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**The Path to Georgia's European Dream: A Media
Analysis of Rhetoric, Reality, and Russian Influence**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Year of the defense: 2024

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 30.04.2024

Anna Zamtaradze

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Abstract

The research explores the complex interplay between Georgia's European integration efforts and the impact of Russian soft power within the country. Through an extensive media analysis spanning recent important political events, the study investigates the dichotomy between Georgia's official foreign policy documents and the informal public and political discourse that deviates from pledged responsibilities. The research employs Joseph Nye's Soft Power as the main theoretical basis for the thesis and emphasizes its presence through two legislative case studies, both of which first materialized in Russia. Through qualitative research and the exploration of rhetoric vs reality in Georgian politics, the research highlights the challenges and opportunities facing Georgia at the geopolitical crossroads between Russia and Europe. Finally, the research concludes that there is a notable gap between official aspirations and reality as a result of Russian interference in Georgian politics.

Abstrakt

Výzkum zkoumá složitou souhru mezi evropským integračním úsilím Gruzie a vlivem ruské měkké moci v zemi. Prostřednictvím rozsáhlé mediální analýzy zahrnující nedávné významné politické události studie zkoumá dichotomii mezi oficiálními zahraničněpolitickými dokumenty Gruzie a neformálním veřejným a politickým diskurzem, který se odchyluje od slíbených povinností. Výzkum využívá měkkou moc Josepha Nyeho jako hlavní teoretický základ práce a zdůrazňuje její přítomnost prostřednictvím dvou legislativních případových studií, které se poprvé zhmotnily v Rusku. Prostřednictvím kvalitativního výzkumu a zkoumání rétoriky vs. reality v gruzínské politice výzkum poukazuje na výzvy a příležitosti, kterým Gruzie čelí na geopolitické křižovatce mezi Ruskem a Evropou. Závěrem výzkum dochází k závěru, že v důsledku

ruského vměšování do gruzínské politiky existuje pozoruhodná propast mezi oficiálními aspiracemi a realitou.

Keywords

Georgia, Russia, Soft power, Media analysis, EU, Euro-Integration, Foreign agent law

Klíčová slova

Gruzie, Rusko, Měkká síla, Mediální analýza, EU, Euro-integrace, Zákon o zahraničních agentech

Název práce

“Cesta k evropskému snu Gruzie: Mediální analýza rétoriky, reality a ruského vlivu”

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Abbreviations

UNM – United National Movement

GD – Georgian Dream

EU- The European Union

USA – United States of America

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

ROC – Russian Orthodox Church

GOC – Georgian Orthodox Church

DO – De-Oligarchisation

NGO – Non-Government Organisation

FARA – Foreign Agents Registration Act

RFAL - Russian Foreign Agents Law

GFAL – Georgian Foreign Agents Law

CSO – Civil society Organisations

NCO- Non-Commissioned Officer

OPIFP - Organization Pursuing the Interests of a Foreign Power

NNLE - Non-Entrepreneurial (Non-Commercial) Legal Entities

CFSP - Common Foreign and Security Policy

Introduction

Article 78 of the Georgian Constitution named, “Integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structure” reads: “The constitutional bodies should take all measures within their powers to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)” (Constitution of Georgia, 1995).

Georgian Foreign Policy strategy also names Euro-Integration as one of its most important goals (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2022).

The current climate of Georgian politics, following the first peaceful change of power in 2012, has seen a rise in concepts that can be categorized under the umbrella of “That which shall not be named” (L. Ghambashidze, personal communication, March 09, 2024). Official documents, addresses, and even policies all point towards one destination – the West, The EU. Yet close inspection of Georgian internal political rhetoric forces one to take notice of an amalgamation of trends pointing toward a path that involves a very problematic neighbor. Thus, the analysis of the dichotomy between official documents and unofficial addresses through extensive media analysis and close attention to social trends is necessary to fully grasp coveted and sometimes blatant intentions. Simultaneously, the thesis aims to draw attention to the harmful rhetoric of the “Georgian Dream” party emphasizing how GD has slowly been feeding Georgian citizens a Russian narrative, while seemingly advocating for further integration with the West.

