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Migration in the Agendas/ Programmes of Political Factions/ and Political Parties in the Parliament of Georgia, 2011

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Introduction

Even though migration regulation and management have become a major part of the international obligations assumed by Georgia, the discussion about the submission of migration processes within a legislative framework has been reflected only in international treaties and Georgia's foreign policy strategy document. The migration issues have been covered scarcely in the agendas of political parties.

This analysis provides a coverage of pre-election programs of the political parties and political platforms of the parliamentary factions operating actively in Georgia. The programs of parties in international affairs have not differed much from each other. The Republican Party was first to have emphasized the necessity of migration regulation and labour migration legalization overall in its party program prior to the parliamentary elections in 2008. The cooperation established between the EU and Georgia is being transformed into partnership relationships of a new kind. In parallel to this, the control of migration processes, the facilitation of migration legalization and the strengthening of ties with diasporas are emerging as some of the priorities in the activities of the ruling party and the opposition associations. The priorities have been formulated so concisely within the programs of the factions present at the parliament of Georgia today that it prevents migration issues from being specified in detail. However, each of these programs establishes enhanced socio-economic cooperation with neighbor countries and the protection of citizens' rights as the main priority. The parliament of the last convocation has approved legislative amendments, which regulate the rules for departure and entering Georgia for Georgian citizens, the legal status of foreigners in Georgia, the matters of registration of Georgian citizens and issuing of an identity (residence) card to a foreign citizen residing permanently in Georgia, as well as issues related to the passport of a citizen of Georgia and obtaining an emigration permission, etc. A Law on Compatriots Residing Abroad and Diaspora Organizations (#5301, 2011) has also been adopted, which defines the state policy and principles of Georgia for compatriots living abroad, and diaspora organizations. The discussion of the above draft laws was held without any debates at the parliament since the principles proposed under these legislative initiatives turned out to be acceptable to both parties- the ruling and the opposition forces.

Before starting reviewing the programs of the political parties in Georgia, let us overview the political party system¹ of Georgia during the last two decades i.e. the period of Georgia's independence.

By looking into the results of a series of parliamentary elections held since Georgia's independence, we can see that many parties used to take part in the past elections, whilst only their small portion could overcome the pre-determined election barrier and gain respective mandates. From one to another election, the number of the political parties has increased² steadily. The political alliance Round Table- Free Georgia was a dominant party during the first elections.

The second stage (1992-2003) was more prolonged. After Eduard Shevardnadze's return to power in Georgia, the rearrangement of political forces within Georgia's party system occurred. As a result, the majority of the political parties united within the Round Table alliance, had almost vanished from the political arena. They had been replaced by completely different political parties, inter alia, including the Citizens' Union of Georgia, the Labour Party, the Democratic Revival Union, the Socialist Party etc. Only the National-Democratic Party (the People's Party was formed later from it), the Republican Party, the Traditionalists and a few other parties had survived from among the political forces operating prior to the rearrangement. In late 1990s, the right-wing young politicians broke away from the Citizens' Union of Georgia and formed a new party- the New Rights. Later, in 2002, the young reformers united within the Citizens' Union, laid the foundation to the establishment of two new parties: the United National Movement and the United Democrats. In 2001, the Conservative Party was established, which, together with several other opposition parties formed a united political opposition, the so-called National Council in 2007. In 2009, a new party, the Free Democrats was founded, which had been a member of the Political Alliance for Georgia together with three other parties (the New Rights, the Republican Party of Georgia and the Way of Georgia Party)³. In February 2012, the political coalition Georgian Dream was established, which nowadays incorporates four political parties: the Georgian Dream- Democratic Georgia, the Republican Party of Georgia, the Free Democrats and the National Forum⁴.

The "Rose Revolution" of November 23, 2003 was a distinct manifestation and consequence of the economic, social and political crisis existing in the country in that period. The "Rose Revolution" once again reshaped the party system in Georgia. Major parties (enlisting many members) - the Citizens' Union of Georgia and the Union of Georgia's Revival ceased functioning on the political arena. The United National Movement emerged as the dominant party at the third stage of the political history of independent Georgia (since 2003 up to present). In the 2008 pre-term parliamentary elections, the Unified Opposition (National Council, Rights), which united almost all the active political groups (the New Rights, the Freedom Party, the Movement for United Georgia, the National Forum, the People's Party, the Way of Georgia Party, the Conservative Party, political party Chven Tviton (We On Our Own party), political party Kartuli Dasi (The Georgian Team), excluding the Republican, the Christian Democratic and the Labour parties, confronted the United National Movement of Georgia.

Respectively, the following parties have seats in the Parliament of Georgia currently: the ruling party- United National Movement (holding a majority of mandates) and also, the Conservative Party, the Republican Party, the Labour Party, the New Rights, the Christian Democratic Party, the political party Chven Tviton, political party Kartuli Dasi, the Free Democrats and the National-Democratic Party, each holding one or two mandates. In compliance with the existing political attitudes, there

¹ Political Parties and Party System of Georgia in the Period of Democratic Transformation. A scientific-public journal 'Modern Politics'. <http://politscience.ge/index10.html>

² According to the data provided by the Ministry of Justice, over 200 political parties are registered in Georgia today. Out of them, only some 10-15 parties are operating actively, while the rest of the parties are unfamiliar to Georgian public.

