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## Georgian leader weighs launching a political party

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Nino Burjanadze, the former speaker of Georgia's parliament who served as acting president of the country during two interim periods, said she couldn't rule out the possibility of creating a new political party in Georgia but stopped short of openly breaking with President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Some analysts believe Ms. Burjanadze could emerge as a key opposition figure to Mr. Saakashvili, who has drawn criticism outside the country for his handling of hostilities with neighboring Russia. Russian troops invaded Georgian territory last month amid escalating tensions over two breakaway Georgian regions. Mr. Saakashvili still enjoys substantial domestic support.

"If it will be helpful, I will do it," Ms. Burjanadze said while speaking at Columbia University in New York on Friday, referring to the possibility of forming a new political party.

**Lincoln Mitchell, a professor at Columbia** who specializes in Georgian politics, said the establishment of a new party in the country would be a positive step toward furthering democracy there.

"Georgia is effectively a one-and-a-half party system," he said, noting the government is dominated by the United National Movement. Opposition political parties are legal and compete, but the "line between party and government or party and state is very gray."