Georgia applied for candidate status in March 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops. In June of 2022 while Moldova and Ukraine were granted candidacy, upon further inspection Georgia's application was deemed unsuccessful and the country was given 12 priorities to uphold to be reconsidered. In December 2023, Georgia was granted candidacy with the understanding that it would address the 9 steps laid out for admission. The systemic analysis of contradictory action through media analysis attempts to showcase the extent of Russian Soft power in the Georgian State of affairs and accentuates the deliberate wrongdoing of the Georgian government in terms of fulfillment of necessary criteria. This juxtaposition of declared European aspirations against a backdrop of actions and narratives that suggest a different commitment raises critical questions about the authenticity of political discourse and the underlying motivations driving Georgian politics. The exploration of this dichotomy is not simply academic but speaks to the possibilities of Georgia's future trajectory away from Russia and its influence. By dissecting the nuanced layers of political communication, both public and covert, the thesis attempts to showcase the real stakes in Georgia's quest for European integration. It also seeks to shed light on aspects where rhetoric and reality diverge, offering a more profound understanding of the strategic interplays at work. In doing so, it aspires to contribute meaningfully to the discourse of the results of soft power influence, and the ongoing struggle for breaking away from the labels in the post-Soviet space, while emphasizing implications for Georgian-European relations if such narratives are allowed to fester.

The timeline of research will extensively cover incidents from the beginning of the Russian war in Ukraine and heavily focus on conduct following the 12 priorities laid out by the European Commission for candidacy followed by 9 essential steps for Georgia to ascent

to the EU. The thesis will first explore the theories surrounding soft power, addressing the use of it in Georgia by both the EU and Russia, to establish differences. Furthermore, the thesis will analyze the EU Commission's working document on enlargement and following the laid-out recommendations will use two case studies to support the mentioned arguments. Despite the strategic and constitutional pledges mentioned above, the thesis tries to establish a theme that sheds light on deliberate action toward Russia rather than the West arguing that not only is Russia influencing Georgian politics through the warped use of soft power, leading it away from the west, but that such influence has directly inspired Georgian legislation, leading Politicians to directly copy Russian rhetoric and laws.

Chapter 1 – Research Objectives

1.1 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this thesis is to analyze the dichotomy between Georgia's official foreign policy documents regarding its aspirations to join the European Union and the informal discourse as presented through media analysis and observation of social trends. This research aims to fill a significant gap in existing literature, as there is currently a negligible amount of scholarly work addressing the nuanced interplay between Georgia's formal diplomatic endeavors and its informal public and political dialogues on EU integration. Specifically, the research objectives are to examine official foreign policy documents by analyzing the content and commitments outlined in Georgia's official foreign policy as well as the constitutional documents related to the European Union, with a particular focus on

adherence to the nine steps clearly laid out by the EU Commission for Georgia's future path towards integration. This will include a thorough review of governmental publications, diplomatic communications, and strategic plans aimed at aligning with EU standards and expectations. This will also include the Commission's staff working document analysis on their views of Georgian conduct in fulfilling the steps. Furthermore, the thesis will try to investigate informal public and political discourse by conducting a comprehensive media analysis and interviews to capture the informal narratives, perceptions, and attitudes regarding political interplay in Georgia. This will involve assessing various media platforms, including traditional and social media, and conducting interviews with NGO members, media representatives, experts, and citizens to gather a diverse range of perspectives. To identify and analyze the dichotomy the thesis explores the contradictions, and convergences between the formal and informal narratives surrounding Georgia's EU integration efforts. Based on the analysis, the thesis attempts to provide concrete evidence of instances where informal discourse and practices may diverge from the official policies and commitments made towards EU integration. This involves a critical examination of both (sometimes more) sets of narratives to identify specific areas of misalignment or contradiction concerning the nine steps outlined by the EU Commission. Finally, the thesis tries to observe all this under the umbrella of Soft Power by investigating how soft power dynamics between Russia and Georgia have contributed to the ease of manipulation by the current Georgian government. The thesis assesses the effectiveness of Russian soft power strategies in comparison to those employed by the EU and how these dynamics have impacted Georgia's EU integration efforts by examining the differences between the European Union's approach and Russia's approach to exerting soft power in Georgia. While simultaneously establishing themes of converging narratives and ultimately legislative action between Georgia and Russia.

Through these research objectives, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges Georgia faces on its path toward European integration, particularly in reconciling its official stance with the realities of domestic public and political discourse.

