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# Online Conference - Georgia the Future of Democracy

In March-April 2021, the German Embassy, the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (საია) and the Council of Europe Office in Georgia co-organized an online conference entitled “Georgia - The Future of Democracy”.

In the framework of the conference, four sessions were held:

1. “What is democracy? How can we measure it and evaluate its progress?” (April 29);
2. “10 Years of Democratic Development in Georgia - Achievements and Challenges” (May 6);
3. “Where does Georgia stand now? What needs to be done in the future?” (May 13);
4. “Responsive Government” (May 20).

Scholars and politicians were invited to each session where they discussed the achievements, needs and challenges of Georgia’s democracy.

The conference was attended by academics, representatives of civil society, diplomatic corps in Georgia, as well as international organizations. Attendees also had the opportunity to ask questions to the speakers.

The series of conferences were opened by the Ambassador of Germany to Georgia Hubert Knirsch, the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Georgia Natalia Voutova and the Chairman of GYLA Nika Simonishvili.

In the first session “What is democracy? How can we measure it and evaluate its progress?” the speakers were Professor Wolfgang Merkel (Berlin Science Center) and Sabine Donner (head of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index Group). The session was moderated by Ketevan Abashidze (Human Rights House Foundation). Professor Merkel spoke about the importance of democracy and its crisis that many states face

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today. In addition, Sabine Donner presented the Bertelsmann Transformation Index to the audience, which assesses the progress or regress of 126 countries towards the development of democracy and a market economy.

Zaal Andronikashvili (Professor, Ilia State University, Researcher at the Berlin Center for Literature and Culture) and Stephen Jones (Professor, Mount Holyoke College) were members of the panel at the second session **10 Years of Democratic Development in Georgia - Achievements and Challenges**. The session was moderated by Salome Asatiani (Radio Tavisupleba). According to Zaal Andronikashvili, Georgia is still governed by a revolutionary law, which considers itself the only force and is not subject to restrictions. Stephen Jones noted that Georgia is the most democratic country among the post-Soviet countries, however, both in other countries and in Georgia, democracy has become fragile.

The third session **10 Years of Democracy: Does Georgia stand now? What needs to be done in the future?** - Georgian politicians Davit Usupashvili, Salome Samadashvili and Irakli Kobakhidze were members of the panel. The conference session was opened by the EU Ambassador to Georgia - Carl Hartzell, and the introductory speech was delivered by Vakhushti Menabde, GYLA representative and Ilia State University Associate Professor. The event was moderated by Nino Lejava (Melani Publishing). Carl Hartzell recalled the guiding principle of European integration, according to which **the differences, there are common interests**. According to him, Georgia should also embrace this principle, as it aspires to a European model of politics. For Vekhushti Menabde, the recent crisis is a **political system that developed during Georgia independence**. According to him, politics is considered as a zero-sum game, a clear example of which is the **political system**. Politicians Davit Usupashvili, Salome Samadashvili and Irakli Kobakhidze reviewed the history of independent democratic Georgia and discussed the challenges that political parties face today.

The fourth session of the conference **Government** was opened by the member of the National Constitutional Commission of Georgia, Vakhtang Natsvlishvili. Tamar Tskhadadze (Associate Professor, Ilia State University), Giorgi Maisuradze (Professor, Ilia State University), Lela Rekhviashvili (Doctor, Researcher, Leibniz Institute of Regional Geography), Professor Nicos Alivizatos (Member of the Venice Commission) were invited to the panel. The session was moderated by Ketevan Khutsishvili (Open Society Georgia Foundation). Vakhtang Natsvlishvili noted that

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Georgia became a parliamentary republic three years ago and today, many doubt the existence of democracy in the country. Tamar Tskhadadze positively assessed the legislative initiatives developed to prevent gender-based violence, but also pointed out that less effort had been made to end gender inequality. Giorgi Maisuradze reviewed the Namokhvani project and noted that in the light of this crisis, it is difficult to identify which side represents the interests of the state, the people or the business sector. According to Lela Rekhviashvili, neoliberalism was incompatible with democracy. She said the Namokhvani project was an example of state-owned business giving the sector an unequal advantage. Nicos Alivizatos approached the issue from the perspective of a member of the Venice Commission. In his opinion, the political crisis in Georgia was conditioned by private interests and personal ambitions. He also noted that the majority and the opposition have a common responsibility and therefore, should have a sense of solidarity towards each other. In addition, according to him, while the responsibility of the government is to develop an effective decision-making mechanism, the majority should never change the rules in its favor.

In order to view the conference sessions, go to the links below:

Session I - <https://www.facebook.com/GYLA.ge/videos/277282567369281>

Session II - <https://www.facebook.com/GYLA.ge/videos/210897687241812>

Session III - <https://www.facebook.com/GYLA.ge/videos/1119343738546848>

Session IV - <https://www.facebook.com/GYLA.ge/videos/282917020178305>