

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Karabakh) > Georgia > **Georgian protesters have only their voices. Many don't trust any politicians**

Mass Protests Face Political Deadlock

Georgian protesters have only their voices. Many don't trust any politicians

Inside Georgia's Pro-EU Protests: Leadership Vacuum and Political Distrust

Wednesday 11 December 2024, by [LAKOMÁ Aneta](#) (Date first published: 11 December 2024).

The ongoing mass protests in Georgia against the government's EU integration reversal have exposed deep-rooted issues in the country's democratic framework. As hundreds of thousands take to the streets, Aneta Lakomá explores the complex dynamics between protesters, opposition forces, and the ruling Georgian Dream party.

While protesters in Georgia raise their voices against EU integration reversal, a lack of unified leadership and clear vision hampers the movement's effectiveness. Opposition to Georgian Dream alone may prove insufficient for meaningful societal change.

Street protests are unfortunately almost the only programme of the Georgian opposition in the domestic sphere

Hundreds of thousands across Georgia are protesting the government's decision to halt European Union integration efforts. As police respond with force and the Georgian Dream party—which secured victory through questionable electoral practices—ignores street demonstrations, the opposition faces a crisis of public trust and strategic direction. Without effective organisation and establishment of functional structures to counter political arbitrariness, disappointment may be inevitable.

Regrettably, democracy remains fragile in Georgia, as evidenced by recent elections that merely simulate democratic processes. The West has overlooked this reality to its detriment and may now find itself surprised by developments in what was considered the most pro-Western state in the Caucasus. The society largely operates on informal connections and relationships, a fact clearly reflected in electoral practices.

Divide and Rule

Georgian Dream's power base lies in rural areas. The party maintains control over nearly all countryside regions and urban centres in the provinces. Its ministries govern local authorities through resource control and appointment powers. Local governments have never been as centralised as they are today, helping oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili's party maintain its grip on power.

Therefore, there is currently no place for opposition in Georgia, as rural voters depend on local patrons—mayors and officials who control the property market and tax administration. Georgian Dream also has control over school principals, judges, and local entrepreneurs. This dependency intensifies particularly during elections. Promises include land or other benefits. And when bribes

don't work, intimidation and threats follow.

People are caught in a vice also because the state is the dominant employer in the regions. Local governments pay wages and provide financial assistance to the unemployed and sick. Fear of negative life impacts here is well-founded. Influence and fear-conditioned social ties help Georgian Dream maintain its dependency system in operation.

Streets Without Leadership

Against such a sophisticated opponent, who is also well-financially secured, stand protesters without a political programme. Or rather, the protests themselves are unfortunately almost the only programme of the opposition on domestic ground. They are meant to force Georgian Dream into concessions or even capitulation. But the energy of protesters will one day be exhausted. This is how protests against the foreign agents law weakened over time, and people from the mining town of Chiatura eventually cleared their bivouac in front of parliament without politicians paying any attention to them. These examples show how short-sighted it is for opposition politicians to want the street to be the sole engine of change.

People have no hope other than a unified opposition that acts according to plan, not impulsively. They can no longer rely even on the Constitutional Court. It decided not to challenge the parliamentary election results and didn't even consider the president's lawsuit. Salome Zurbishvili subsequently declared the presidential office the only legitimate institution in the country. She wants to remain in office until power is transferred to a legitimately elected government. However, her mandate will soon expire, and she alone will not be enough against the uneven odds with a single party in parliament.

The president's action plan, the so-called *Charter of Georgia*, which aims to unite the pro-European opposition and create a counterweight to Georgian Dream, unfortunately doesn't appear effective so far. No one knows to this day how the opposition intends to implement its plans. And moreover, it cannot even be said that it enjoys society's trust. Some demonstrators don't recognise it, another group of protesters doesn't accept the president. Although everyone doesn't want Georgian Dream, they can't agree on who should be their voice, whom they trust. In the given situation, protesters are mainly just making parliament uncomfortable for Georgian Dream. That's fine. But they're exposing themselves to water cannons and police harassment without guarantees that someone can implement their postulates at the political level.

Georgian opposition has so far been stretching its forces abroad. According to Zurab Japaridze from the Coalition for Change, opposition parties must not legitimise the current parliament and must ensure that foreign countries don't recognise it either. Ana Buchukuri from Gacharia for Georgia sees it similarly: *The point is for the government to lose foreign relations and not be legitimised*, said the politician. It's worth remembering here that Georgian Dream ignored European partners' opinions already in the case of the law against foreign agents.

Although the protests are spontaneous, officially lack leadership and nobody convenes them, Georgian Dream is already showing that it will punish opposition representatives and activists for them in particular. Over four hundred people have been detained so far. If the opposition scene doesn't coordinate for more thoughtful action on domestic ground, security forces will manage to arrest or otherwise suppress significant actors in the country's political and social life in a moment. And Georgia doesn't have so many of them that it can afford to waste them.

Aneta Lakomá
The author is a journalist.

P.S.

Source:

https://denikalarm.cz/2024/12/protestujici-v-gruzii-maji-jen-svuj-hlas-cast-z-nich-politikum-neveri/?pk_campaign=feed&pk_kwd=protestujici-v-gruzii-maji-jen-svuj-hlas-cast-z-nich-politikum-neveri

Translated from Czech by Adam Novak