1.2 Research Questions and Hypothesis

The thesis aims to answer the following research question:

How does the dichotomy between official documents and public statements regarding EU ascension by Georgian politicians reflect the country's actual progress in fulfilling the nine steps required for EU integration, and to what extent is Georgia moving closer to or further from Russia, particularly in the context of soft power influence?

The hypothesis of the thesis is the following:

The research hypothesises that there are notable discrepancies between what is being projected externally vs what is being said/done internally in terms of fulfilling laid-out criteria and that there is a significant Russian influence in action.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Media Analysis

Media content analysis which is a specialized sub-part of content analysis, is a well-established research methodology (McNamara, n.d), within the thesis, media analysis, or more broadly, media research, involves an overview of a wide array of media sources. By engaging in a cross-checking of information, reported events, and public speeches circulating within some of the most prominent media outlets in Georgia the thesis aims to construct a comprehensive and nuanced picture of the discourse dynamics at play. The process allows the author to identify discrepancies and informational asymmetry (especially considering that the masses get most of the information from the media rather than an overview of official documents). As, Content analysis allows for the identification of specified characteristics within text (Stone, Dunphy, Smith & Ogilvie, 1996, with credit given to Holsti, p. 5). This methodology is particularly crucial in contexts where media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and policy directions. Through this lens, the thesis attempts to address cases through which narratives are constructed and propagated.

2.2 Qualitative Approach

The thesis takes on a qualitative approach as most of the main texts on qualitative research showcase the emphasis such research has when it comes to the importance of context, depth, and the researcher's interpretive role in understanding certain events (Patton, 2015). Essentially the approach was favoured for its capacity to prioritize human experience and perception, and in turn provide a nuanced perspective on social realities where unlike its quantitative counterpart, which focuses more on the numerical statistical aspects of analysis, it seeks to push deeper into the subjective experiences of individuals, collecting data through methods such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis

(Denzin, et. Al, 2011). Most importantly the approach was chosen for its capacity to serve as a liaison in understanding the complexities of human behaviour.

2.3 Selection of period for media analysis

The time period for media analysis in this thesis is anchored around recent events to ensure the most relevant and impactful insights. Specifically chosen to encompass the most critical recent developments in Georgia's path toward the European Union. The focus is drawn on data from the periods following two key events: first, after June 2022, when the European Union, upon reviewing Georgia's application for candidacy, recommended that the country address 12 specific steps to be reconsidered. The second was after December 2022, when Georgia was granted EU candidacy on the condition that it undertake and satisfactorily address nine steps outlined by the EU Commission. Nevertheless, there are some deviations to more historically important periods as they serve as prime illustrators for necessary themes within the context of the thesis.

2.4 Selection of media outlets

Georgian media outlets (Formula Originals, Civil. ge, Radio Freedom, Eurasia. net, Front News Georgia, Inter Press News (IPN), Mtavari TV, News Hub, Real Politika, OC media, et. Al) for analysis were selected based on popularity and credibility in Georgia. It is important to note that for maximum impartiality, both major pro and anti-government outlets were consulted. Furthermore, blatantly pro-Russian/Russian-funded outlets were not taken as objective providers of information but were observed for the sake of comparison.

2.5 Selection of case study

The first case study regarding the “Foreign Agent Law” was selected for its recency and its capacity to serve as a prime illustration of how narratives can be manipulated through disinformation and the public's lack of knowledge on the topic. It stands as a vivid example of the strategies employed to sway public opinion and policy directions, highlighting the challenges posed by the deliberate spread of misinformation from the Government. In an era where access to information is unprecedented, the case reveals the paradox of an informed society being vulnerable to manipulation due to the overwhelming abundance and strategic fabrication of data. The law is also an illustrator of Russian involvement, and the susceptibility of Georgian politics to copy Russian laws.

The second case study, regarding the “anti-LGBT” law, which is rooted in constitutional change, was also chosen for its recency and relevance. Primarily chosen to showcase blatant misalignment with EU values and human rights. Especially at a time when Georgia has pledged to represent European values on its way to integration. The case study will try to emphasize the conjuncture between Russian and Georgian Policy, the reason behind such convergences, and the manipulation of public discourse through populist sentiment.

