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Democratization and Europeanization in Georgia (1991-2022)

Thematic Analysis of the Political Discourse

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AA - Association Agreement

EU - European Union

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PACE - Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

I. Introduction

Georgia, the country that has always lived on the border of different empires, and its success as a state has always depended on various internal or external political factors, was the first state that split from the Soviet Block in the Caucasus region. Supreme Council and members of the Government of the Republic of Georgia signed the Act of Restoration of State Independence of Georgia on April 9, 1991 (Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia, 1991), and Georgia received another chance to build a free country. Yet, being a part of the Soviet Union for decades did not make it easy to build a prosperous, democratic state.

The US and the European Union have been steadily contributing immense political and financial resources to strengthen democracy in Georgia (Falkowski, 2016). However, the country obtained 5.20 points out of 10 in Democracy Index Report 2022 (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limit, 2023). The report identified poor quality of institutions and ill-functioning governments as a major challenge for Eastern Europe. Whereas, Georgia holding the 90th position among other countries has the lowest scores in Political Culture (3.75) and Functioning of Government (3.57). The report identifies the country as a Hybrid Regime of government as it demonstrated both democratic and autocratic traits. However, it is important to note that some characteristics of democracy, such as the tradition of elections, can be identified even within the most autocratic systems. Therefore, hybrid regimes can be defined as more "gray zones" rather than a link between autocracy and democracy and are not a result of significant political transformation (Carothers, 2002, as cited in Lebanidze, 2020).

Because Georgia's highest score for the last decade, on the global ranking, was 5.95 in 2013 (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limit, 2013), it is evident that the complexity of the above-mentioned challenges significantly impedes democratic advancement. While the lack of strong institutions and political culture plays a significant role in the democratic processes (Inglehart and Welzel, 2003), the research claims that personal leadership and personalities also play a substantial part in shaping the outcome in Georgia.

As, patently, some of the most important structural and procedural changes in politics can happen as a result of leaders' interventions (Cerny, 1988). Philip G. Cerny posits that the structures of society, specific political and historical circumstances, and the way leaders think and behave in a culture all interact in various and unexpected ways.

Consequently, firstly, the research aims to distinguish how the political discourse has changed throughout the three decades since obtaining state independence and how the choices Georgia's political leaders have made to achieve national peace and prosperity impacted Georgia's constitutional course of action towards Europeanisation and Democratization. Second, by applying Cerny's personal leadership framework, the research attempts to examine the dimensions of Georgia's leadership styles in the political processes.

Although the latest Georgian history underwent many pivotal events, it can still be diverged into several, most fundamental periods. The research is divided into three main parts. Each of them reflects Georgia's journey from a post-Soviet country to an independent, young democratic nation. The first part refers to the period from 1991 to

2003, when the country seceded from the Soviet Union and gained independence but suffered from corruption, civil war, and other burdensome disputes. This cycle culminated with the Rose Revolution. The historical moment when Georgia's corrupted government was replaced with young, Western-educated young politicians. The second part of the research covers Saakashvili's period – from the Rose Revolution and his first presidential term (2004) to 2013. Saakashvili is considered the major figure for the early 2000s in Georgia. Under him, rapid improvement took place in the country on the path to democracy. However, his second term marks the chapter when authoritarian tendencies appeared on the horizon. The third and latest section covers the Georgian Dream party period from 2013 to 2022. The party came onto the political scene intending to recourse Saakashvili's authoritarian regime but has been scrutinized for the same mistakes for the last few years. These timelines are selected as each of them marks drastically different periods of Georgian history, from the first steps as an independent state

to revolutionary governance and democratic change of the government:

1. 1991-2003 Restoration of State Independence, first steps towards democratization
2. 2003-2012 Rose Revolution, Fighting Soviet-style corruption and engaging with the West
3. 2012-2022 Dreaming the Georgian Dream

1.1. Research problem

The project is centered on the idea that post-Soviet Georgia has been developing its own political and policy trajectory in the context of nation-building. But the path has been adjusted in different ways at different times, officially claiming to remain deliberatively democratic. Therefore, the research aims to examine how the dominating political themes in Georgia have been constructed to fit the Europeanization and democratization and what leadership styles have been employed in the process.

1.2. Research methodology and design

The research uses qualitative data analysis to scrutinize how the political narratives have changed throughout three decades in Georgia. Specifically, the comparative thematic analysis is conducted by the following theoretical framework -- the study applies five characteristics of democratic political systems as a guideline along with the five features of the states that have achieved Europeanization. Explicitly, the research observes and looks into influential political figures and their public speeches, interviews, and other official statements while also inspecting the leadership styles that have been employed throughout these three decades.

To understand the nature and dynamics of change, the study draws upon Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach in qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006.) Braun and Clarke have been developing the approach since 2006 and indicated it is theoretically flexible, meaning that the method can address quite diverse types of research questions, including the ones related to people's experiences and perceptions, representation of different issues, understanding social processes and the factors that influence them, rules and norms, different practices and behaviors and the way the meaning of various phenomenon is constructed in society.

Braun and Clarke identified six different ways to approach data and analyze the content. In this study, a more constructionist perspective is employed. The approach suggests observing and examining the representations of realities constructed in the data. The approach of the thematic analysis consists of six phases and includes the following steps: initial analytic observations of the data, coding, identifying themes, reviewing and developing themes, naming them, and writing up the analytic narrative.

As effective leadership is recognized as one of the main determinants of success, to understand leadership styles in Georgia and their influence on the democratization and Euroropeanization processes, the research draws upon leadership theories. However, as leadership is a multidimensional issue, many definitions exist to offer a better understanding of the phenomenon. R.M. Stogdill (Stogdill, 1950) describes it as a process of influencing people to achieve some goal. Similarly, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (Kouzes and Posner, 1995) believe that leadership serves to mobilize people for a common goal, and anyone can become a leader if they practice some key behaviors, such as aligning their values with actions, sharing a vision or fostering collaboration.

On the other hand, Philip G. Cerny suggested a typology of leadership styles where he introduced the leader/political actor as a third crucial factor (other than the body politic and the state) in the process of generating political outcomes (Cerny, 1988) and identified three factors affecting the leadership process: the *personal equation*, the individual and the "body" politic, and the individual leader and the state. The *personal equation* concept claims that the effectiveness of leadership depends on a leader's strategic thinking capabilities and the specific circumstances in the country. The individual and the "body" politic, meanwhile, focuses on the relationship between leaders and broader socio-economic groups. However, unlike the common assumption

based on the elite theory that political actors reflect the interests of society, this dimension considers that individual leaders can act against the interests of the socio-economic groups. In the *individual and the state* approach, the author discusses several factors, such as the formal position of the leader within the state hierarchy and the limitations of the position, the individual's social standing internationally, and the leader's ability to mobilize resources for the state in the global arena. While leaders themselves are categorized into four distinct styles: *routine leadership* - not the most effective, passive leadership, *integrative leadership* - when a leader harmonizes with society's interests and concerns, *catalytic leadership* - autonomy characteristic of the leader who allows themselves to make bold decisions and *transformative* leadership - a leader who is most effective in crises and possesses the power to transform the norms and structures.

To apply these methods, two prominent political figures were selected for each distinct period of Georgia's history. Accompanied by the selection of the five most significant public speeches they delivered. To ensure balance, both position and opposition leaders are represented. Consequently, one individual from each period represents the governing body, while the other individual constitutes the opposition.

Additionally, the selected speeches are not arbitrary – the ones that have been chosen were addressed when some significant, transformative event took place in Georgian history. However, all the speeches, one way or another, are connected to Georgia's foreign policy choice, democratization, or Europeanization. Because, for the population, Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration has had a direct correlation with the country's security and welfare. 82% of Georgian citizens support the country's EU aspirations and expect the government to take consistent steps towards the goal. As some scholars state, there is no neutrality for Georgia, the only alternative

can be full-scale Russian domination that comes with corruption, crime, and a harsh socio-economic situation (Tsereteli, 2016). In light of Russia's abiding status as the major danger to Georgia's security and considering the country's finite capacity to address this threat independently, the population anticipates that the government will adopt measures eventually aligning Georgia to the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Furthermore, as some of the selected political figures held the position of presidency, the archive provided diverse data on their tenure, while for other individuals, the selection proved to be sparse. Especially when considering that Georgia is a transitional state that has been through various forms of governance, including oligarchy. Consequently, throughout these years, the country has witnessed a large turnover of prime ministers. In many cases, they acted as spokespersons for one dominant figure behind the system. The same applies to the country's third President, Mikheil Saakashvili. Although he left Georgia shortly after he had stepped down from the presidency, his political party, "the National Movement," remained one of the most popular opposition forces for a long time. Later, upon Saakashvili's return to Georgia, he was immediately arrested for the deeds he had done during his tenure. Currently, Saakashvili remains imprisoned, and his messages are conveyed by different political figures among his allies.

Consequently, the study will examine the speeches of the following political figures in Georgia: for the years 1991-2003, the statements of Georgia's first and second presidents (respectively) Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Eduard Shevardnadze; for the years 2003-2012, third president Mikheil Saakashvili representing the narratives from the governmental perspective and five other politicians from different opposition political parties; for the third section, covering 2012-2022 period, the research will analyze the political narrative of the founder of Georgian

Dream Party and Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili. This time, Mikheil Saakashvili's speeches will be inspected as one of the four other opposition forces.

II. Literature review

Scholars have examined what determines successful transitions to democracy and what factors hinder young democratic nations from establishing older, well-performing democracies. In academic studies, post-Soviet countries often are studied to comprehend democratic failure or setbacks in newly democratic nations (Lebanidze, 2020). Extensive academic work has been conducted on political culture, economic situation, educational level (Keefer, 2007), and other structural elements of these states and assessed what influences the quality and speed of democratization and Europeanization in the region. While most of the member countries of the Soviet Union aspired to build democratic states, only a few of them succeed steadily. For example, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are considered such, while the quality of democracy has been recessing or has not consistently improved in Armenia, Azerbaijan, or Belarus (Votey, 2012).

Approximately thirty years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and from that point on, Western governments have been investing a substantial amount of financial assistance to support these states to bolster the quality of democracy. Georgia represents one of the states receiving such assistance regularly. Yet, the results fail to demonstrate substantial advancement or illustrate a fluctuating nature. While there are many contributing reasons, some of the most frequently cited determinants are political elites, foreign actors, and community identity issues.

Internal politics is considered to play one of the most crucial roles in declining the quality of democracy. Ayşe Mine Kuzu reviewed specifically the role of leadership in the process of democratization (Kuzu, 2007), taking Georgia as a case study. Kuzu claims that the elite has a main role in the transitional countries, deriving from the "color revolutions" where the unification of opposition forces made a pivotal change. Kuzu divides Georgia's recent history into two separate periods for the country – transition, and consolidation (from obtaining state independence in 1991 to 2020) and concludes that even though leaders promised democracy to the public, they did not put the substantial effort to achieve the goal. Consequently, free elections did not guarantee democratic development as long as the elite did not remain loyal to the other democratic values (Kuzu, 2008). He bases the argument on Christian Welzel (Welzel, 2002),

who indicates that elite behaviors are the most important elements in the democratization process, and their (elites) settlements drive the major processes in a state. In support of this argument, elites frequently do have significant political, social, or economic power along with the decision-making authority and other resources; consequently, this allows them to influence democratization processes. Not to mention the fact that they play a major role in achieving political consensus during transitional periods and participate in power-sharing arrangements.

However, it is important to acknowledge that within authoritarian-leaning governments, political elites often experience external influences. Either because of their interests or from governmental forces. This is frequently manifested through different means, including the limitation of financial resources for them, governmental influence on mainstream media, and the existence of political prisoners. Such factors prevent the political elites from mobilizing the populace and bringing about change not in a revolutionary way, but in a democratic manner, through informed voter engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that the deterioration

of the quality of democracy cannot be solely attributed to the decisions and actions of the elite and opposition groups. First of all, the readiness of society to actively participate in political processes and social movements plays an integral role. But active participation depends on several factors such as a heightened political culture, advanced educational level, and other diverse cultural and social aspects, including community identity issues.

