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European Integration Means Women's Rights

By Paul Rimple

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A friend recently confided that she was pregnant and her partner did not want the child. She faced a choice between abortion and the severe wrath of her family, who she was convinced would disown her after a fierce beating. Single motherhood was not an option.

People in Tbilisi are often in denial that such "backward" attitudes are prevalent in Georgia. "Maybe in the villages," they say, but women in the capital still find themselves dominated by traditional gender roles in which they are expected to be virgins when they marry and complacent homemakers thereafter. Hymenoplasty is a solution, but it does little to address the problem.

In Pankisi, honor killings, although rare, still occur, and in the Marneuli district, which is mostly populated by Azeris, child brides are either given away by their parents or kidnapped by their "fiances." While bride-napping is in many cases a method of consensual elopement, hundreds of women are taken against their will each year across the country — and not just in

the regions. In 2007, 304 cases of "illegal deprivation of liberty, with the aim of marriage" were reported to the police in Georgia. More than half were from Tbilisi and in most cases, the perpetrators received a fine or suspended sentence.

The Anti-Violence Network of Georgia claims that "every third woman is the victim of violence in Georgia." In a Caucasus Women's Research and Consulting Network study, 90 percent of women stated that "women should be more modest and try not to provoke violence," while 60 percent of women stated that whatever happens should stay within the family, regardless of the situation.

Clearly, the country needs to pursue an aggressive education campaign so that society realizes that it's not acceptable to allow women to be married against their will or beaten. Georgia has signed a number of international human rights treaties that require the state to prevent and investigate violence against women, and it has established laws on domestic violence. Yet the government still lacks a comprehensive approach to policies and programs aimed at achieving women's equality with men, particularly those that address both direct and indirect discrimination against women.

Being committed to European integration means being committed to meeting the obligations of the treaties it signs and, at the very least, creating conditions where women no longer believe it's their fault they are abused and the men who abuse them are punished to the full extent of the law.

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