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**IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE**

**Pundits in Krynica consider ways to overcome EU crisis** P.4

თბილისი **OUT**  
TBILISI CULTURE GUIDE

P.13

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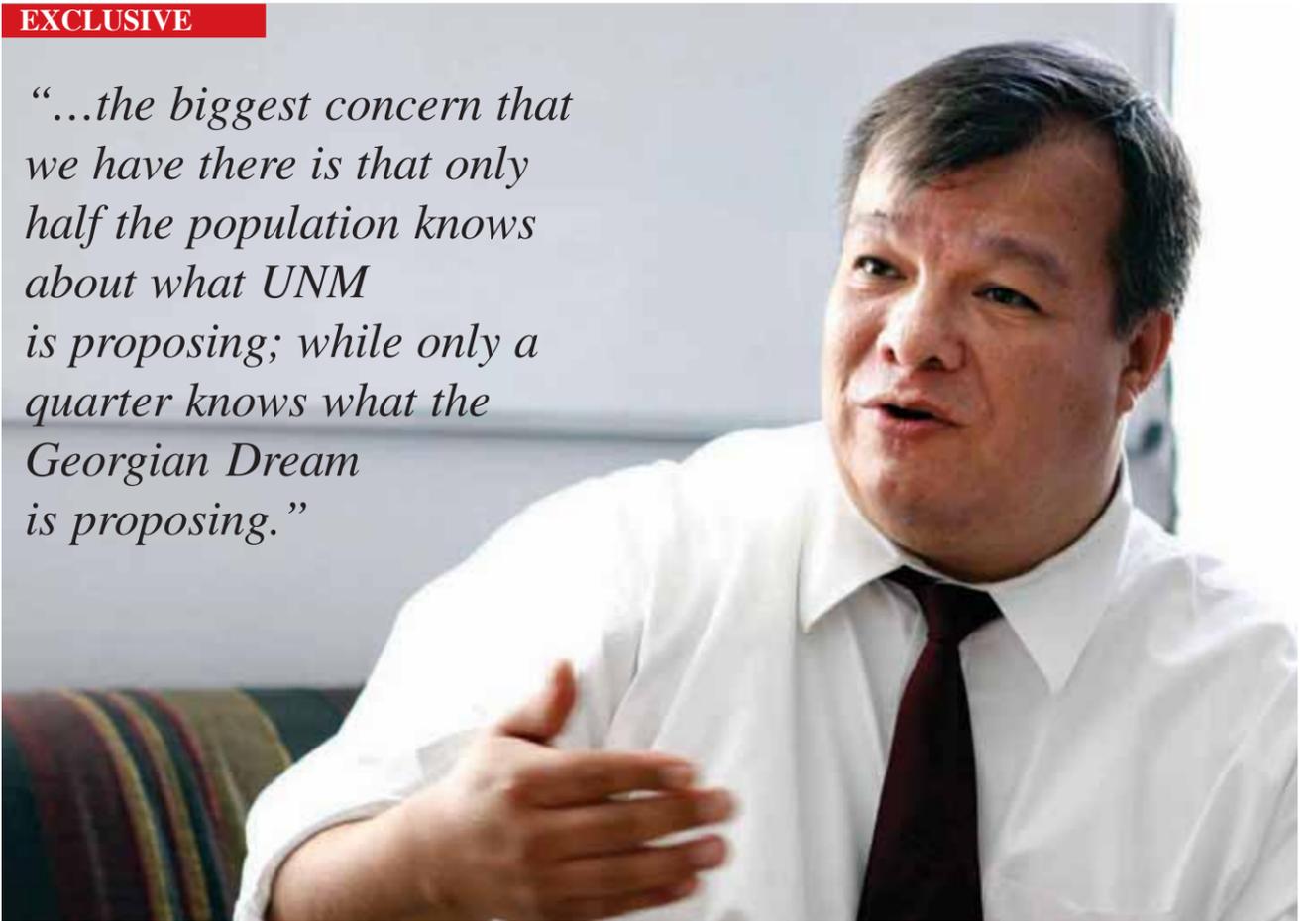
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## Luis Navarro of NDI explains the latest survey's results

**EXCLUSIVE**

*"...the biggest concern that we have there is that only half the population knows about what UNM is proposing; while only a quarter knows what the Georgian Dream is proposing."*



P.2

**BRITISH COUNCIL** LearnEnglish

**General English** P.15

SEPTEMBER 7 - 13

# Business

**NEW!**  
**Business inside** P. 9-12

## Georgian wines crack English "ethnic market"



**BUSINESS HEADLINES**

**Restaurant Fleur De Lys' Olivier Lemaire discloses the secrets of good cooking**

**Runway reconstruction project launched at Tbilisi airport**

**Anaklia hosts international business forum**

**New Hotel complex planned for Anaklia**

# Luis Navarro of NDI explains the latest survey's results

**"...the biggest concern that we have there is that only half the population knows about what UNM is proposing; while only a quarter knows what the Georgian Dream is proposing."**

By Archil Sikharulidze

According to the new survey commissioned by The National Democratic Institute (NDI), employment, healthcare and territorial integrity remain the most acute problems for Georgian society. At the same time, controversial issues related with Maestro TV, Global TV and the exorbitant fines imposed on the Georgian Dream coalition and— in particular, its billionaire leader Bidzina Ivanishvili concerns a major part of the respondents.

The survey, conducted through nationwide face-to-face interview with 2,038 respondents, has a margin of error of plus/ minus 3%. The survey was fielded by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) for NDI on July 31-August 12 and was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

Georgia Today interviewed NDI Director for Georgia, Luis Navarro, asking him to interpret the latest survey's findings.