2.6 Sources

The study incorporated research from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included legislation from the EU, Georgia as well as Russia, along with four independent correspondences conducted by the author. While the majority of the research

was done consulting blogs, articles, independent research, speeches, and addresses the research also incorporated the analysis of relevant books, official state documents, legal portfolios, personal writings of officials, and foreign-funded research. Seeing as the thesis was mostly concerned with secondary sources, as in media outlets, it was imperative for the author to take utmost responsibility in choosing credible and relevant sources, all of which were double and often triple-checked with other media resources.

2.7 Limitations

This thesis faces several notable limitations that must be acknowledged. The freshness of the topic means there are limited academic frameworks and previous studies to reference or fall back on for support which may affect the depth and scope of the analysis. Secondly, media sources, which form a crucial part of the informal discourse analysis, may exhibit bias. The polarized nature of media in Georgia, especially in recent years, can lead to skewed representations of public and political opinion, affecting the objectivity and comprehensiveness of the media analysis conducted for this thesis. Finally, the notable inconsistencies, shown through varying statements and positions within Georgia's ruling party and among different politicians introduce a considerable degree of information asymmetry. This variability can complicate the analysis, making it challenging to discern clear, cohesive trends or positions regarding EU integration.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

In conducting the thesis the author took great care in the consensual nature of interviews and surveys. Ensuring that the consent of participants and sources was always

maintained. The author made concerted efforts to anonymize any identifiable information unless explicit consent was provided by the participants. Secondly, the author was acutely aware of the need to maintain impartiality and avoid biases during media analysis and interviews. Striving to present a balanced view of the various perspectives encountered. Lastly, the author committed to transparency throughout the research process. Being clear about the aims of the research with participants from the onset.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 The General Concept of Soft Power

“The dictionary tells us that power means an ability to do things and control others to get others to do what they otherwise would not” (Nye, 1990), this is what Joseph Nye emphasizes in the beginning of his book regarding – soft power, a term, initially coined by him in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*” (1990). He attests that while traditionally the test of power lay in war and military strength, the modern reality of the time had brought in factors like technology, education, and economic growth as significant contributors to international power (Nye, 1990). Nye originally discussed soft power, only through the lens of the United States, and how the country would be able to understand its place in the post-cold-war period, without Soviet threats. According to Nye (1990), the measurement of the U.S. success would come in the form of its capacity to control the political environment and get other countries to do what it wants rather than the abundance of resources it possesses. He quotes Kissinger, the biggest believer in the classical balance of power in politics, who in 1975 conceded that the world’s increasing globalisation

would bring about a change in the manner of exertion of power. It is through these attestations that he prompts the acceptance of the limitations of traditional (hard) military power and supplements it with the idea of soft power. Nye (2008) categorizes soft power as an ability to affect others through attraction rather than coercion. He identifies three main resources a country must possess to exercise soft power: Culture (attractiveness to others), political values (domestic and foreign), and foreign policy (must be legitimate and have moral authority) (Nye, 2008). Nye's belief in the necessity of having power to make others want what you want is accepted but slightly expanded by Alexander L. Vuving to whom the word "want" requires more precision when it comes to understanding the true scope of soft power (Vuving, 2009). Vuving delves deeper into the concept of attraction as the main essence of soft power, his analysis suggests that soft power is not merely a matter of cultural or political export but involves a complex interaction between the source and the target. To him, it's about creating a context where the values and practices of one nation are adopted by others because they find them attractive or convincing, not because they are coerced or paid to do so (Vuving, 2009). Although soft power in practice has shown a warped perspective where the coveted exertion of power is not always done through a manner of attraction.

3.2 Russian Soft Power

Russia has institutionalized soft power on the state level, in a way that it now has a formal usage as a weapon of political battle (Tughushi, et. Al, 2016). Unlike the more traditionally understood Western concepts of soft power, which base themselves on attraction rather than coercion through cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policy initiatives that have the tendency of promoting democracy and human rights, Russia has an approach that diversifies traditionally used tools. These tools include heavy media propaganda, the

Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) the Russian diaspora, language, and economic investments, all of which are used in a harmful self-indulgent manner rather than an enriching one. Furthermore, Russia utilizes informational warfare and cyber operations to shape narratives and public opinion in its spheres of influence to achieve its agenda. It is important to note that “For Russian leaders, soft power is not about attraction; it instead refers to non-military instruments for manipulating, undermining, and weakening opponents, a supplement to Moscow’s military power” (Meister, 2016). Aleksandr Dugin who is the main ideologue of the model Russia has adopted for soft power, states that Eurasianism is the opposite of Western civilization and that Russia’s interests of the state should prevail over common democratic principles, this is further accentuated through the Russian use of the concept of “Sovereign Democracy”, accentuating Russian disinterest in general common laws and practices if it means the upkeep of Russian interests (L. Ghambashidze, personal communication, March 09, 2024). The model of the Russian world is based on conservative values that unite Russian people under the narrative that the US is a common enemy (WMC, 2016), on a path of undermining Russian values and international standing. One of the interesting factors within Russian Soft Power lies in the way Putin categorizes it, as an informal interaction with the outside world (Mkheidze, 2021, p.33), which in turn lays the groundwork for organizations like the Rossotrudnichestvo (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation), as well as Russkiy Mir (Russian World) foundation, both of which were originally aimed at promoting Russian language and culture in the post-Soviet countries (Meister, 2016), but often serve as tools for propaganda as well as intelligence operations and advocacy for Kremlins Policies (Cohen, 2012). In essence, Russian "soft power" bases itself on Propaganda and disinformation instead of attraction, and by spreading

this misinformation, it ultimately threatens the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of countries in its scope of interest (Khubulashvili, 2023).

3.2.1. Russian Soft Power in Georgia

As a successor of the Soviet Union, it is one of Russia's primary goals to maintain its power of influence within the Caucasus region (Gozalishvili, 2018). With the region's weak character in economic and political institutions following the Soviet Rule, Russia's scope of influence, from the very moment the soviet rule dispersed has been festering in areas that these countries had not experienced autonomous function in years (Herzig, 1999). This scope of interest grew, especially as Georgia gained its geopolitical worth to Western countries. As Russo-Georgian relations were deteriorating during the United National Movement government (UNM) with them, banning Russian TV channels in 2008, a total embargo of Georgian exports to Russia in 2006, and the invasion of Georgia resulting in the occupation of South Ossetia in 2008 (with prior annexation of Abkhazia in 1993), the scope of Russian Soft power in Georgia was readily decreasing (Kapanadze, 2015). Yet, the change of power with Bidzina Ivanishvili at the helm who made his billions in Russia during the 1990's, showcases blatant alignment with certain Russian narratives in all aspects of Russo-Georgian relations. Notably, the alignment with the Russian agenda of who started the war in 2008, shed light on the beginning stages of GD participating in the spread of Russian propaganda in Georgia by blaming the 2008 invasion on Georgian provocation. Which, similarly, was deemed the same by RT (Russian TV), one of the biggest (which is considerable, as most of the Russian media is controlled by the Kremlin (Pomerantsev, 2014)) Russian state-controlled international television networks funded by the Russian government. With an American radio show host, Alex Jones appearing on RT to condemn America's support of

Georgia during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war by accusing Georgia of sneak attacks against Russia (Cohen, 2012), the country largely started to imply the newly adopted Western path of Georgia, with ultimate European integration in mind was to be seen as a threat to Russian sovereignty (Utiashvili, 2014). Ultimately, observation of previous practice as well as literature showcases the interconnectedness of hard power within the Soft Power framework created by the Kremlin (Khubulashvili, 2023) the manifestations of which are seen in cases of both Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014/2022). With the Bucharest NATO Summit, which gave membership promises to Georgia, followed by the 2008 war and the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine followed by the annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas (Kapanadze, 2019), and recently the obvious pro-western actions of Ukraine resulting in a full-scale invasion. From distorting reality through intelligent use of media, where observation of the new policy of the Kremlin demonstrates that Putin has taken information propaganda into the context of national security, through significant influence on both the domestic and international communities, (Tughushi, et. Al, 2016) to creating memory alliances through the perpetration of historical narratives (McGlynn, 2020) and extreme use of Orthodox Church, Russian Soft-Power has deep roots in both Georgian governance and daily life.

