

Editorial Team: Anton Saifullayev (Deputy Director of ICE),
Agnieszka Zajdel (Editorial Assistant), Spasimir Domaradzki,
Bartłomiej Krzyszczan, Damian Szacawa, Agata Tatarenko

No. 1581 (86/2026) | 07.04.2026

ISSN 2657-6996
© IEŚ

Nora Gigineishvili*

From EU Standard Institutional Reform to Party Control – The transformation of Georgia’s Public Service

Georgia’s foreign policy shift has resulted in multiple repressive and undemocratic measures aimed at suppressing the protests triggered by the decision to halt EU accession negotiations. The civil service became one of the targets of the coercive apparatus for systemic subordination, transforming it from an institution striving for alignment with European standards into an increasingly politicised administrative system. The measures taken by the Georgian Dream party are consistent with patterns of democratic backsliding and indicate a strengthening of political control over public administration.

The starting point of the constitutional crisis and its immediate aftermath. On 28 November 2024, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, whose legitimacy is not recognised by opposition parties, civil society actors, and protest movements, particularly in the aftermath of the 2024 parliamentary elections, announced the government’s decision to suspend EU accession negotiations and remove the process from the political agenda until 2028. This statement followed a European Parliament resolution that discounted the results of the parliamentary elections “due to significant irregularities”.

The announcement triggered mass protests that continue to this day; putting it into perspective, 80% of the population supported Georgia’s path toward EU accession at that point.¹ During previous constitutional amendments that took place while Georgian Dream was in power, a new Article 78 was enshrined, obligating constitutional bodies to take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the EU and NATO.

In a further response to this announcement, public servants began publishing and signing collective open letters, so-called petitions, within the framework of their constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of expression. Employees of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia were among the first to publish the petition, followed by civil servants from the Ministry of Justice, Tbilisi City Hall, the Ministry of Education, the Batumi City Municipality, and others. By the 2nd of December 2024 employees from 19 public institutions² reaffirmed their loyalty to Article 78 of the Constitution and called on the government to reverse its decision, as it did not align with the country’s strategic interests.

Georgian Dream’s PM, Kobakhidze, commented on the petitions, saying that “The self-cleansing process was very interesting” and that there would be a response. He also accused civil servants of having “serious difficulty with reading comprehension”. Shortly thereafter, Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Public Service through an expedited procedure.

Amendments to the Law on Public Service. Although the “Law on Public Service” was amended numerous times after the initial expedited adoption, key changes remained the same.

- Civil servants dismissed due to the reorganisation process will not be reinstated to their prior position and only reimbursed for three months of lost salary during the litigation, even after winning the lawsuit.
- The annual evaluation system was changed to biannual, which enables employees’ termination after two consecutive “unsatisfactory” evaluations in a year instead of two years. Unsatisfactory evaluations can

¹ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/25955/>

² <https://www.gyla.ge/post/saguaro-mokheleebze-zewola-siskhlis-samartlis-danashaulia>

also cause 20% salary retention until the next evaluation. Finally, the supervisor can change their decision within one month after the evaluation, without explanation.

- Department heads and their deputies' employment status was changed from permanent staff to fixed-term administrative contracts, which also enabled their appointment without open competition. Their contracts are regarded as automatically terminated in case of the resignation of the head of the institution.
- Administrative contracts will also be applied to officials holding diplomatic positions, which is in violation of the Law of Georgia on Diplomatic Service. The amendment was introduced by an order of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 27 January 2025.
- The date of employment for department heads and their deputies is determined by the minister or the head of the public organisation. In the event of the termination of a mid-level official, the minister is not obligated to justify the decision and can notify them three days prior to their dismissal.
- Public servants will no longer be able to engage in scientific and pedagogical activities without the consent of their superiors.
- Directors of the State Theatres will be appointed directly by the Minister of Culture, and in the municipalities, directly by the mayor.

These legislative changes indicate the strengthening of political control over state institutions and the erosion of legal protection for civil servants, thereby weakening the institutional mechanisms designed to ensure the political neutrality of the Civil Service. Mamuka Mdinaradze, then Executive Secretary of the Georgian Dream party, stated that simplifying the structural reorganisation process would reinvigorate the public service.³

According to Transparency International Georgia, the amendments significantly worsened the legal protection for public servants and effectively abolished the public service reform that had been implemented with the support of international organisations over the previous years, a prerequisite for the country's integration into European structures. The Law on Public Service, before these amendments, was refined and improved within the framework of the EU Association Agreement and in accordance with EU standards as part of the public administration reform.

The Beginning of Systemic Purges in the Civil Service. The initial wave of dismissals targeted employees with fixed-term contracts. According to the Georgian Labour Code, employees with fixed-term annual contracts exceeding 30 months of employment are considered to have indefinite contracts and can only be dismissed through a formal structural reorganisation process. However, Georgian Dream terminated these employees as well.

The second phase of terminations targeted permanent staff on indefinite contracts. By September 2025, more than 1,200 civil servants had been released, a number that has continued to increase⁴.

The Civil Service Bureau, responsible for the effective implementation of the reform, after their statement wherein they noted that the amendments to the law completely contradict the declared spirit of the reform as well as the Law on Public Service, worsen the legal status of civil servants, and threaten the existence of legal guarantees for the protection of their rights, was abolished.⁵

An analogous situation occurred after the employees of the Parliamentary Research Centre were interviewed by Radio Free Europe, during which they criticised the government's decision to halt EU accession negotiations. The day after the interview was aired, it was announced that the centre would be abolished.

³ <https://1tv.ge/news/mamuka-mdinaradze-sajaro-samsakhuris-shesakheb-kanonshi-sheva-cvlileba-romlitac-reorganizaciis-sakitkhebi-sajaro-seqtorshe-gamartivdeba-es-uzrunvelyofs-sajaro-seqtoris-gajansaghebas/>

⁴ <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/slideshow/587084/>

⁵ <https://bm.ge/news/sajaro-samsakhuris-shesakheb-kanonshi-shetanil-tsvlilebebze-sajaro-samsakhuris-biuros-tanamshromlebi-gantskhadebas-avrtseleben>

Conclusion. Legislative amendments simplifying structural reorganisation procedures and easing the termination of public servants' employment enabled the party to use administrative mechanisms to curtail dissent among civil servants. At the same time, these changes indicate increased political control over state institutions, which is inconsistent with Georgia's commitments made under the EU Association Agreement.

The Georgian civil service has, therefore, shifted from its ambition to develop a merit-based, professional, and politically neutral public administration, aligned with the commitments outlined in the EU Association Agreement, toward a more centralised governance model.

These developments suggest that Georgian Dream has consolidated its hold over state institutions through large-scale dismissals within the civil service. The dismissed employees carried years of institutional memory and represented a significant investment of resources from Georgia's international partners and democratic allies in the capacity-building initiatives. Therefore, the politicisation of the civil service indicates not only the weakening of administrative capacity but also the erosion of the institutional foundations of Georgia's democratic governance.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in the guest commentaries are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or official position of the Institute of Central Europe.

* **Nora Gigineishvili** – Lane Kirkland Programme scholarship holder in Lublin, and a former civil servant in Georgia.