**Q: Mr. Navarro, what are the main findings of NDI's latest survey in your view?**

**A:** The main findings were that jobs, healthcare and territorial integrity remain the top three concerns of Georgian citizens going into these elections. There is high interest in the elections; 77% of Georgians have indicated that they intend to vote in the elections. In addition, now, by a 42% to 40% margin, Georgians have a more positive assessment of democracy. However, by a nearly 2:1 margin those who are aware of the Global TV and Maestro controversies, disapprove of the actions taken by State Audit Agency and the Prosecutor's Office.

**Q: The previous survey was conducted in June. What makes this latest survey different from the June survey and the other surveys published previously this year?**

**A:** Well obviously people were more positive about assessing democracy in this poll than may have been in the June poll. The number of respondents who say that Georgia is a democracy increased in the August poll slightly beyond the margin of error to 42% from 38% in June. Also, there was a slight decline outside of the margin of error among people who saw themselves as worse off economically.

Another thing that was different obviously is that this time we spent some time trying to assess the new governmental structure with (PM) Vano



Merabishvili's appointment and looked at how the ruling party's plan compares to the plan of the Georgian Dream— not in terms of substance, but in terms of how the people perceive it. The biggest concern that we have is that only half of the population know about what the UNM is proposing; while only a quarter know what the Georgian Dream is proposing. So we are hoping that both parties will do a better job of communicating with the public on these issues.

**Q: Which developments affected the results in your opinion?**

**A:** That is hard to say. Clearly, the fact that people continue to see the government as making changes that matter to them has to have some bearing on the fact that people say that the country is going in the right direction. They are different in terms of intensity on that issue, but in general, they say that they support the direction the country is going in. I assume also that because you saw a decline among people who describe themselves as economically

worse off, also contributes to that.

Questions around democracy are always a little bit less clear, because obviously Georgians place a greater emphasis on freedom of speech, the media and hearing different views as the primary determinant. What has been changed in terms of democracy? We asked this question in two ways: The first was a yes or no question. The other was whether or not people agree with certain statements. Clearly, what happened here is that people not only had a more positive assessment on yes or no questions, but they also had a more positive assessment based on different statements: Either Georgia is a democracy already, but needs improvement or Georgia is not yet a democracy, but is heading in the right direction.

**Q: Employment is an issue that concerns the majority of your respondents. According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, only 15% of Georgian citizens are unemployed. How would you describe such a dif-**

**ference between your survey and the official statistics?**

**A:** We ask the people how people perceive themselves. So, it is outside the context of what the state defines as unemployed. Secondly, what we find in our focus groups is the people who do not have a dress code, who do not get paid through a pay-check, or are not working in a job where they are trained or educated, these people have a tendency to see themselves as unemployed even if they are making income as a taxi driver, a farmer or as an owner of a store at a bazroba. If you are selling your product by the roadside instead of selling to the distributor, you tend not to see yourself as being employed. We qualify that by saying that there is a difference between people who say that they are employed and people who are actually looking for work; that's why the number is only 33%. This is because people who are part of the non-active labor force like homemakers, students and pensioners – they are obviously not people who are looking for a job. So, when added all up in the end, the difference between our numbers and the state's numbers are 2:1. But again, these are self-descriptions and we know that there are differences in the way people perceive themselves and their economic environment.

**Q: According to the majority of respondents, Georgia is already a democratic state, but there is room for improvement. At the same time, democracy is perceived by the interviewers as freedom of speech, media and free and fair elections. Despite this, only a minority of the respondents are concerned with the lack of democratic freedoms. What is your explanation?**

**A:** This is a question of how they define democracy. The way we ask them to qualify that is by asking: what does democracy mean to you? One thing that many Georgians can agree on (almost 60%), is that democracy for them means the ability to hear different views, freedom of speech/media. The next two values that are consistently in close proximity are equality before the law and protection of human rights. But clearly, people make a distinction between how they value those qualities versus the first issue. So, all we can say for certain is that the vast majority of Georgians agree on what the primary value is.

**Q: The majority of the interviewed disapprove of government's measures against Maestro TV, Ivanishvili and Global TV. Still, approximately 47% of them think that the country is go-**

**ing in the right direction and support the government. Doesn't it seem illogical?**

**A:** They think that the country is going in the right direction and they think that the government makes changes that matter to them... this is not necessarily support for the government; these are different identifications. So, in terms of Maestro and Global TV, what Maestro and Global TV says is that first we ask the question whether or not people are aware of these issues; then we ask the question whether they approve or disapprove. What is interesting to us is that by a 2:1 margin, the people who are aware of this issue, a large proportion disapprove of these actions.

But you see the large number of people in both of these issues say they don't know; and I will argue that is a functional effect that being able to follow all of the details of these two issues requires some attention. So unless you are someone who is really following that issue closely, you may be aware that there is a problem or that there is a controversy, but you may not feel as if you have enough information in order to pass judgment. What we can say is that among those people who say that they are aware, they are decisively disapproving of this action, but it is also noteworthy that a large percentage of people say that they don't know.

**Q: The main Georgian oppositional force Georgian Dream Coalition has cast doubts on the objectivity of the surveys conducted by NDI by questioning the methodology. Your comment?**

**A:** The difficulty we have is that we are the most transparent in terms of methodology of any of the publicly released polls. For example, we say who is funding our polls; it is the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); we talk about the time period in which the polls took place; and we talk about what the margin of error is. We also mention how we go about conducting the poll in a much more comprehensive way that I believe any other entity does.

So, as a democracy promoting institute, we certainly feel obliged to transparency in that regard; but we would expect that anyone else who says they have a poll should face similar scrutiny, because too many times we find that whether or not someone likes a poll or whether or not they agree with its findings has no bearing on whether or not it has been methodologically conducted in an appropriate fashion.

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