In connection with this matter, Kornely Kakachia and Salome Minesashvili (Kakachia and Minesashvili, 2015) examining different aspects of liberal theory and constructivism, discuss Georgia's foreign policy orientation and democratization through the nature of its social structures, identity, and ideas. They explore how identity influences foreign policy-related decisions and constructs social order within a country. Specifically, Kakachia and Minesashvili, referring to the constructivist concept of identity and the liberal perspective of "social order",

claim that states make decisions on their foreign policy orientation based on the society's compatibility and incompatibility with the potential partners/enemies. Moreover, according to the authors, these factors define state interests and are the guideline upon which the political figures act. The study concludes that Georgia got its "European identity" only after the Rose Revolution and it is partially derived from the country's values, history, and future aspirations that the country's elite has created. But the reasoning comes down as contradictory.

While authors do acknowledge Georgia's historical similarity with the European culture and values, they also claim that the *European identity* only emerged after 2003. This argument cannot be considered accurate as, first of all, European identity does not exclusively mean becoming an EU member state but also sharing European political values and identity traits. Consequently, this gives rise to some questions – namely, if society had historically possessed European-like values and aspirations, and if the governments decide on their foreign policy choices based on society's philosophical viewpoints, then why was the pro-Western course only chosen after 2003? Or, considering the latest developments in Georgia, where most of the polls demonstrate that the Georgian population remains strongly pro-European Union and NATO (National Democratic Institute, 2023),

how is it possible that at the same time, society has to constantly fight for pro-Russian narratives against the current ruling party, or even against smaller opposition parties?

Additionally, some academics have found the examination of the regional actors' influence to be one of the most intriguing approaches for measuring the quality of democracy. Bidzina Lebanidze (Lebanidze, 2020) questioned the role the EU and Russian Federation have played in the post-Soviet space in terms of democracy building. Lebanidze claims that the democracy level fluctuates according to the EU and Russia's political behavior: Without Russia's continuous destabilizing measures, it would have been much harder for the Georgian government to justify its security-first discourse and a reform agenda driven by security-related needs.

When the EU is consistent with its democratic conditionality and Russian influence is not strong in a country, democracy quality gets better. But when either of these two breaks, democracy starts to decline. Lebanidze affirms that democratic conditionality is violated when the EU continues collaboration with governments that demonstrate authoritative tendencies. Nevertheless, the author overlooked a crucial point – the EU encounters an important obstacle and a powerful rival in the region. Putin's regime lacks accessibility and diplomatic openness. Therefore, if the Union stops cooperation with the local government, especially when the government starts to demonstrate authoritarian tendencies, there is a risk of Russian influences easily assuming control. Consequently, the EU has a limited number of alternatives and has to continue cooperation by applying different soft power instruments. By doing so, the union can still foster positive transformation and ameliorate the situation.

2.1. Europeanization

A comprehensive academic discussion exists about the extension of the EU influence and in general, about Europeanization in Georgia (Tsuladze, 2017). Some of them (Sikharulidze, 2021) perceive the possibility that Georgia presents one of the oldest nations carrying European culture and values, while others have an opposing opinion. Therefore, it is important to observe the various interpretations of Europeanization defined by different authors and identify which framework the concept will apply to the study. Especially that Europeanization is seen through many dimensions, including in the context of the European Union, EU integration, and EU enlargement, as well as national policy adaptation, modernization, and transnational and cultural integration process (Buller and Gamble, 2002).

The term *Europeanization* is often used to refer to the European Union, its policies, policy institutions, or the EU member states' political influences spread across the continent. However, initially, the term was created to better understand the impact of European integration because often it was used and applied in disorderly and conflicting contexts. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003) consider *Europeanization* as a stable, middle-ranged theory that is frequently used for two purposes: first, to study EU membership and national policy changes, and second, creation and implementation of a common foreign policy of the European Union. Yet, these are just a fraction of the multifaceted application of the term "Europeanization" within academia.

First, Europeanization is a national adaptation. The term was first defined in 1994 by Robert Ladrech (Ladrech, 1994) who believes that achieving European integration requires policy-making and institutional structures to be European-like adapted. While Thomas C. Lawton (Lawton, 1999) discusses the appearance of new forms of European governance but stresses that it should not be seen as equal to European integration. Instead, the concept suggests that European integration gave birth to new definitions of power relations, structures, and formations not only at national but also supranational levels. The term indicates that actors' active participation in permanent institutional arrangements changes their perceptions and interests. For instance, recurrent participation in European Institutions' meetings can make national officials more "Europeanized". At the European level, specific governance structures

have already been established and advanced, and political, legal, and social institutions have formalized interactions with different actors.

Other authors, such as Drake and Milner (Drake and Milner, 1999) see *Europeanization* as a challenge and an opportunity for local political management. They state that governments must find ways to reconcile potentially conflicting European and domestic pressures, both regarding the major policy choices and broader discourses of legitimacy. Because, although the EU's decision-making system aims to protect national interests, in specific circumstances, individual member states have to pursue policy choices that have little local support. Therefore, in some cases, *Europeanization* appears simply as an external constraint. However, the European policy-making forces can also structure the opportunities in a way that will assist national governments. According to the analysis, local governments need to find a policy position that will be acceptable for both parties – domestic and international players. However, this dual constraint is also a strategic advantage. Governments can use European restraint to shift the parameters of domestic political debates toward their agenda. Meanwhile, domestic opposition can become a useful tool to bargain in European negotiations.

Another concept is suggested by O'Leary (O'Leary, 1987), who discussed *Europeanization* in terms of modernization. In this case, *Europeanization* refers to the countries that are geographically close to the EU but economically lag behind. The concept of *Europeanization* aims to put these countries into the European norms and bring them closer to the more influential and wealthy EU countries, especially in the areas of economy and politics.

Sometimes *Europeanization* is used as a synonym for EU enlargement and frequently relates to the Central and Eastern European countries. Meaning, that these countries should firmly entrench democratic institutions and a market economy. In addition to developing administrative institutions that can participate in Europe's intricate and onerous policy-making environment. In this context, Lipset (Lipset proposes a slightly different definition. He introduces the Europeanization process, when the countries become fully integrated into the different structures of West Europe and Trans-Atlantic cooperation, such as politics, economics, and security. Nonetheless, Europeanization, as conceptualized in this understanding, emerges as an arduous process, unfolding in a top-down manner, whereby the norms and policies are imposed by the Western EU and its more influential member states.

Occasionally *Europeanization* is seen as a process of identity reconstruction (Borneman and Fowler, 1997). In this sense, *Europeanization* transforms contemporary Europe identities in a way that relates different national identities with each other (but not completely). Borneman and Fowler (Borneman and Fowler, 1997) claim that "Europeanization fundamentally reorganizes territoriality and peoplehood, two principles of group identification that have shaped the modern European order". The scholars believe that first of all, due to the organizational and administrative power of the EU, Europeanization is still different from the EU. And neither of them will replace the nation-state, which, so far, remains the highest form of participatory democracy and territorial organization. Nevertheless, they are likely to force states to cede some parts of sovereignty to the EU or other transnational bodies – primarily in military, political, and economic areas. On the other hand, the Europeanization process is a dynamic interplay between the EU and individual countries; although the EU promotes a common EU identity and encourages its member states to make their identities compatible with the EU one, individual states enjoy the right to negotiate their national choices and decisions with the EU.

Borneman and Fowler (Borneman and Fowler, 1997) also associate Europeanization with transnationalism and cultural integration. They found a link between *Europeanization* and daily interactions among people and claimed that it emanated from increased transnational and intercultural relations. As a result, Globalization and EU integration narratives have escalated, and intercultural encounters have attested to a corresponding increase.

The research mainly examines a central premise: *Europeanization* in Georgia entails building a state and society that meets European standards, and the achievements are evaluated based on society's performance on how European they are or have the potential to become. Consequently, as the study has a specific emphasis on the leadership of Georgia, the analysis delves into the prism of Europeanization by examining how Europe is performed and enacted by important political figures within the nation.

2.2. Democratization

As *Europeanization* and *Democratization* have been almost synonymous with each other in Georgian Politics, *Democratization* is another concept that the research uses to delve into Georgia's political discourse over the last three decades. This is especially noteworthy due to the recurrent narrative among political leaders within the country, wherein they claim that the democratization process is inseparable from the country's alignment with European political and identity values. The connection between those two concepts is not arbitrary and draws upon the fact that the EU puts democratic values and principles as preconditions for partnership and membership. Therefore, Georgia's political goal to become a member of the European family fully depends on building a strong democratic state. This, whereby, can be seen as a positive mechanism to support domestic reforms, improve the human rights situation, build stronger institutions, and better governance.

Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press, n.d.) defines the term *democracy* as "the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves". Consisting of two Greek words *Demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule), the translation of the word is simply "rule by the people". However, as every hypothesis in a sociological analysis needs to be provable with demonstrable statements, democracy has also been through many examinations, and until today it still raises many questions.

As the research observes how the processes of democratization and Europeanization have changed in Georgia during the last three decades, it is interesting to consider what kind of social, political, or political environment supports or hinders processes. While key democratic concepts include political equality, the rule of law, protection of human rights, and popular sovereignty, according to Joseph Schumpeter and Max Weber (Schumpeter, 1942, Weber, 1981, as cited in Shaw, 2008), this could only work if the following three criteria are in place: first, the democratic system should be legitimized, meaning media freedom, parties, and other institutions are generally accepted; second, one political group is already leading the government office, and third, there should be a group of politicians who can act as opposition for the government and be willing to take their place. If those three conditions are not met, having stable democracy is

impossible. Especially when the opposition is not strong or does not exist, it's easier for the governments to lean towards dictatorship rule.

Additionally, maintaining stable democracy requires two other compound social systems: legitimacy and economic development. In economic development, generally, scholars connote urbanization, wealth, education, and industrialization. While legitimacy is more abstract and relates to the degree people value and respect institutions in the country. Furthermore, there is no sharp line between more democratic and less democratic societies – democracy is not a single quality but more a set of characteristics that can be measured in many ways.

However, Shaw contends that according to Weber's theory (Weber, 1981, as cited in Shaw, 2008), those characteristics can be strongly influenced by some historical events or national patterns and should not be generalized to every country. For instance, in Germany, in terms of economic development, all the above-mentioned elements championed building democracy. But due to unfavorable historical events, some parts of society struggled to believe in its legitimacy. Yet, some of the features tend to be a strong indicator for democracy-prone societies.

One of those is education as it is considered to be the foundation for democracy. The interconnection of education and democratization is even more explicit with individual behaviors. Studies show that no matter where an individual lives (whether it's a "more democratic" or "less democratic" country,) the more educated they are, the more tolerance they demonstrate towards democratic values. Moreover, education was found to be more compelling than the amount of income or occupation. On the contrary, however, Germany and France are considered to have some of the most educated citizens, but this certainly did not brace their democracies. Yet it did hinder the strengthening of anti-democratic movements – the data collected from the post-Nazi period in Germany, demonstrated that higher educated people are prone to be against one-party government systems (Shaw, 2008).

Nevertheless, while the correlation between education and opposition to one-party governments can be identified, it may not necessarily be a causal relationship. Attitudes toward one-party systems can be influenced by other factors, such as socioeconomic status or the historical context in which society is situated. This condition, while interpreting the data, is especially important in the German case. Which could have had an impact on the above-

mentioned represented data in Germany. Therefore, applying this finding to a broader range of individuals might not be precise.

In this research, the changes in terms of *democratization* are discussed through the areas where Democracy and *Europeanization* can be associated with each other and impact the processes. Specifically, in the realm of equality and human rights, democratic institutions, free media and judiciary, and strong opposition forces.

