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# The rose that lost its blush

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## How justified is disillusionment with Georgia?

Six years ago on 2 November, Georgians went to the polls in what would prove to be a vote profoundly marred by fraud. Twenty days later, on 22 November, a dam of public protest broke and supporters of the opposition entered parliament, carrying roses, to prevent a compromised legislature taking office. Since then, the hopes and expectations of the Rose Revolution have blossomed and faded. Six years after the revolution, how justified is the disillusionment?

Undoubtedly, there have been both achievements and failures, but it will be some time before they can be judged objectively on the scales of historical analysis. But, first, about the achievements:

The new generation of politicians came to the fore, bringing with them core Western values, skills and education received in Western universities, the decisiveness of youth and greater international support. They could tap into a huge reserve of trust, both on the part of Georgia's population and from democratic states around the world. The Georgian economy, after years of stagnation started to grow rapidly, foreign direct investment and budget revenues rocketed, and low-level corruption was dramatically reduced.



### The real disaster was brought about by the war of August 2008



The Georgian state, previously considered close to failure, became much stronger. The government initiated reforms in almost all areas of life,

replacing corrupt police with much more efficient patrol units, liberalising the economy and strengthening the country's military capacity. The supply of electricity, once intermittent, became constant, and the country's once neglected economic infrastructure began to be modernised. Tbilisi re-established control over the region of Ajaria, after years of autocratic rule by Aslan Abashidze.

However, some deficiencies of the political and economic process in Georgia became visible early on, although Western governments preferred to ignore these early harbingers of future problems. In 2005, US President George W. Bush called Georgia a "beacon of democracy", but in 2004 dubious changes had already been introduced into the Georgian constitution that strengthened the president's powers at the expense of those of other branches of power. Parliamentary elections conducted in the spring of 2004 produced a parliament dominated by a single political force, and through it, by the incumbent president.

A weakness in strategic thinking was revealed when limited military action to bring secessionist South Ossetia back under Tbilisi's control failed dramatically. Numerous violations of human rights put in doubt the moral basis of governance. The government prioritised modernisation and state building at the expense of the democratisation process and development of democratic institutions.

The situation deteriorated further, as – in parallel to

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