³ On February 23, 2009, the "Alliance for Georgia" was established, comprising the Republican Party, the Rights and the political team of Irakli Alasania, headed by the latter. On April 9, 2009, the Way of Georgia party joined the Alliance.

⁴ The political union "National Forum" was established in November 2006.

were formed the following parliamentary factions: the United National Movement and the Regions of Georgia, together constituting a parliamentary majority (85%). As for the Parliamentary minority, it is represented by the factions – the Powerful Georgia, the Christian Democrats and the Unity for Justice.

While studying the priorities of the activities planned by these political factions, it can be highlighted that despite the active discussion about the necessity to develop migration policy, initiated especially by representatives of the ruling party, the migration regulation issues appear less within the scope of the work of these factions.

- Only one point- “The Integration in NATO and the European Structures“ can be observed in the list of the main priorities of the activities followed by the parliamentary faction the Regions of Georgia, which implies, as the faction members interpret it, all the issues related to supporting a free movement of humans.
- In order to help reform the existing socio-political system in the country and establish a more democratic political regime, the parliamentary faction the Unity for Justice put forth its proposals. They are rather important in terms of nationwide welfare and inter alia, include the following issues: protection of lawful interests of refugees and eco migrants; social integration of ethnic minorities; public employment support; guarantees for the protection of citizens’ labour rights; revival of national sectors of economy; protection of a national market and consumers’ rights, and control of migration processes. As we can see, the development of migration management mechanisms has been determined as one of the priorities for this faction.
- The regulation issues for the movement of immigrants or emigrants have not been outlined among the priorities set in the political platform of the Christian Democrats faction. However, in talking about this issue with me while conducting this study, the faction members stated that the Christian Democratic Party is working out an election program for the coming parliamentary elections this fall, and it will necessarily reflect the party’s attitude towards the elaboration of labour migration and immigration policy;
- As regards the basic directions document of the activities of the faction Powerful Georgia, it is still in the process of elaboration; no single trace of this document can be seen on the faction’s web site either.
- Neither can a political platform be seen on the web site of the United National Movement faction; therefore, the major directions of its activities will be covered while analyzing the party program.

The basic function of political parties is to unite citizens around particular ideas, concepts and programmes, which shall be put into practice once the party gains power. Within the Analysis of Political Parties’ Socio-Economic Programmes Project, implemented by the Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia under the financial support of Friedrich Ebert Foundation, some conclusions have been made. According to them, none of the political parties operating in Georgia has elaborated any socio-economic programme. As the Center outlined, many parties have recorded similar programmes merely as their verbal intentions. Some of the parties have such programs only in their slogans; they do not tend to go beyond that. Only a small number of political parties have developed a programme with respect to the country’s political issues or foreign policy⁵.

The Labour Party assumed an obligation in the foreign policy section⁶ of its presidential program according to which after the Party comes to power, Georgia will proceed actively with its integration into NATO and the EU. At the same time, the Party plans the following: to improve relationships with Russia and restore economic, transport- and other communications with her; facilitate visa regime with

⁵ The Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia, The Analysis of Socio-Economic Programs of Political Parties. Tbilisi, 2010. http://www.csr.dg.ge/index.php?module=multi&page=detals&multi_id=1&id=275

⁶ <http://www.labour.ge/geo/party/programs.html> The Labour Party election program.

neighbor countries; eliminate illegal introduction of migrant labour force from foreign countries into Georgia. The Labour Party platform stresses that every Georgian, who will go abroad, as well as his/her family's property left in the country will be a major concern for the state.

As we can see, the Labour Party is one among the few exceptions underlining the need of elaboration and making stricter the immigration policy of Georgia. The Labourists were also against the Readmission Agreement; the Party called on the leaders of the member countries of the European Union not to spring into action the Agreement, which envisages the deportation of illegal migrants residing in the EU states⁷. At the same time, the Labour Party welcomes the introduction of facilitated visa regime with the EU.

The Way of Georgia Party's program puts priority on strengthening interactions with Georgian diasporas⁸.

For the 2008 parliamentary elections, the Republican Party presented the basic directions of its pre-election program in compliance with various spheres⁹. Having taken into account the problems and the poverty level the population of Georgia has been facing, the Party has elaborated 30 legislative initiatives dealing with fundamental changes within state organization, economy, education and culture, healthcare and social maintenance issues. Its legislative initiatives, inter alia, include the elaboration of a law on labour migration. The draft law considers the following issues: regulating the record of the citizens incoming from abroad and outgoing from Georgia; signing bilateral interstate agreements in employment sphere and issuing labour visas; bringing the employment issue of foreign labour migrants residing in Georgia under a legal framework and protecting the interests of labour migrants from Georgia residing abroad.