III. Thematic Analysis of Public Speeches Delivered from 1991 to 2022

To analyze the selected speeches five dominant themes were identified for democratization (freedom of election, media freedom, independent judiciary, well-organized opposition parties, inclusiveness, and equality) along with five topics for Europeanization (domestic change in human and minority rights, fight against corruption, behavioral or a policy change toward institutional change, security and stability, and prosperity as a whole). Differences and patterns about these themes are examined by the communication choices, the emotions political figures try to evoke, and their goals while using these determinants in the context. As the research was conducted from the constructionist perspective, other major themes that emerged during the data analysis are included in the assessment as well.

Throughout the last three decades, some themes have been dominant consistently in the public narrative of Georgian politicians. Generally, these issues are related to foreign policy choice and its influence, human rights situation, justice, freedom of expression, religion, and the relationship between the government and the opposition parties. Additionally, it's important to note that the most prominent elements remain to be patriotism, democracy, and Russia, and they are attached to almost every above-mentioned theme in some way. All these constituents not only exhibit interconnectedness but are also completely intertwined in Georgian society. Oftentimes, patriotism is perceived as a tool for self-survival, protecting traditions, and respecting religion, while democracy is directly associated with the EU and its values with which the majority of Georgian society associates itself; Russia has had two separate connotations at different times -- the biggest threat to security or a Big Neighbor, a possible ally with which relationship needs to be settled.

3.1. Democratization and Europeanization in Zviad Gamsakhurdia's socio-political Discourse

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the leader of the coalition Round Table was elected as the first president of Georgia has been much appreciated by Georgian society. Gamsakhurdia consistently demonstrated strong love and patriotism toward the country and was quite descriptive of his attitude about the country's future, Democratic processes, and foreign policy decisions.

3. 1. 1. Framing Europe

Gamsakhurdia incorporated a strong nationalistic narrative in his public speeches and often labeled his stance on foreign orientation as a national orientation. He, unlike some other political leaders in Georgia, did not consider only Russia as a major threat to the country's sovereignty. Even though Gamsakhurdia had regular meetings with the European leaders, he perceived the official West in opposition to any national movements. The West is frequently depicted in the context of a "denationalizing person" that leads people to get disconnected from the rest of the world and are easily manipulated by global, cosmopolitan forces. Europe alongside the US is also accused of invoking ethnic conflicts and pursuing imperialistic ambitions:

> The forces tasked with preparing for world government domination consider other countries only in terms of resources. Their goal is to turn these countries with their people, governments, and culture into simply territories, where they will leave the population only in the amount necessary for the world elite. At the same time, completely demoralized, ready to serve his interests. The realization of these intentions can only be prevented by the national self-awareness of the people and the creation of national states. That is why the West fights against national movements, that is why it tries to ignite ethnic conflicts and provoke wars (G, 1992, B).

Consequently, as a leader of the country, Gamsakhurdia stated that Georgia would not operate in consonance with Western interests. In his speech delivered in Grozny (G, 1992, E),

the word "empire" is used in the plural form -- highlighting that the World empires are fighting against Georgia's government:

> The struggle of world empires against us, against the legitimate government of Georgia. But, fortunately, in the last year, as you know, very important changes took place in the West, and one of the worst enemies of Georgia, its legitimate government, the Georgian people, left the political arena, with God's help, and perhaps there will be some changes in the politics of the West, we must have this hope. Auspicious signs are visible (G, 1991, D).

In this context, it's important to note that at first sight, Gamsakhurdia's attitude is mostly driven not by aggression toward the West but more by protecting national identity and sovereignty, in a broader sense, from empires. However, when comparing his approach toward the West to the perspective on Russia, a different picture emerges. Gamsakhurdia, to a certain extent, believed in the potential of having Russia as a neighbor ally and expressed his deep respect for the Russian people (as opposed to the government).

Therefore, it can be concluded that he was more confident in the possibility of building a positive relationship with Russia rather than the West. Because in that case, according to him, Georgia would have been able to keep its individuality as a nation:

> I am no stranger to pro-Russian sentiment. I always aspired to a close relationship with Russia and dreamed that Georgia would have a natural ally in the form of its big eastern neighbor *(G, 1992, B)*.

Although he considered the Soviet Union a coercive power, having aimed for complete national liberation, Gamsakhurdia does not express in any of his (selected) official statements that Georgia belongs to Europe or aspires to be a closer partner. Therefore, Gamsakhurdia's narrative, after years of disconnection from the rest of the world, was an attempt to conduct the politics of "national victimization." Yet, paradoxically, Georgia's first president assertively fought for some of the most Western values and sought partnerships in different Western countries individually (Matsaberidze, 2015).

Noteworthy, Gamsakhurdia's approach toward the West only changed after he became president in 1991; at that time, President Bush mentioned in his remarks to the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine that nations that base their nationality on ethnic hatred were eventually aiming for suicide and the US will not support any "local despotism" by any means (The American Presidency Project, 199, as cited in Chkhaidze, 2017). Before this occurrence, Gamsakhurdia frequently referred to Georgia as part of a European family, which he would describe as civilized and traditional with high moral standards.

3. 1. 2. Religion as a tool

Religion and specifically Christianity is one of the major tools Gamsakhurdia uses to revive nationalism and fight against contemporary European imperialism, which in his words has lost its moral values and has become a conspirator (G, 1991, D).

Gamsakhurdia consistently applied religious-like languages and abstract terminologies such as spiritual revival, god's intervention, Christian faith and consciousness, moral principles, and the apostolic work of the church. For the first president, democracy and freedom, true independence were impossible without Christian faith and implementing national-religious political goals. Gamsakhurdia, however, was strongly determined to achieve democracy, and neither did he see the overlapping space between European values and democratic societies, nor perceived religion to be any type of hindrance to achieving this goal:

> The history of the Georgian nation, the history of Georgian statehood,
> Georgian culture, and traditional values, this is our past, this is our pride.
> People fighting for freedom and democracy, a society reviving religious
> worldview and national consciousness — this is our present (G, 1991, D).

Considering the fact that traditionally religion is often associated with authoritarianism and dogmatism, Gamsakhurdia's approach to increase integrity between state and religion, especially in the country, where religion and national identity has always played central role, can be perceived as contradictory and limiting factor for democratization; since the societies where religious authorities are present, it's more difficult to support democratic processes and developments. As Robert Audi (Audi, 2020) states, conflict is inevitable between religion and democratic governments because what is sometimes prohibited for some religions, may be

permissible for democratic governments. Additionally, Religious groups rarely find themselves in an environment where discussions and considerations are open. Therefore, the stronger the religious authorities are, the less likely it is for society to embrace democratic norms. This is primarily because in religious societies, spiritual leaders are considered more reliable in terms of receiving guidance on political matters.

3. 1. 3. Human rights, minorities and equality

Although Gamsakhurdia regularly expressed "unwavering support" toward Georgia's ethnic minorities and perceived their protection as preserving national culture and security, his narrative reveals some inconsistent and antithetical themes. Gamsakhurdia brought human rights issues forward either as a tool for gaining political advantage or to ensure the country's geopolitical safety. Because, according to him, "world cosmopolitan powers" were capable of invoking discontent in minorities and disintegrating the nation that way. Besides, despite the fact that he wanted to recognize Orthodox Christianity as the state religion, he also averred that the Georgian government would remain committed to traditional religious tolerance. Yet, the tolerance was not unconditional:

> ...that internal stability cannot be achieved through violence and suppression of national minorities. It is necessary to transition to such a form of coexistence of nationalities in one state, which will be favorable for everyone, both in the field of economy and from the point of view of the security of preserving national culture. But the principle of self-determination, of course, should not go to the point of absurdity; For example, if today the Germans from the Volga region in Russia wanted to create a German state, this should be considered a completely unacceptable demand (G, 1992, B)

In this narrative, a hidden majority bias can be indicated in terms of the supremacy of Orthodox Christianity. As some scholars suggest, hidden majority bias, certainly, is not overt but rather embedded in governmental structures and institutions (Bader, 2003). In Gamsakhurdia's case, although publicly tolerant, he did emphasize that no one should attempt to dominate the major religion as the Georgian nation's identity is impossible without Christianity.

Besides, concerning other groups, such as ethnic minorities, based on Gamsakhurdia's arguments, it can be inferred that he divided ethnic minorities into two groups -- indigenous and non-indigenous. Meaning that the indigenous ones could have claimed territorial autonomy, while non-indigenous groups were supposed to enjoy basic human rights but did not deserve territorial autonomy. Gamsakhurdia considered so-called South Ossetians to belong to the latter group, while Abkhasians were perceived to belong to the indigenous group. Deriving from this idea, he recognized Abkhazians as inseparable from Georgia and expressed that they could enjoy political rights just as much as ethnic Georgians. Hence, claiming that South Ossetia historically had no right to claim territorial autonomy and could only enjoy autonomy in the framework of cultural self-rule.

Gamsakhurdia discussed other human rights issues in speeches given in 1992 (G, 1992, C) and 1993 (G, 1993, E) and used it against his opponent, Eduard Shevardnadze, who, by that time, had become the leader of Georgia as Chairman of Parliament. In this case, Gamsakhurdia involves characters such as prison employees and youth in his description and blames Shevardnadze for his inability to improve the situation in prisons where the penitentiary system was ruled not by the legitimate government but by the gangs and the criminals.

Additionally, the narratives about the United Nations can be discussed separately. Gamsakhurdia applied political morality approach and victimization: "Georgia should not expect salvation from the UN either as our salvation lies only in the efforts of our own nation and in the mobilization of world public opinion (G, 1992, C). He scolded the UN for "not practicing the democracy it preaches". Specifically, the UN is being called upon for its inability to act upon genocide and terror caused by Russia and for showing a blind eye to the suffering of small states.

To sum up, Gamsakhurdia to some extent stood for political, civil, and socio-cultural rights but these issues were less highlighted in the context of improving democratization but rather to frame foreign or opposition forces.

3. 1. 4. Opposition and polarization

As the early 90s was a politically chaotic period in Georgia, specific opposition forces based on their political views were perceived as a threat to state-building. Especially, due to the historical experience, any groups related to communism were perceived as dangerous.

Consequently, Gamsakhurdia too, condescended some of the opposition groups and labeled them "neo-communists" (G, 1992, C). These forces were called propagandists who supported the Shevardnadze regime along with Moscow to resume Georgia's international isolation. In this speech (G, 1992, C), Gamsakhurdia referred to joining the UN, and by blaming Shevardnadze for isolating Georgia from the international community, he tried to wash away the widespread implication that his strong national-oriented politics could have separated Georgia from the West (Ivanauskas, 2018).

Gamsakhurdia's socio-political discourse to opposition forces mostly is not aligned with democratic and European norms. "Enemies of statehood," "biggest obstacle to sovereignty", and "traitors" - are the phrases he used to describe alternative political forces (G, 1993, E). Gamsakhurdia did not entertain the idea of dialogue or mediation with other national powers. But the approach was not extended to the electorate. He employed the religious theme to demonstrate his willingness to accept people with different viewpoints:

> If God does not sacrifice a person in the end, neither do we have the right to sacrifice someone in the end. Those who will think carefully, those who will take the path of repentance in time, and those who will prove us with deeds, we will have nothing against them, because we are Christians (G, 1993, E)

3. 1. 5. Media freedom and independent judiciary

Gamsakhurdia's discursive approach to media freedom can be seen through a liberal paradigm viewpoint in which media freedom should not undergo any governmental interference. He believed that media was controlled by the government and either referred it to as a tool for propaganda or deemed the Georgian media fully ostensible. Gamsakhurdia denoted that Shevardnadze's government held the full advantage through informational blockage on discussing, promoting, and influencing the political situation in the country:

> What is there to hide, that an information vacuum has been created around me? A lot of misinformation is spread by the Junta, this so-called

television, and finding out the truth is, of course, extremely urgent today

(G, 1993, E)

Therefore, having government-controlled media was an obstacle to democracy and most importantly, a big problem for the alternative political figures (such as himself) to make their voices heard. Gamsakhurdia used free media issues to bring forward his political interests and referred to them as the cornerstone of democracy. Demonstrating that having been controlled by the government, there were no other tools to ensure transparency or keep the government accountable (G, 1992, C).

