement, pays party dues, is not a member of any other party, and helps to promote the movement's aims can be its member. He acquires the right to elect and be elected to its ruling, executive, advisory, and auditing structures, take part in discussing the issues related to party functioning, and obtain information on anything that may interest him. He is duty bound to abide by the decisions of the party's ruling structures and disseminate information about its activities.[34]

Like the members of the United National Movement, a member of the Labor Party has the right to elect and be elected to any of its structures, and to obtain information from the party leaders about the party and their own work. This right is very important for more active involvement of the rank-and-file members in party work and for more democratic control over the party's ruling structures, which keeps the leaders in touch with the masses. As distinct from the United National Movement, in the Labor Party this right is specified: the members have the right to obtain information precisely about the work of the ruling structures and the party leaders (the United National Movement Charter speaks about information on topics that may interest its members). The formal possibilities of the Labor Party members are much stronger, as well as their right to take part in the party congresses.

The charter of the National Democratic Party differs radically from the similar documents of other parties as far as the members' rights and duties are concerned. It is much closer to the party of professional revolutionaries of the Leninist type. The charter presupposes two types of membership: full and free. The full members are much more closely associated with the party than the free members; they are registered with one of the primary cells, pay membership dues, are involved in the political activities of the party, and have casting votes. The free members are registered with one of the primary cells on the basis of personal applications; they actively support the party (especially during election campaigns), and have deliberative votes.[35]

The charters of many political parties presuppose close ties between their parliamentary deputies and the party organization outside the parliament. The members of the United National Movement parliamentary faction, for example, are also members of its political council, while the New Right does not limit the right of decision making to its parliamentary faction, but has extended it to all those elected or appointed to the executive structures from the party. Its political council includes the members of the parliamentary faction and those who represent the party in the executive structures.

Some parties impose a stricter code of behavior on its representatives in the legislative and executive structures. The New Right, for example, demands that the party members who occupy posts in the

[33] See: *Itogovy protokol provedennykh v marte 2004 po proportsional'noy izbiratel'noy sisteme povtornykh parlamentskikh vyborov 2 noiabria 2003 goda. Rasporiazhenie Tsentral'noy izbiratel'noy komissii,* No. 94, 2004.

[34] See: *Politicheskie partii Gruzii*, pp. 61-62.

[35] See: Ibid., p. 80.

legislative and executive structures should quit them if the party goes over to the opposition.[36] A Labor deputy elected to a legislative structure by party lists should vacate his seat if excluded from the party, or if he leaves it on his own free will.[37]

All Georgian political parties pay particular attention to the youth; nearly all of them have youth organizations, the heads of which are members of their respective parties' ruling structures. The leader of the youth organization of the United National Movement, for example, is a member of its secretariat.[38] The New Right has a youth structure of the same name (its leader and board members are also members of the party's political council).[39] The National Democratic Party has a structure called the Young National Democrat, which, according to the charter, is an autonomous unit responsible for the party's youth policy.[40] Its chairman is elected by the congress of the Young National Democrat organization, which has its own charter adopted on 22 November, 2002.[41] The NDP worked actively with students and paid much attention to teenagers: the Young National Democrat comprises the Union of Pupils and the Graali Student Movement.[42]

Conclusion

The façade of democracy also covers the country's political parties, while the democratic procedures camouflage the fact that it is the party leaders and the elite who dominate the political scene. The party leaders keep the initiatives of local organizations under their strict control; the parties are set up around their leaders. In fact, they largely depend for their continued existence on the leaders' political prestige. This serves as fertile ground for raising the political elite. The parliament's role in shaping the political images of the party leaders is translated into its greater impact on the process of party development.

[36] See: *Politicheskie partii Gruzii*, p. 100.
[37] See: Ibid., p. 181.
[38] See: Ibid., p. 61.
[39] See: Ibid., p. 97.
[40] See: Ibidem.
[41] See: Ibid., p. 80.
[42] See: Ibidem.