The programme directions of the National Council consider the definition of a new neighbourhood policy. Even though the Council confirms that current European Neighbourhood Policy¹⁰ fully conforms with Georgia's prospective intention for development and integration into the EU, however, it evaluates negatively the mechanism for its implementation. The accelerated accomplishment of the EU recommendations and the follow-up irreversible process of the EU integration are one of the cornerstones of the new neighbourhood policy¹¹ presented by the National Council.

The parties Free Democrats and New Rights set Georgia's worthy membership into the Euro-Atlantic organization and the strengthening of good relationships with its adjoining states as their foreign policy priority.

Along with other social measures to be taken, the Christian Democratic Party¹² emphasizes the need to support the development of agrarian sector and the employment of a large portion of population in agriculture. As the Party suggests, this will help encourage local inhabitants to stay in the regions, rural areas, and thus, facilitate the improvement of a demographic situation and the regulation of internal migration.

As concerns the programs of the ruling parties during the last two decades, unfortunately, we could not find such programs of the Round Table and the Citizens' Union of Georgia parties, even if they

⁷ <http://www.novisa.ge/novisa/?m=201103&lang=ka> The Labourists against the Readmission Agreement. 01.03.2011.

⁸ www.thewayofgeorgia.org The Way of Georgia Party's programme priorities.

⁹ http://republicans.ge/javascript/scrubite_editors/xinha/plugins/ExtendedFileManager/files/document/saarchevno_programa_2008_21maisi.pdf The Republican Party of Georgia "Pre-election Announcement and Basic Directions of the Programme".

¹⁰ The EU Neighborhood Policy is based upon the implementation of major activities, inter alia, including the creation of the opportunities for legal migration and a free movement of labour force.

¹¹ <http://erovnulisabcho.ge/?p=12878> The Conservative Party Program "New Neighborhood Policy".

¹² <http://cdm.ge/ge/mission.html> The main mission of the Christian Democratic movement.

had existed at all in the period of party dominance. At the same time, we can point out definitely that the management of migration processes had not been a priority in their activities.

The political platform of the ruling party the United National Movement¹³ is rather poor in terms of migration regulation, if taking into account the activities undertaken by central authorities in this respect from 2006, and the achievements gained today in terms of international relationships maintained with neighbour countries. The government's efforts put forth for regulating the movement of Georgian population over the country's borders have been backed by the action plan operating within the international cooperation with the European Union.

Georgia-EU European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan has defined a number of activities, including, inter alia, the following issues: continuation of the work on the elaboration of a draft state strategy for migration and asylum by taking into consideration the new challenges our country is facing nowadays; the development of electronic data base of the returnees under the readmission agreements and potential migrants, also the improvement of an information base on Georgian diaspora organizations operating in foreign countries and Georgian citizens residing abroad; border management and illegal migration control; improvement of coordination among respective national agencies dealing with migration issues; information exchange and planned collaboration on transit migration issues; support to holding trainings on migration and asylum issues and qualification upgrade of the personnel of respective agencies, etc.

A work on both the strategy document and respective action plan on migration will be finalized this year—in 2012.

An undeniable accomplishment achieved by the authorities of the country is the enactment of the agreements on readmission and the simplified visa regime between Georgia and the EU. Starting a dialogue on facilitating circular migration and liberalization of movement to the EU countries has been a major step taken forward in Georgia-EU relationships. In addition, Georgia has been actively involved in assisting the return and reintegration of migrant compatriots. The implementation of social-economic and cultural reintegration programs under donor organizations' financial support is underway. In order to provide economic stimuli to and attract foreign investments in the country, the authorities of Georgia are also taking efforts to establish closer links to Georgian diasporas by arranging business conferences and economic forums.

Georgian Government's Basic Data and Directions Document for 2010-2013 identifies several priorities. Major importance within these priorities has been attached to the activities for the development of an overall state policy and implementation on migration¹⁴. They are directed towards enhancing legal labour migration capacities and regulating migration process record.

As can be concluded from the above, the program directions and "slogans" of the political parties with respect to international relations are quite similar. In terms of migration regulation, the opposition political parties accuse the ruling party of institutional weaknesses and an inconsistency. Migration issues have not become yet a topic of debates in the parliament. A weekly TV talk-show "The European Choice" (which dedicated several programs to migration issues) and a radio program "The Routes of Migration"¹⁵ (aired twice in a week) are broadcasted on a regular base, in which politicians, experts, scientists and representatives of NGO sector discuss various aspects related to migration.

¹³ The political platform of the United National Movement faction contains the following paragraph: "Integration of Georgia into NATO and the European structures, the facilitation of the integration process and the development of respective legislative base for this purpose." Public Information Unit of the Organizational Department of the Parliament of Georgia.

¹⁴ Georgian Government's Basic Data and Directions Document for 2010-2013. 2010. <http://www.parliament.ge/files/budget-off/bdd-20010-2013.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.radio1.ge/Show.aspx?Show=36> Radio broadcast programme "The Routes of Migration".

We presume that the wider public in Georgia should take its keen interest in the programs and concepts of particular political parties functioning in Georgia. As a result, the constituency should vote for one or another party during the elections given the party program and experience.

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