Regarding the judiciary system, Gamsakhurdia did not refer specifically to the judiciary system in any of the chosen speeches. Yet, he used Shevardnadze as a social actor who played the main role in hindering the process of building and developing strong institutions. This was not completely unreasonable as the public shared a common view. The Georgian society attributed the difficult socio-economic and criminal situation to Shevardnadze and held him accountable for these challenges.

Gamsakhurdia started to criticize institutions and reckoned them distrustful after he had to flee from Georgia (1991). The Georgian political leaders were labeled as an "illegitimate government" which lost control over the main institutions, destabilized the country, supported criminal groups, created an informational vacuum, and let the so-called "Intelligentsia" make decisions independent of the legal political entities. This might have served Gamsakhurdia in his political plans to come back to the country where society was ready to change the government:

> I am often asked: what is necessary for you to return to Georgia? Friends,
> I will not return without general public demand. This is what I will tell you.
> You know the conditions for my not coming back. Public demand will be
> a prerequisite for my return. I do not wrestle with personal power. You
> know very well that I am not running for the presidency. My main goal is
> to save Georgia (G, 1993, E).

3. 1. 6. The Leadership Dimensions and Styles

In applying Cerny's analytical framework to the case of Gamsakhurdia, the research observes what ways it fits into the different dimensions and styles outlined in the framework.

In particular, seemingly, it is difficult to place Gamsakhurdia solely on any of the three dimensions of leadership. Firstly, Gamsakhurdia does not fit into the Personal Equation feature. Precisely, his personality does not emphisize on personal leadership, but rather collective action. In his speech delivered in Grozny for instance (G, 1992, E), he highlights that his return to Georgia would be possible if there were expressed will of the majority of the people. Due to this approach, he was even called the "nationalist of the mass rallies" (Matsaberidze, 2014).

Besides, although his presidency period is associated with the restoration of Georgia's independence, and the public often considers this event the greatest achievement of the first president, Gamsakhurdia's strategic views are difficult to be perceived as politically reasonable. The fact that Gamsakhurdia focused on a nationalist approach and characterized all major political powers as adversaries of the newly created independent country raises questions about his strategic thinking. The first president is not aligned with the second dimension of the Individual and the "body" either. In all of his speeches, Gamsakhurdia predominantly expresses the needs and interests of the majority, especially regarding issues related to Christianity and the preservation of national spirit and identity. By consistently prioritizing these themes, Gamsakhurdia and his supporters were often perceived as extremists by their opponents. Furthermore, due to his overt disregard for the West and other global powers, it is also challenging to categorize Gamsakhurdia into the third dimension.

However, because of the aforementioned elements, Gamsakhurdia can be, partially and at first sight, linked to the Routine leadership style, wherein the leader harmonizes with the society's interests. Nevertheless, despite his stress on national identity and preservation, Gamsakhurdia also encouraged the population to protest (G, 1992, E) and frequently referred to the government as illegitimate (G, 1992, C).

3.2. Democratization and Europeanization in Eduard Shevardnadze's socio-political Discourse

After Zviad Gamsakhurdia was forcibly removed by the military groups in 1992, he was succeeded by Eduard Shevardnadze, a prominent figure in Georgian politics who played a pivotal role in international relations during the Soviet and post-Soviet times. Unlike Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze was an experienced politician and was known as "Silver Fox"

owing to his strategic thinking and remarkable ability to see potential challenges and possibilities. Having had extensive international experience, he recognized the value of building relationships and conducting effective communications not only with foreign authorities but also within the domestic area.

3. 2. 1. Framing Europe

Shevardnadze started his career as Georgia's leader with a strong sentiment that Georgia had a strong affinity towards Europe and was aspiring to become a part of a new European order. Therefore, he firmly advocated European political approaches and culture, including democratic values:

> Our policy framework encompasses three main priorities: basic economics,
> effective governance, and comprehensive social development. Democracy,
> freedom, sovereignty, constitutionalism, and the rule of law - these pave
> our path towards the future (Sh, 1994, B)

Shevardnadze presented Europe as an example and a tool to promote human rights, the rule of law, and democracy in Georgia. He consistently referred to how much could Georgia learn from Europe to improve its governmental institutions and make political, social, economic, and security reforms similar to European standards. In his speech, delivered to the parliamentary assembly (Sh, 1999, D), Shevardnadze highlighted how much positive influence the Council of Europe had on Georgia's goals to adopt a new constitution, having free elections and constitutional courts. And most importantly - as the population's basic survival needs were not met, he framed European integration as a major instrument to escape economic and other development-related problems - the most reasonable way to adjust to the new world order and survive.

It's important to note that evidently, Shevardnadze's effort did bring significant results. In his political narrative, two nuances were discovered. First, for the local audience, Shevardnadze's choice of narrative can be described as hypocritical while shaping the narrative around Europe and democratization; despite the fact that his statements emphasized transparent political systems, asserted pro-democratic messages, and were driven to achieve higher standards of European values, the period of his leadership was not only one of the most politically unstable

and economically challenged, but also most corrupted with noticeable authoritarian tendencies. World Bank Chronicles about Georgia (World Bank, 2012) notes that, during Shevardnadze's presidency, corruption was deeply institutionalized and officials had to buy their public offices. On the other hand, however, some of the first evidence of Georgia's defined European course can be traced back to his Presidency. In the opinion polls conducted in 1998 (Jones, 2006), 68 percent of Georgians considered themselves European, while only 19 perceived Georgia as a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In his speech at the EAPC summit, Shevardnadze drew historical parallels and highlighted that although Georgia always strived for Europe, Europe showed it a cold shoulder: "Due to historical vicissitudes, my people have for centuries been cut off from the western civilization although it always saw its rightful place there" (Sh, 2002, E). The same message was conveyed earlier, right after Shevardnadze started his Presidential tenure:

> Europe twice turned its back on Georgia, and this cost my nation statehood. The first time this happened on the eve of 18th century when she requested help from European monarchs and was left empty-handed. The second time, during the 20's of our century, when foreign power trampled down the democratic republic. Both times, it was not only Georgia who paid the price. Today, when our statehood is emerging, we believe that this time Europe will not neglect us and the confirmation of the latter is that you are here in my homeland (Sh, 1992, A).

Shevardnadze frequently used the technic of moral suasion while addressing the international community. Specifically, not only he stressed the territorial size of Georgia and its capacity to contribute to the world stage but also highlighted its geographical and strategic importance and potential trouble for the West if security threats had not been neutralized. By noting that instability in Georgia, could have become a root for regional or continental conflicts, he implied for the West that Georgia should have been considered a closer ally and given more attention and resources.

Another important component that Shevardnadze underlined on the EAPC summit was the idea of Europe as the most effective way to fight against extreme nationalism, aggressive separatism, religious fanaticism, and most importantly the danger of terrorism:

The so-called "white spots" that emerge as a result of aggressive separatist activities, often turn into nidi of terrorist infection. Georgia as an active member of the Partnership for Peace program stands ready to cooperate fully with the Alliance to address this problem in our region which happens to be an outpost of a civilization that regards freedom and humanism, in the widest possible sense, as its central values (Sh, 2002, E).

3. 2. 2. Religion as a tool

Dissimilar to Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze had a strategically more moderate attitude towards religion and separated politics and religion. However, as religious leaders have always been influential figures in Georgian history, Shevardnadze also tried to cooperate and establish a good relationship with the church. Although Shevardnadze and religious institutions had many different disputes related to property, corruption, and transparency (the church accused Shevardnadze of being corrupted and authoritarian while Shevardnadze blamed them for intervening in politics), his speeches were generally characterized with positive politeness where the "Silver Fox" emphasized the major role religion played in protecting Georgian identity and culture during the Soviet shackles.

Also, Shevardnadze noted how much the church contributed to supporting human rights protection and democracy-building. By this, it can be concluded that he radically altered Gamsakhurdia's approach to using religion against Western influence. Applying the reverse persuasion technique, he tried to convince people of the positive impact of the church in the processes of Europeanization and democratization. Consequently, building a positive relationship between the church and the political leaders would make the highly religious electorate more inclined to accept the government's initiatives. This could have held special importance in predominantly Orthodox Christian society as Christian churches often have preferences on issues such as education, same-sex marriage, or abortion (Grzymala-Busse, 2016). Therefore, drastically different perspectives between the Church and the Government can potentially cause complications for the government.

3. 2. 3. Human Rights, minorities, and Equality

Shevardnadze being a foresighted politician, promptly started building narratives on Georgia's future international role and place -- which as he frequently addressed was closely related to the European family. Consequently, deriving from European values, human rights was one of the main themes for the second president to discuss locally and internationally. He tried to convey that Georgia was ready to take any actions to meet European standards and take imperative legal steps. However, he also demanded international advocacy and asked for stronger international pressure to achieve these goals. For instance, in his speech made to the parliamentary assembly (Sh, 1999, D), Shevardnadze sent three main messages, first, he requested more comprehensively and clearly defined objectives from the Council of Europe in terms of improving human rights; second, he pressed the importance of distributing attention and effort equally on different countries while creating a new European order; and third, he used the rhetoric of "rallying cry" and encouraged international community not to misuse peace talks with endless procrastination and buttress it with tangible actions:

> If peace talks were misused, for example by endless procrastination aimed at allowing crimes to become legitimised, they would be discredited. In general, diplomacy had to be backed by force (Sh, 1999, D)

Furthermore, to stimulate Western support, he referred to the victimhood rhetoric and justified the trying human rights situation with the harsh political, economic, and financial crises that the country had gone through. This could also be considered Shevardnadze's attempt to justify himself to Europe for not being able to create stability and prosperity in the country.

Another theme that Shevardnadze actively discussed in different contexts as a means to promote democracy was related to ethnic and religious minorities in the country. Officially, he was ardently advocating for religious freedom and ethnic minority groups by stating:

> Democratic Georgia is the homeland of not only Georgians but also people of all nationalities and denominations, all citizens of the republic. The Republic of Georgia cares for the development of the language and culture of all people living in its territory, for the protection of their political rights (Sh, 1994, B).

However, despite his eagerness to promote diversity and inclusivity, the second president embraced some of the policies that aimed to prioritize the Georgian language and build one, Georgian identity. His name is also connected to the most violent conflict in Georgia's latest history - the Abkhazian War. One of the reasons the war took place was Shevardnadze's government's unwillingness or inability to avoid inter-ethnic tensions and address minorities' problems promptly (Sabanadze, 2010).

Noteworthy, despite the fact that Shevardnadze's presidency period by no means was a democratically advanced time in Georgian history, he signed some of the most crucial international acts, such as the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child along with the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights and Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Caucasus Datablog (The Caucasus Datablog, 2021) survey that was conducted to measure the successes of the Georgian governments from 1992 to 2021, demonstrated that the majority of the Georgian population (34%) reckoned that Shevardnadze's government had no success, while 12 % expressed that Shevardnadze gained international recognition of Georgia.

Theoretically, it can be concluded that Shevardnadze was dedicated to the idea of getting closer to democratic and European values. But as Ariel Cohen expressed, "Shevardnadze was old and tired" (Cohen, 2004) and did not have the determination to fight against such heavy barriers. His government too lacked genuine commitment -- the desire to hold onto the power was stronger than the will to achieve tangible results. Therefore, the economic and structural obstacles as well as the Soviet rule legacy and ethnic conflicts had become the root cause of Shevardnadze's autocratic shift.

