



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **NDI POLL: GEORGIANS DISAPPOINTED WITH COUNTRY'S DIRECTION AND GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF ECONOMY; HIGH SUPPORT FOR NATO AND EU**

TBILISI – Poll results released today by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and CRRG Georgia reveal a growing dissatisfaction among Georgians about the direction of their country. In particular, they are concerned about the impact of a weakened economy on their lives. Georgians believe their households are worse off (42 percent) or the same (47 percent), and only 10 percent believe they are better off compared to 2012.

The majority of Georgians believes the country is going in the wrong direction (39 percent) or not changing at all (36 percent), and most (58 percent) think the government is not making decisions that matter to them. The economy remains Georgians' top concern, with only 2 percent assessing the economic situation as good. Jobs (57 percent), rising prices/inflation (35 percent), and poverty (30 percent) are ranked as the most important national issues. An overwhelming number blames the government (81 percent), the previous government (59 percent), and the global economy (53 percent), respectively, for economic problems in the country. Even the majority of Georgian Dream supporters believes mistakes made by the current government are one of the main causes of the current economic problems.

Georgians do identify areas of improvement in healthcare and freedom of speech. 51 percent of respondents assess healthcare as better since 2012, and 38 percent describe freedom of speech as improved.

“There is a high degree of concern and frustration among Georgians about the direction of their country and the economy, in particular,” said Laura Thornton, NDI's senior director. “They do not see adequate responsiveness from the government or political leaders, who they feel are neglecting their concerns and talking about issues that do not matter to their lives. Particularly in an election year, it is essential that officials and politicians from all sides improve their communication with citizens on the economy and present their plans for growth and employment.”

On foreign affairs, Georgians' support for the country's European Union (EU) and Euro-Atlantic aspirations is strong, with NATO support at 68 percent and EU support up to 77 percent from 61 percent in NDI's August 2015 poll. Most citizens (54 percent) believe the country will benefit from EU-Euro-Atlantic integration, as opposed to only 27 percent who favor abandoning this goal for closer ties with Russia, although the latter sentiment is higher in ethnic minority settlements. Georgians (86 percent) are well aware of the positive EU assessment report on visa liberalization issued in December and the vast majority approve (84 percent) and believe (72 percent) this will have a beneficial impact on the country and their lives. Although pro-Western, the majority of respondents has a nuanced foreign policy vision for Georgia, with 52 percent suggesting the country should be “pro-Western” but with good relations with Russia and only 14 percent suggesting simply a “pro-Western” policy.

“It is reasonable to assume that the positive reinforcement provided by the EU’s favorable assessment in December provided reassurance and boosted public support for the EU, indicating that signs of commitment from Europe toward Georgia contribute to building citizens’ pro-Western orientation,” said Thornton. “However, it is also interesting to note that the majority of Georgians still prefer to keep their options open, supporting ties and good relations with both Western countries and Russia.”

NDI surveys public opinion to help Georgian stakeholders diagnose and address issues of public concern by providing accurate, unbiased and statistically-sound data. The poll was developed in consultation with party, government and civil society leaders, and aims to capture the most relevant information to foster the development of responsive policies and governance. A wide range of leaders from across the political spectrum have reported that the polls are important to their work and encourage continued polling. The results reflect data collected from February 23 to March 14 through face-to-face interviews with a nationwide representative sample of citizens of Georgia that included 3,900 completed interviews. The average margin of error is +/- 1,6 percent.

NDI’s survey work is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

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*CRRC-Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization with a mission to promote evidence based debates on policy issues by providing reliable, up-to-date and accessible data and analysis. More information is available at <http://www.crrc.ge>*