3. 2. 4. Opposition and polarization

Shevardnadze, similar to his predecessor, did not exhibit a supportive disposition toward the opposition forces in his official speeches. In his political statements, Shevardnadze often refers to the alternative forces as carriers of nationalist and chauvinist ideology who seek to establish dictatorship:

> They become carriers of the nationalist, chauvinist ideological path, which is undoubtedly a step towards dictatorship, towards the mechanical introduction of "social truth", towards the establishment of "abstract democracy" (Sh, 1994, C)

However, it should be noted that officially Shevardnadze expressed openness to negotiations, constructive dialogue, and cooperation. Through the implementation of coercion methods, he sought to convince the opposition forces that the only possible way to gain leverage over the government was through constructive political activities. Yet, at the same time, repetitively portrayed them as a danger to national security and developed the so-called "patron-client relationship" governing style, leaving no space for the opposition to establish firmly (Dominioni, 2014).

3. 2. 5. Media and Judiciary Independence

Shevardnadze broadly demonstrated his commitment to creating space for independent media outlets. However, his political narrative and priorities notably lacked emphasis on media freedom issues and therefore, effectively displayed the real picture of the Mass Media situation during his presidency. There were almost no non-state-owned media outlets in Georgia, and censorship and propaganda tools were actively involved to hide corruption and dreadful socio-economic situation. Media was used to silence opposition and manipulate information. This was demonstrated well in Zviad Gamsakhurdia's speeches: "Here, as you know, even the publication of true information in the press was blocked in every possible way" (G, 1993, E). Consequently, these issues were conspicuously circumvented in Shevardnadze's official statements. Yet, understanding the significance of the topic, in his speech to the United Nations General (G, 1992, C), he briefly indicated the importance of independent media and considered it one of the main pillars of democracy-building.

Concerning the independent judiciary, Shevardnadze underlined his willingness to reform the system and create an independent court. Therefore, some of the most important steps he took was establishing Supreme and Constitutional Courts affirming that "these reforms had created an institutional respect for human rights". Still, none of these promises was practically

implemented. As described by Zviad Gamsakhurdia (G, 1992, C), an independent Judiciary would have been the fastest way to expose Shevardnadze's corrupted regime and "abrogation of the Constitution". Accordingly, the absence of an independent judiciary as well as a consistent disjunction between his words and actions became one of the major reasons Shevardnadze lost his credibility locally and internationally. In other words, Shevardnadze used the concepts of "Europeanization" and "democracy" as a tool to promote his interests. The question may arise, what were the underlying motives behind Shevardnadze's decisions? Could he not maintain his power without advocating for European values and democracy? After regaining independence, the Georgian population had a resolute position about the Russian Federation and considered Europe as the only alternative for peace and prosperity (Jones, 2006). Therefore, Shevardnadze understood that he had to align with the sentiment to sustain domestic support for his government.

3. 2. 6. The Leadership Dimensions and Styles

Shevardnadze drastically different from Gamsakhurdia, recognized and attempted to employ the modern world requirements for Georgia to accept it in the free global family. However, while he did have a strong personal presence, valuable experience, demonstrated strategic mind, and skills, the circumstances he started his political career were most favorable for building a firm democracy. Despite this, categorizing Shevardnadze into any of the three leadership dimensions is not easy.

Although Shevardnadze is frequently referred to as a "bold" decision-maker (Dominioni, 2022), none of the structural patterns that significantly transformed the political processes in Georgia can be identified. He does not align with the third dimension either. While having broad international network, some scholars, such as Johan Engval affirm that Shevardnadze's regime exhausted and disappointed Western allies as their financial and political support was factually wasted (Engval, 2012).

Furthermore, Shevardnadze's style cannot be characterized into the four leadership styles either. Although being a visionary, he could not manage to be a catalytic president, the state did not achieve any significant change or success during his tenure, if not the opposite. Neither the crises nor the negative norms and structures that emerged during his leadership were dealt

effectively. One of the heaviest wars in Georgian history, the Abkhazian war, is connected to Shevardnadze's name, the deep-rooted Soviet-style corruption was exacerbated further during his presidency as well. And despite the fact that verbally Shevardnadze consistently aimed for better political culture and wanted to improve democratic norms and governmental institutions, in practice,

none of these managed to be implemented -- therefore, categorizing him into the integrative leadership style presents a considerable challenge.

3.3. Democratization and Europeanization in Mikheil Saakashvili's Socio-Political Discourse

3. 3. 1. Framing Europe

"I do not want to be pro-American or pro-Russian. I am pro-Georgian; I am Georgian, and I am European by being Georgian" -- Saakashvili the third president of Georgia, who came into power after the Rose Revolution, appeared with strong directives about Europe. Rights after taking office, he immediately declared European integration as the government's chief political objective, formed a cabinet for the Minister of Euro-Atlantic Integration, and stationed the EU flag along with the Georgian flag at every official meeting (Nodia, 2009).

His narrative regarding Europe, sharply different from Gamsakhurdia's views, was built on Shevardnadze's approach. He presented Europe not as a potential threat and an enemy, but as the only way out for peace and unity. Saakashvili referred to Europe not only as Georgia's partner and ally but also tried to convince everyone that Georgia was an integral part of Europe. It should be noted that, like Shevardnadze, Saakashvili also emphasized the importance of Georgia for Europe -- he claimed that Georgia's dependence on Europe went beyond maintaining peace and that regional stability was paramountly important for European security:

> Europe needs to do more: to ensure the prosperity and stability of future
> generations. For just as Georgia can play a key role as a net contributor to
> European stability, it is also part of a region that is a potential major
> generator of instability – unless Europe gets actively involved, does not

close its eyes, acknowledges the problems, and confronts them bravely, as

it did at the height of its history (S, 2004, A).

Saakashvili aimed to completely redefine the notion of "national": "When we created the National Movement, the idea, the goal, the essence of our project was precise to give a new meaning to this word: "national", to make it an inclusive word and not an exclusive one anymore (S, 2007, D). On the one hand, in his messages, he tries to emphasize that national identity is a fundamental human right and it is necessary to preserve it. On the other hand, he equates national and European values and says that the national values of Europe and Georgia are completely congruential:

Taking identity as a point of departure, it is clear to me and to all Georgians

that our identity is fundamentally European. Today, Georgia is finally on

the road home, once again integrating itself into a Europe with which it

shares common values and a common history (S, 2004, A).

Saakashvili eagerly started advocating Georgia's full integration into the EU. He portrayed Europe and European aspirations as a way toward building democracy, comprehensive reforms, rule of law, anti-corruption regulations, and a free judiciary system. Spreading the democratic values in Georgia, he believed would make the country a role model and significantly motivate the region's other countries to follow the example. Dissimilar to Shevardnadze, who presented these issues as almost impossible to achieve goals, Saakashvili displayed them as opportunities, both for Europe and for Georgian society. As a result, people increasingly embraced the idea of EU integration and the benefits it would bring to them -- improved living standards, economic progress, and easier mobility across Europe.

It's important to mention how Saakashvili used discursive framing in his narrative several times. Specifically, he applied a comparative approach and discussed two European nations -- Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Stating that these nations are rarely perceived as "tiny", while Georgia is commonly attributed to this label. Saakashvili claimed that this discrepancy comes from being an EU member country. Drawing on the fact that in the EU "small power" does not indicate the size but rather behavioral characteristics. As, in the end, European affiliation ensures small countries with a sense of strength, fortifies their resilience, and shields them from other external threats (Crombois, 2020).

Another important strategy that Saakashvili applied was to portray Russia as a common enemy for Georgia and Europe. Accordingly, the determination toward European values should ensure the rapprochement of Georgia and Europe so that in times of danger, Georgia would not be alone while facing the enemy, but other European countries would stand next to it. This message can be looked over in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war that started in 2022.

Because the official government of Georgia showed a rather ambivalent position at that time, they received some critical evaluations from international partners. Among them, some of the leaders stated that the same enemy might also reach Georgia one day, but the most important part would be where and how Georgia would stand at this time, and whether it would be alone or with friends. In one of the Saakashvili addresses (S, 2012, D), he recalled the Western leader's initial skepticism when he was lobbying for Georgia's integration into Europe and NATO. Yet, over time, this attitude evolved, and Western circles started to genuinely believe in Georgia's European prospects. More than a decade later, international politicians reiterating Saakashvili's message, indicated that the messages that Saakashvili delivered about Georgia and the EU were efficacious within Georgia and across European Union.

Throughout his presidency, Saakashvili consistently expressed this attitude regarding Europe. However, in his final speech as a president where he addressed Georgian society, he candidly admitted that many mistakes were made on the path to democracy and European integration and one of the most dangerous was the excessive use of power:

> In our desire to ensure the safety of all citizens, we have developed a zero-tolerance policy that has sent too many people to prison. In our wish to reform quickly the country, we have overlooked the necessary concertation with people who opposed the changes or had a different view of them. Our reform of the judiciary was too slow, and our reform of education was not deep enough (S, 2007, D)

Nonetheless, this speech did reveal the reasons why the divergence between his public narrative and the practical implementation of true democracy did not align fully. Firstly, it shed light on Saakashvili's tendency to use personal stories where he positioned himself as a heroic person who championed dreadful challenges, he centered himself as the core of democratic and European values: "I will never apologize for having destroyed organized crime and root out

corrupt elite, for having built new cities and traveled the world to plead our common cause against powerful enemies." (S, 2007, D).

However, he forgot what his initial idea of democracy was -- a reflection of people's choice in choosing their representative (S, 2004, A). Therefore, a self-centered approach made it impossible for Saakashvili to understand that as a politician he fulfilled his mission, and it was time for a change. Consequently, these not so "small" mistakes, refusing to acknowledge the need for a shift in leadership, caused the decaying of Georgian democracy.

3. 3. 2. Religion as a tool

Saakashvili's first presidential term demonstrated a strong commitment to European values in relation to religion. He unequivocally expressed his dedication to the principles such as freedom and pluralism of religion, non-discrimination, and separation of church and state. He often invoked historical figures and their dedication to religious tolerance. By drawing attention to the king of Georgia, David Agmashenebeli, who exhibited the practice of alternating Christian and Muslim worship places for his prayers, Saakashvili attempted to embrace religious and ethnic diversity and inclusivity. His actions concurred with his narrative too -- during his presidency some tangible results were achieved in this area, including a law that was adopted to ensure the protection of religious freedom and the rights of religious organizations.

However, the third president often referred to Christianity as a means of unifying the Georgian nation and the main axis of identity, and subsequent to his resignation from office, Saakashvili made a shift in his rhetoric and adopted a more populist approach that aimed to echo popular sentiments. Among them, accusing other opposition forces of alienating the Georgian people from Christian and traditional values as they had protected minorities' rights. The above-mentioned statement was discussed by some political experts in Georgia, including Giorgi Tskhadaia, who stated it was Saakashvili's attempt to attract a more conservative electorate by bypassing some democratic values including, the diversity of religious beliefs (Netgazeti, 2019).

3. 3. 3. Human Rights, minorities, and Equality

Saakashvili, characterized by his charming and enigmatic leadership style, consistently articulated his goals for Georgia's future integration into Europe. Each of his strategic decisions

to bring the country closer to Europe was meticulously planned and accompanied by well-defined justifications for each step. However, while examining Saakashvili's rhetoric on human rights, it becomes evident that his narrative often remained at a superficial level, providing close to no arguments regarding his intended improvements in this area.

According to Transparency International's 2012 statistics, Saakashvili's government made significant progress in terms of eradicating corruption in Georgia (Transparency International, 2012). However, this resulted in the imprisonment of numerous officials, improved the business environment, and promoted equality. But his policy of "zero tolerance" and the belief that he represented a hero for the country, made it easier for him to violate some of the most fundamental human rights. Even towards the end of his first term of presidency, Saakashvili failed to acknowledge his own pivotal mistakes and instead blamed them on other officials, as proved by his statement: "I regret that sometimes I had exaggerated trust in the authorities of the ministry of internal affairs and the prosecutor's office" (S, 2007, D).

As for the minorities, similar to other leaders of Georgia, the most dominant themes for Saakashvili were ethnic and religious minorities. He considered one of his biggest achievements the unification of Georgia:

> When we arrived in power, Georgia was a divided nation, Adjara was ruled by a local satrap, and the Armenian minority district was abandoned by the central government. That time government did its best for making Samegrelo and other regions alien. The Pankisi Gorge was in fact out of control... We have reunited the people by winning the hearts and souls of those who felt excluded (S, 2007, D).

Saakashvili condemned any attack based on national, ethnic, or religious traits and used different strategies to make positive change. Among them, he tried to raise the fear and danger in the community that any confrontation related to minority groups could cause dangerous predicaments for the country's sovereignty. It can be concluded that Saakashvili tried to instill human rights-related values in society with a visible confrontation with Russia - he fostered the perception that if people did not practice democratic and European values in everyday life, Russia would easily defeat the country (S, 2007, D).

3. 3. 4. Opposition and polarization

Saakashvili's narrative toward the opposition lacked of consideration. At different times he expressed different, sometimes controversial attitudes. For instance, in 2005, he expressed disappointment because of the absence of the opposition forces and encouraged "better quality" forces to come forward. However, when a highly rated opposition party "Georgian Dream" appeared, Saakashvili quickly portrayed them along with other small opposition parties as a group sent by Russia to hinder Georgia's democratic development and framed them as a destabilizing force.

3. 3. 5. Media and Judiciary Independence

On November 7, 2007, governmental special forces broke into the leading opposition TV channel "Imedi" and temporarily stopped its broadcasting. "The fact that the police protected public order with methods accepted in the world is acceptable" (S, 2007, B) Saakashvili defended himself by stating that the government's intervention effectively safeguarded public interest. After several years of his presidency, a pattern emerged whereby Saakashvili framed every opposing act or entity as directed by foreign forces and positioned himself as the nation's savior against radical media outlets controlled by the radical opposition. He argued that media that criticizes the government several times a day is not media but a political tool - forgetting the main responsibility of journalism as a fourth government (Sudo, 1989).

Therefore, it can be concluded that by employing this rhetoric, Saakashvili tried to suppress political opponents and cover up human rights violations under his rule. The justification for defending national security against media, indicates censorship, the erosion of civil rights, and infringes on people's freedoms (Principle 2 of the Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, 1996). Therefore, the manipulation of fear that aimed at framing his crimes as necessary for state security, was Saakashvili's attempt to exploit people's emotions to validate his actions.

It is important to acknowledge that the main force behind Saakashvili's Rose Revolution was free, independent media, through which the world became aware of the unjust, undemocratic

practices of Shevardnadze's governance. Therefore, this shift in rhetoric underscored the deficiency of democratic culture and governance within Georgia's ruling party.

As for the freedom of the Judiciary system, Saakashvili acknowledged several times the need for reform and independence within the court as according to some sources, the government exerted political influence over the judiciary. His government introduced comprehensive judicial reforms focusing on tackling corruption and increased transparency. However, these "rules" came with exceptions. As stated by Bidzina Ivanishvili, they applied to everyone but the governmental elite (I, 2012, A).

3. 3. 6. The Leadership Dimensions and Styles

After Saakashvili came into power through the Role Revolution, major changes took place in the state infrastructure and policy. His presidency was marked by radical, often unconventional decisions in matters related to the development of the country. Consequently, he shortly gained the reputation of an innovative leader and generated attention domestically and internationally. His reforms in areas such as police, anti-corruption measures, education, infrastructure development, and economic liberalization brought about rapid improvements in the country. Although much younger and inexperienced than his predecessors, Shevardnadze and Gamsakhurdia, Saakashvili demonstrated independent thinking, took decisions autonomously, and often these actions were opposed to the majority of the society.

As such, the Personal Equation can be selected to understand Saakashvili's leadership style. Saakashvili's bold personality and strong public image as a revolutionary and transformative leader could position him within the realm of the Transformative leadership style. As he did manage to transform some deeply ingrained negative norms and structures, political leaders often perceived him as someone autonomous and displayed resistance to consider alternative viewpoints (O, 2008, C). However, in Saakashvili's case, the leadership style was applied effectively at the beginning of Saakashvili's tenure (2004) when there was a need in Georgian society to have such a type of leader. Later, Saakashvili did not exhibit "crisis leadership" characteristics, as Hoffmann (Hoffmann, 1967) considers to be Transformative leadership.

3.4. Democratization and Europeanization in Mikheil Saakashvili's Opposition's Socio-Political Discourse

3. 4. 1. Framing Europe

During the tenure of Mikheil Saakashvili (2004-2013), the political opposition was quite scattered which made it challenging to identify one prominent figure in the opposition. However, the absence of one distinct leader strengthened the cooperation among smaller opposition parties, leading to their frequent joint initiatives and statements.

Deepening polarization between the government and the opposition became more discernible under Saakashvili's presidency. Yet, although the opposition parties expressed numerous complaints against the government, they did not accuse Saakashvili of deviating from the European foreign policy trajectory but rather taking steps that were slowly depriving the country of its European perspective:

> Georgia will eventually lose the trust and support of the West, the prospect
> of joining the Euro-Atlantic structures, and will face many problems that
> cannot even be predicted. You have to make a choice - what is more
> important to you - the country, the conditions we gave to the people in 2003
> or securing your personal power.

These accusations were not groundless as Saakashvili did create a "hyper-presidential" system. Instead of building institutionalized democracy, he consolidated power by limiting the Parliamentary power and taking Presidential control over the Prime Minister's institute and its Cabinet (Broers, 2011). In these processes, the coalition of opposition portrayed Europe as a supporter of an illegitimate president to maintain stability, thus ignoring major democratic principles and prioritizing strategic interests over democratic values:

> Do not attempt to justify the President's support for stability at the expense
> of the people's well-being; we have already experienced this in January
> 2008 when our closest allies chose stability over democracy. Saakashvili
> utilized this support for his own goals, leading to chaotic actions and

> ultimately resulting in war. Since then, we no longer have democracy nor genuine stability (O, 2009, D)

These events led the opposition parties to label Georgian democracy as a "parody," and categorically urged Europe not to interfere in the crisis. However, it is noteworthy that the European political culture diverges from the Georgian political culture, characterized by expectations of more radical actions from the partners to tackle problems. But the EU approaches its partnerships as cooperation, where a partner country decides how deep the cooperation can be and how far can the EU intervene in domestic politics (Gahler, 2021).

Consequently, the EU establishes formal relationships with governments elected by the people -- was the case with Saakashvili's democratically elected government. Therefore, if the majority of the people sought to change the government, it was up to the electorate and the opposition to express their will in the election. It can be concluded that Saakashvili's opposition did not consider the EU a strong collaborator. The EU tended to adopt a more neutral stance as it aspired to resolve the situation through diplomatic mediation. However, in this statement, particularly addressed to Germany, Poland, France, and Estonia, the opposition perceived this as less of a supportive gesture and more as an aid to external forces (Moscow) in carrying out provocations:

> Do not try to use these events to promote volatility. It should be clear to our northern neighbor that any sounding of arms or provocation during this transition period will be perceived as a sign of covert and indirect support for Saakashvili, which will indicate that Russia is supporting a discredited and weak Georgian government that is easier to isolate (O, 2009, D)

3. 4. 2. Human Rights, Equality, media, and independent judiciary

The opposition forces employed human rights issues as a fundamental tool and as a central theme in their rhetoric to bring about a change in the government. They created a sense of urgency regarding the democratic values in perils and announced non-stop demonstrations. This strategy was expected to work in two ways -- on the electorate and the international community. The Georgian society was expected to actively protest against the government and the West,

acknowledging the crisis and discouraging the president not to using excessive force against the demonstrators: "The international community, please advise Mikheil Saakashvili not to use force and provocations through special services" (O, 2009, D)

Unsurprisingly, the opposition discourse significantly contrasted with the narrative disseminated by Mikheil Saakashvili, who claimed that raiding peaceful protestants aimed at protecting Georgian society (S, 2007, B). Meanwhile, the opposition continuously stressed the absence of fundamental human rights protections under Saakashvili's administration: "Georgia, in which today nothing is guaranteed, neither the freedom to vote, nor the independence of the courts, nor the inviolability of private property, nor personal security, nor the freedom of the media, especially television, cannot be considered a partner of the democratic union" (O, 2008, B).

These statements referred to the events of 7 November when the government used violent and disproportionate measures to disperse demonstrations. At that time Freedom House statistics rated media freedom in Georgia lower than before the Rose Revolution (Freedom House, 2013). While making progress in some other areas, Saakashvili's government deteriorated media freedom by closing critical media outlets or taking indirect control. Besides, it's important to note, that the raid on TV Imedi was preceded by the incident of the murder of civilian Sandro Girgvliani. The case was extensively reported by TV Imedi, highlighting the fact that the Minister of Internal Affairs, Vano Merabishvili was directly connected to the case. Georgia's Ombudsman, Sozar Subari acknowledged this case as a litmus test for the government and the independent judiciary.

The opposition highlighted the barriers to effectively communicating about the human rights situation to international audiences, including unprecedented control over businesses, a single-party-dominated parliament, and a judiciary that was under the government's influence. The opposition expressed that it did not have any financial resources to allow free media to exist as even business was under government control:

> Thanks to the abuse of administrative and police resources and the monopoly on electoral resources (media, finances), the government establishes a one-party, non-competitive governance system, which with each subsequent election further empties the content of democracy and just "wraps" in the form of democracy (O, 2011, E)

Even though both parties claimed that political instability was not the intended outcome, subsequent consequences reflected otherwise. The parliament represented only one party, the National Movement, and people were permanently protesting in the streets (Dominioni, 2014). The opposition's persuasive language and attempt to create a sense of urgency worked on the society, but were not effective enough to make the international community strengthen their diplomatic pressure on Saakashvili's government.

3. 4. 3. Opposition and Polarization

Although it is observed that Saakashvili did not give sufficient importance to engaging in the dialogue with the opposition, the opposition itself did not refrain to express their extremely negative attitude toward the government by drawing contrasts such as shameless government and ethical opposition, neo-Bolshevist, revolutionary government and democratic opposition, scapegoater government, and rational opposition. Most importantly, the oppositon emphasized the fact that the government deliberately attempted to portray them as ineffective: "...the government wants to send a familiar message to the capitals of the West - "What should I do, whom do I agree with, do you know whom I am dealing with... (referring to the opposition)" (O, 2011, E).

Some of the most important issues that demonstrated polarization were related to the August War in 2008 and the 2008 Presidential elections. The opposition frequently accused Saakashvili of initiating the War. The war that in their own words would have been impossible to win against Russia and which the Western world did not consider provoked by Georgia (Foucher, 2008): "(the government) started a war against the will of its people, which caused hundreds of casualties in the Georgian army and among our citizens in Tskhinvali" (O, 2009, D). Henceforth, the opposition coalition that claimed to be in favor of European integration, through their statements aimed at attacking Saakashvili, adversely impacted Georgia in the international arena. It can also be assumed that in light of these circumstances, Saakashvili and his government would have exhibited resistance to engaging in any form of negotiation. This stance would have allowed the opposition to substantiate their point on the government's inclination to deepen polarization.

The opposition parties refused to participate in the election unless their stipulations were fulfilled: "Without an agreement with the opposition, first of all with the "Eight", the government will not be able to hold elections, and if it does, it will not be an election, but a struggle of the people against the usurping government" (O, 2011, E). Saakashvili's government initially resisted the early election, accepted the demand only after the former Defense Minister, Irakli Okruashvili claimed on live television that Saakashvili ordered him a murder (Nichol, 2008).

These two factions of the political arena, while claiming to advocate for democratic principles in their rhetoric, at the same time, delegitimized each other, impeded the progress of state development, and divided citizens into two radical groups leaving no place for the middle ground. It is imperative to note that the opposition's strategy to achieve their goal by boycotting the elections, would have been ineffective as it lacked logical coherence. Because several other parliamentary opposition did not share their positions (Dominioni, 2014). Hence, the possibility of conducting elections was viable.

3. 4. 4. The Leadership Dimensions and Styles

To understand the leadership styles of Saakashvili's opposition, the Individual leader and the State dimension can be employed as it allows for discussing leadership styles based on their social position. The opposition of Saakashvili, although limited in many ways due to the government's pressure on them (O, 2011, E), used all the mechanisms to overcome the limitation of their position as non-majority. Not only they approached the international community assertively (O, 2009, D), but also generated public protests and refused to participate in the election. And even though not a single person was identified as a distinct leader of the opposition at that time, the majority of the opposition as a group to some extent demonstrated an integrative leadership style. They emphasized the issues that were the biggest concern for the society and displayed strong will for collaboration and dealt with the challenges in a peaceful, non-revolutionary manner.

3.5. Democratization and Europeanization in Bidzina Ivanishvili's socio-political Discourse

3. 5. 1. Framing Europe

Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire who came into the realm of Georgian politics in 2012, initially demonstrated a strong commitment to democratic values as well as to Euro-Atlantic aspirations (I, 2012, A). However, in contrast to his predecessor, Ivanishvili made a shift in his stance on Europe and foreign policy. The context in which he mentioned Europe for the first time can be traced back to the transition of power from the Saakashvili's government: "We can learn everything and we have a lot to learn from Europe, we have a lot to learn from America, but our tolerance, historical adaptability, emotionality won us, the great culture of Georgia won" (I, 2012, A). This statement aimed to send two specific messages.

First, Ivanishvili aspired to assert that the Western external actors do not have control over the events unfolding in Georgia and it was fully driven by the Georgian people. Yet, interestingly, Georgian people have confidently chosen a pro-Western foreign course and it was widely acknowledged and unsurprising. Therefore, utilizing the word "but" could have aimed to confront the West and Georgian society as a way to create an impression that their objectives to oust the authoritarian government, were not entirely aligned. Second, he sought to evoke a sense of patriotism, national unity, and the feeling of victory within society. Ivanishvili's this narrative can be compared to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, whose primary objective was to unite the society around the nation, and not to be under the influence of any big empire, including Europe: "We aspired to pursue an independent policy, we did not obey the dictates of the Western states, we did not serve their interests, and to put it more simply, we did not allow Georgia to become a colony" (G, 1992, B).

However, unlike Gamsakhurdia who notoriously enemied the Soviet Union and the Russian government, Ivanishvili's government's attitude was more moderate toward Russia, and although this does not necessarily indicate a foreign policy shift, it would have made it easier for Putin's regime to pursue its intentions in the region. Which would eventually cause the EU failure (Falkowski, 2016).

Moreover, viewed from a contemporary perspective, there is another noteworthy detail that demonstrated Ivanishvili's attitudes and intentions toward Europe. In 2013, as a Prime Minister, Ivanishvili addressed European leaders at the PACE summit. Although he reiterated Georgia's unwavering commitment to the European course, Ivanishvili also emphasized Europe as a peace project and noted that Georgia aspired to achieve this model and intends to take an example from Europe and restore partnership with its old enemies (Russia): "We are beginning to put the lessons learned from the EU into practice in terms of building consensus with former adversaries" (I, 2013, B).

While this statement could have appeared innocuous initially, subsequent statements of the Ivanishvili regime's Prime Minister made in 2022 are vital to consider as it demonstrated that Ivanishvili had already known in 2012 how to frame Europe for society. With the onset of the war in Ukraine, as the EU excluded Georgia from receiving a candidate status unless the government followed the 12 recommendations, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili accused Europe and America of seeking to drag Georgia into the war, meanwhile insinuating that the Georgian government was fighting for peace (I, 2022, E). U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan has commented on Gharibashvili's announcement and called it "a hundred percent Russian disinformation" (Civil.ge, 2022). Gharibashvili further affirmed that if the West did not want peace for Georgia, Georgia would protect its interests at all costs (I, 2022, E) while some of the former deputies of Georgian Dream framed the membership application as a "trap" for Georgia's peace: "Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations were used as a "trap", the authorities were forced to apply for EU membership, so that they would not be granted candidate status and cause tension in Georgia" (NewsFront, 2022).

This could be considered a subtle message and a tool against the Georgian society, already terrified of the possibility of war, to see the West as the power which endangers their safety. Fear cultivation followed by mass manipulation is one of the Soviet Union's notorious propaganda tools, considered to be still actively used (Liñán, 2010).

Whether this propaganda distributed by the Georgian Dream had a limited or large effect on mass society is yet to be determined, but it did contain many logical inaccuracies. First of all, Georgia lacks the physical resources to be an aggressor country, especially if it has to fight separately for Abkhazia, and Ossetia and also prepare for potential hostilities from Armenia.

Georgia as a much smaller country than Ukraine, in the event of war will have to turn to the West for military equipment support, which will further burden the EU, already investing in Ukraine. Second, with the war in Ukraine, Georgia's strategic position becomes even more important for the West, facilitating connections with Azerbaijan for natural gas (Garibov, 2018). Therefore, Europe has a vested interest in preventing instability in Georgia.

Thirdly, Georgia is the only country in the region that reflected the Euro-Atlantic direction as the country's foreign policy in its constitution (Rukhadze, 2013). Consequently, starting a war in Georgia would jeopardize the West's main support partner in the South Caucasus. Especially because Russia has already strengthened its influence on the Black Sea after the annexation of Crimea and the Karabakh War.

Another salient aspect that can be observed in Bidzina Ivanishvili's narrative is the transfer of the European perspective to a distant future. Although Ivanishvili mentions European aspirations, he simultaneously tells the public that this EU membership journey is protracted, and nobody should have the illusion of being a member of the European family shortly:

> It should be well understood that the issue of Georgia's accession to the European Union is not on the next agenda. We will also need to wait for some time before we become members of NATO, because this is part of a complex geopolitical process and does not depend only on our desire and readiness (I, 2016, C)

We can compare this with Saakashvili's narrative, which, on the contrary, convinced the public that faster European integration was possible, and Georgia had to develop quickly to become a member of the European Union:

> Our goal - and I have already appealed to all the concerned leaders - is accelerated integration into NATO in order to prevent the reoccurrence of past mistakes and Georgia's accelerated integration into the European Union. We are part of the democratic world, and the democratic world should embrace Georgia (S, 2008, E)

3. 5. 2. Religion, Human Rights, and Equality

Bidzina Ivanishvili's attitude regarding the issues of human rights, equality, and religion has remained practically persistent for ten years. Since the first stage of coming to power, Ivanishvili has constantly linked human rights issues to Saakashvili's government:

> The entire country turned into one big prison, with the hundreds of thousands of prisoners and probationers, the entire population was staring at the prison door. Total eavesdropping, surveillance, covert filming, and blackmail were commonplace, and the government fully controlled the media (I, 2016, C)

His approach has not changed even in the recent past, and the strongly negative presentation of the National Movement remains the main tool for the Georgian Dream government while presenting its achievements. Meanwhile, Freedom House reports found some of the critical human rights issues identical to the Saakashvili's regime, among them were limiting opposition-aligned media outlets, discrimination, illegal surveillance and data collection, and the absence of an independent judiciary (Freedom House, 2018).

It should be noted that Ivanishvili, like Gamsakhurdia, is closely connected with the Church and the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia, especially since Ivanishvili has a history of being a financial supporter of the church. Accordingly, he often connects the Georgian character and identity with Christianity and also emphasizes the tolerant nature of Georgians towards other religions or ethnic minorities. However, it should be noted that every time Ivanishvili talks about tolerance, he also says that any attempt to force any political, religious, or another kind of radicalism on Georgia will be responded to accordingly:

> We should be well aware that attempts to impose political or religious radicalism on us, aggression due to a different opinion or way of life, threaten to destroy the foundations of our existence. That's why we have to be especially vigilant and uncompromising toward any such manifestation (I, 2016, C).

In this context, it is important to note that during Ivanishvili's government, a demonstration of members of the LGBT group was dispersed by homophobic groups on 17 May 2017. And the state and the police did not properly take care of the physical safety of LGBT activists, did not protect their constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression, did not prevent violence from the clergy, and then did not identify and punish the perpetrators.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the positive attitudes towards minorities on the part of Ivanishvili's government representatives are mainly addressed to ethnic and religious minorities, while he deliberatively avoids mentioning sexual minorities. Supporting LGBT groups could have been perceived as a confrontation with the church (the patriarch announced that 17 May was the day of family sanctity and declared homosexuality a sin). Therefore, by supporting these groups the Georgian dream could have irritated society and eventually lost the voters. It should be noted that the Georgian court did not recognize the perpetrators of 17 May 2013 events, including one priest, as guilty.

Later, the European Court of Human Rights published its decision on the case and stated:

> Such protraction exposed the authorities' long-standing failure – perhaps unwillingness – to investigate homophobic and/or transphobic violence. It was imperative that the authorities investigate the possibility that discrimination played a part in the commission of an offence, given the well-documented hostility against the LGBT community in Georgia at the time (European Court of Human Rights, 2021).

3. 5. 3. Media Freedom and Independent Judiciary

Similar to the issues of human rights, Ivanishvili often mentions the previous government and the pressure under which Saakashvili put the free media and presents the government of the Georgian Dream as an antithetical counterpart to this portrayal. However, he raises an issue, such as the conditions of "great freedom", in which the media has become very diverse, and the opposition forces spread disinformation about the government through it:

> Today the media is open, people have to draw their own conclusions, which require proper experience, and that is still lacking in our society. Nevertheless, we will not respond to Saakashvili's propaganda and slander

with violence and prohibition, but with analysis and giving a name to the

events (I, 2016, C)

Ivanishvili's narrative contradicts the principles of democracy, according to which people should have the right to make their own decisions, especially because democracy is only legitimate when it's built on voting (Shaw, 2008). Therefore, if society lacked the skills to correctly analyze the situation and still elected Ivanishvili, his government could not also be considered legitimate. Additionally, Nika Gvaramia, the head of one of the leading critical TV companies, and a former minister of the National Movement was arrested during the Georgian Dream government's tenure, providing evidence that Ivanishvili extended his power in an attempt to silence the critical media. One of the opposition leaders, Nika Melia attributed the fact to the violation of European values:

Civil unification cannot happen in the presence of political prisoners. Just like the European integration cannot take place in the conditions of the capture of the free media and in parallel (M, 2022, E)

Furthermore, the government tried to enact a law frequently referred to as the "Russian law," which would have granted agent status to organizations that received more than 20 percent of their funding from foreign countries. The law introduced by Putin's regime in 2012 technically forces local and international media to leave the country (Salaru, 2022). In Georgia too, considering the critical media's heavy dependence on financial support from Western sources it can be described as an attempt to repress independent media outlets.

3. 5. 4. Opposition and Polarization

Ivanishvili's rhetoric when coming to power shows that he was not planning to persecute the opposition. Later, however, the narrative changed in several directions. Ivanishvili referred to the opposition as "pseudo-opposition" forces, radical groups, and then as dangerous forces for the state, who wanted to overthrow the government and then started a war and opened a second front with Russia -- putting the opposition and the West in the same frame. In this way, as commented by the opposition representatives, Ivanishvili's government wanted to disperse the opposition forces and lower their rating even more, which would keep the government in power

for the next elections, as the fear of war in the society would be associated with the opposition forces (Melia, 2022).

3. 5. 5. The Leadership Dimensions and Styles

Ivanishvili's political strategy, acquiring power, and maintenance of the power, including his tendency to leave and return to Georgian politics at his discretion (I, 2016, C), indicated a certain level of autonomy from socioeconomic groups and their political representatives. His party's approach as well can be described as intriguing in Georgian politics, as they pressed on the most problematic issues and used the mistakes of the previous government to their advantage (Anjaparidze, 2019). Even in matters of foreign policy, they chose a more neutral stance, emphasizing democratization and European integration while simultaneously seeking to improve relations with Russia under the idea of "peacekeeping" within the country (I, 2012, A). Consequently, although Ivanishvili may initially appear to exemplify an integrative leadership style, his actions of gradually portraying the West as an obstacle to peace and increasing negative sentiments toward Western partners, indicates that he did not harmonize with the society's true interests.

Additionally, Ivanishvili became a leader when Georgian politics faced significant challenges including human rights, media freedom,the penitentiary system, and the judiciary. Therefore, he emphasized the need for national unity, strengthening human rights, and Georgia's state institutions (I, 2012, A). The existing crises made it possible for Ivanishvili to come into power and fulfill the role of a Transformative leader role, as no other distinctive leaders emerged or managed to obtain public support. The support that Ivanishvili gained was not due to his personality, but rather because of his strategy to make public the footage of the torture of prisoners (Sichinava, 2015) and the prevailing circumstances which required an urgent need for a new political force in the country.

3.6. Democratization and Europeanization in Bidzina Ivanishvili's Opposition's Socio-Political Discourse

3. 6. 1. Framing Europe

Since 2012, the opposition's narrative in relation to Europe has changed in importance and intensity and has become not only a niche for foreign policy and a strategic partner but also a weapon against the enemy, internationally and domestically:

> We need the Western policy to be more active against Russia's aggression in our region, and not to give ground to those opinions in Europe and in the West in general, who believe that this space is a space of Russian influence, and the case is ruined by the intervention of the West. Because there is such a "school" of useful idiots, claiming so. The government of Georgia should not join these useful idiots (B, 2012, A)

Opposition leaders presented two alternative futures for Georgia -- one that is independent, free, and democratic and therefore belongs to Europe and the Western world, and the other that is clan-ruled, backward, lacking independence, and that belongs to Russia, indicating that there is no neutrality for Georgia. This is especially important in the Georgian case, as some conditions had to be in place to remain state neutrality, including a peaceful neighboring environment and the capability to defend yourself (Managarishvili, 2017). For Georgia, keeping neutrality does not eliminate the threat of Russia, and in case of aggression, the country cannot defend its interests independently.

Saakashvili using contrasts, on the one hand, equated Europe with himself and strengthened positive emotions towards Europe, and on the other hand, equated the Georgian dream with Putin's regime and tried to increase the negative attitude towards Russia: "Lech Kaczynski used to tell me, do you know the difference between Europe and Russia? If I am no longer president in Europe, I will have an honorable retirement and everyone will treat me well, you, in the Asian-Russian world, you can be killed." - Saakashvili cited the Polish politician in his speech at his court along with other European leaders, that he claimed to have close friendships with. This is another interesting detail about Saakashvili, he constantly emphasizes

how much he and Europe are intertwined, that he is the only politician with the necessary skills and knowledge who can lead Georgia on the Euro-Atlantic path.

Other opposition parties presented the European Union and the West as such a force for which autocratic leadership is unacceptable and which is interested in Georgia not as a territory, but as a democracy. This part of the opposition aimed to present the West and the European Union as a sphere of influence not only in Georgia, but throughout the region to completely eliminate Russia's imperial plans. They perceived that under the conditions of the current government, or in the case of Saakashvili's return, in the absence of a democratic regime, the West would give up on Georgia. To reinforce these messages, the opposition forces mentioned sanctions and the termination of European aid to Georgia:

> The West no longer considers the government of Georgia to be a reliable partner and will consider reducing aid if the country does not enter the bed of democratic development - that is, it does not have a government that provides democratic order and a fair investment environment (Tch, 2020, C)

3. 6. 2. Religion as a tool

The opposition used religion symbolically in their speeches. For example, one of the leaders of the European Georgia Party mentions St. George as "the superhero of Western and Eastern Christianity" who defeated the dragon. She added that in the case of Georgia, the dragon had two heads - Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili. Accordingly, one can preclude that in this context, St. George, the superhero of Western Christianity, is identified with the Georgian people, who, to win and achieve the European goal, must get rid of the two enemies of European values, Saakashvili and Ivanishvili (Tch, 2020, C).

3. 6. 3. Human Rights and Equality

Several main narratives regarding human rights and minorities can be observed in the opposition rhetoric. Among them are framing and instrumentalization, for example, Nika Melia and Elene Khoshtaria considered Nika Gvaramia's arrest "a serious obstacle to European integration" and a deliberate step taken by the government to not fulfill the 12 requirements of

the European Union to obtain the status of a candidate country. With this, Melia and Khoshtaria might try to arouse some specific emotions in society. First of all, determination to start wide protests demanding the release of Nika Gvaramia, otherwise there is danger that otherwise Europe will refuse the integration of Georgia.

The leaders of the European Georgia party actively denounce the ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia and call on the public to "act to recognize the genocide". This can also be perceived not only as a call to protect human rights but also as drawing a line and reminding the public how many crimes Russia had committed in Abkhazia.

3. 6. 4. Media Freedom and Independent Judiciary

One of the most frequently cited issues for opposition leaders is related to media and judicial freedom. Especially in the context of the arrest of Nika Gvaramia, the head of the TV Mtavari, who was sentenced to prison for harming the TV Rustavi 2. For instance, Nika Melia (M, 2022, E) says that the arrest of Gvaramia "does not give the public the right to mourn" and it should not stop them from defeating the oligarch. The narrative therefore, can be interpreted this way -- by arresting Gvaramia, which was hailed by the international community as a "step back on the road to democracy," the government tried to show that despite diplomatic pressure from the West, it can treat any individual the way as it pleases, thereby instilling despair and hopelessness among the people.

Saakashvili discussed judicial independence in his court hearing as well (S, 2021, D). However, in this case, Saakashvili's regrets that he, as the president, could not manage to leave an independent court for the next government, indicating that the court was not autonomous and was subject to the Georgian Dream Party influence.

3. 6. 5. Opposition and Polarization

The issue of polarization is in the rhetoric of different opposition leaders in different ways. Saakashvili (S, 2021, D) uses binary framing, where he contrasts himself and the Georgian Dream government. For instance, himself as a "builder" and the Georgian dream as a "destroyer".

Polarization is also observed in other opposition forces, as exemplified by the leader of the European Georgia party, Tamar Tchergoleishvili (Tch, 2020, C), who categorized voters into three distinct groups: supporters of the Georgian Dream, supporters of the National Movement, and those aligned with other opposition parties' ideology. Tamar Chergoleishvili claims that the latter group is aligned with the smaller opposition party's interests and values, and through it, intersects with Europe:

> What we know for sure is that both monsters, Ivanishvili and Saakashvili, against their will, largely have to play in the system whose rules were defined by the Georgian society, the intelligent part of the opposition, and the West (Tch, 2020, C)

3. 6. 6. The Leadership Dimensions and Styles

Analyzing Bidzina Ivanishvili's opposition through various dimensions and styles, reveals several outcomes. First, The opposition forces were scattered and lacked a unified focus on the same goals and objectives. At the same time, the most prominent opposition leaders had established connections or maintained ties with the National Movement Party, which, during Saakashvili's second term as president, obtained negative political reputation. Therefore, despite strategic thinking and prioritizing pressing societal issues, opposition leaders' efforts have not been perceived as effective. This lack of effectiveness may be the result of a lack of trust from the public. Consequently, depriving opposition forces to emerge one distinctive leader or exercise Integrative, Catalytic or Transformative leadership. Even the small fractions of the opposition, which align with the Integrative leadership style based on their political announcements and activities, demonstrate low ratings (around 5%) among the electorate (Transformation Index, 2022).

V. Conclusions

The research examined the speeches of different influential political figures in Georgia from 1991 to 2022 and attempted to identify major themes that have emerged and framed Democratization and Europeanization. Within the thematic framework, the following issues that appeared most frequently were recognized and analyzed: shaping the concept of "Europe", the instrumentalization of religion, promotion of human rights, minorities, and equality, opposition, and polarization, media freedom and independent judiciary and leadership dimensions and styles.

One of the major findings of the study is that throughout three turbulent decades, influential political figures tried to reshape the concepts of Europeanization and democratization and align them with their own political and personal interests. To achieve this, they used different prominent events as an instrument. One of the best examples of this is the religion which was frequently applied in a manner to create negative or positive attitudes toward Europe. Besides, over the years, these two concepts, which were initially used completely separately, have become almost inseparable from each other. It is also noticeable that most of the time democracy and Europeanization were used in a superficial manner and over time, were practically devoid of legitimacy.

With time, the significance and influence of Europeanization and democratization exhibited a sharp increase. For Shevardnadze, democracy promotion was an attempt to cover the narrative of his opposition, Gamsakhurdia's nationalist ideology and represent him as a completely unacceptable figure for the West. While Europe was only considered a strategic partner to take as an example. Gamsakhurdia, on the other hand, clearly separated Europeanization and democratization and believed that democracy could have been achieved without Europe's support. He considered the West to be as dangerous an enemy as the Soviet Union. The reason for this approach could have lied on two grounds: first, Gamsakhurdia believed those big political powers desired to eliminate national identity and religion; second, as Shevardnadze was an experienced politician with a wide network across the globe, Gamsakhurdia perceived the West as Shevardnadze's ally and accordingly his enemy, therefore attempted to frame the West as an anti-Georgian power.

Later, however, when Saakashvili appeared on the horizon, he created a new concept of nationalism for the Georgian society and persuaded them that the Georgian identity was identical to the European one. He also appropriated these concepts personally and effectively equated Western and democratic values with himself. Possibly this became the basis of the strategy of Georgia's next leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili, to use the accumulated negative attitude towards the former president in society for other purposes. Namely, Ivanishvili's government framed Europe (along with the USA) and National Movement (Saakashvili's party) as forces that aim to start a war in Georgia. National Movement with strong European aspirations and the EU, in the same, pro-war narrative could have killed two birds with one stone. One might inquire, why the Georgian Dream government accuses its biggest strategic and financial support of wrongdoing that can result in devastating consequences for the country and its residents.

Although the research timeframe does not cover 2023, some of the events that unfolded in 2023 in Georgia, might provide a possible answer and possible topic to further examine. To name a few, Russia restored a visa-free regime with Georgia in May 2023. This can be considered a reward for the Georgian government, which neither took an anti-Russian stance when the war started in Ukraine nor refused to raise sanctions against Putin's regime.

> After missing the candidate status in 2022, Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream Party has
> done everything to "persuade" European partners that it did not deserve this status. The arrest of
> journalist Nika Gvaramia, mistreatment of former president Mikheil Saakashvili, increased
> polarization [of political life], deliberate torpedoing of the ombudsman's election process, and
> reluctance to join EU policies and sanctions on Ukraine were enough to push away even the
> biggest friends in the EU. However, introducing the foreign agents' law, a la Russian playbook
> [KGB/FSB], makes even the ardent supporters of Georgia wonder whether this is done to
> deliberately invoke the EU's negative position on the candidate's status (Sergi Kapanadze as cited
> in Gente, 2023).

The current government does not prioritize the twelve priorities recommended by the European Commission. This is frequently seen as an attempt to persuade people that the government worked for the priorities but it does not happen to be enough for Europeans (Gente, 2023). Therefore, the Georgian case represents a conundrum for the EU. Shall it grant the status to the Georgian people or punish the government and refuse to do so? Although the Georgian

population has demonstratively chosen a pro-European political course, it also experienced the trauma of two wars during the last three decades. Therefore, what possible ways the Georgian dream strategies on the candidate statues and the "pro-war" narrative might work is yet to be determined.

The categorization of leaders in this context warrants attention too. The majority of political leaders in Georgia do not fit into the classification of conventional leader archetypes. Rather, a pattern emerges wherein leaders emerge unexpectedly when two events take place simultaneously -- when a political crisis takes place and the government's rating is diminished. These leaders usually possess very little or no political experience, which seemingly engenders a high level of public trust in them. Yet, the public exhibits little to no trust toward the opposition factions that previously governed. Consequently, the opposition struggles to consolidate its power and, while the electorate awaits a better alternative, the government, despite its low approval rating, continues to stay in power.

To conclude, the Democratization and Europeanization processes and the quality of the realization of the positive developments in practice, are significantly influenced by different types of leaders in power, the leaders who can potentially take the power from them (the opposition forces), and the ways they choose to frame these concepts within the realm of political processes.

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