3. 3 EU Soft Power

The EU's soft power is rooted in its reputation as a successful model of regional integration, democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law (Nye, 2020). Specifically in the case of the EU, soft power is “normative” (Manners, 2002) and takes the form of “civilian power” (Patalakh, 2017), meaning that it actually follows the initially laid out criteria of owing its influence on attraction rather than to coercion.

3.3.1. EU Soft Power in Georgia

With the strategic importance of the Caucasus region in connecting Central Asia and Europe through the Black Sea, creating transport corridors as well as having the capacity to diversify the EU's energy resources (Borrell, 2021), and Georgia being a strategic access point to Russia as well as, other important areas, it is obvious that the EU's enlargement into the south Caucasus is important for both strategic and personal reasons. Nevertheless, despite personal gain EU's interest in Georgia largely lies in the will of the country to integrate further with the West (Gozalishvili, 2018). The strategy that the EU has adopted with Georgia, has been conducted through the EU Neighbour Policy as well as later the EU Eastern Partnership Program, working with the country to further stabilize the shaky foundations that the governing institutions have been built on following the collapse of the Soviet Union (ibid). Primarily working with the country to strengthen its democracy, civil society, rule of law, etc (Formula Originals, 2024a). Essentially, the general introduction of European Values into daily life, through funding the NGOs, or sending delegations has primarily worked towards creating a stable and peaceful neighbour (Gozalishvili, 2018), with the readiness to integrate with a much more economically and politically stable international actor. From the EU approving the Visa-free-movement of Georgia to the EU in 2017 (European Union, 2011) to the EU giving Georgia, candidacy status, during one of its more turbulent political times, EU soft power has majorly established positive attitudes regarding integration and has used its power to primarily counter the intense propaganda and aggression predominantly asserted by Russia. Different sectors such as Education, have seen the rise in EU involvement, yet most of it has been done through exchange programs like Erasmus Mundus, with a further capacity of creating higher standards, by allowing Georgian citizens to enjoy education in 34+ partner countries, as well as making Georgia a more available

destination for student of the EU as well (Gozalishvili, 2018). Through this, since 2021, over 6,500 students and professionals have taken part in exchanges between the EU and Georgia (EU Enlargement Factsheet, 2024). With EU is Georgia's largest provider of financial assistance, with €1.9 billion of mobilized investment in Georgia since 2021, €205 million being direct grants, along with a total of €63 million being mobilized under the European Peace Facility to help strengthen the Georgian Defence Force's medical, engineering, logistics and cyber-defense capabilities as well as the EU Foreign Direct Investment in Georgia reaching €819 million in 2022 (Total volume of trade in goods with the EU was €4.2 billion in 2022) and more than €340 Millions of fundings planned within the time frame of 2021-2024 (EU Enlargement Factsheet, 2024); It remains obvious that the EU is one of the firmest supporters of Georgia's sovereignty as well as territorial integrity and has been using soft-power from the beginning of more formal relations in 2003 (more intensively), for establishing positively attractive, rather than intrusive practices in its approach towards the country.

3.4 Short comparison of EU and Russian Soft power in Georgia

To analyse the soft power strategies of Russia and the EU in Georgia, it is essential to evaluate the fundamental principles and methods each entity employs to exert influence in the region. Russia, being a historical and regional powerhouse with a history of dominance over Georgia, utilizes soft power by exploiting the vulnerabilities present within Georgian institutions. As mentioned in the previous analysis following the Soviet era, Georgia's political and economic landscape was fragile, creating fertile ground for Russian interests. Russian soft power is predominantly exercised through media channels, such as RT, disseminating narratives that serve Russian geopolitical objectives and aligning local actors

with their agenda. The manipulation of media to distort perceptions and sway public opinion has been a consistent feature of Russian influence, not only in Georgia but also in other regions where it aims to maintain control or counter Western integration (T. Dekanosidze, personal communication, 17 April, 2024). Furthermore, their use of emotional manipulation by the constant threat of exploiting crucial economic relations as well as territorial integrity characterizes the techniques employed by Russia as aggressive. Conversely, the EU's soft power strategy focuses on strengthening and developing already existing shaky institutions. In contrast to Russia, which thrives on institutional instability in its spheres of interest, the EU's approach is centered on promoting stability, democracy, civil society, and the rule of law through collaborative initiatives. This not only assists Georgia in building a more stable state infrastructure but also aligns its values and standards with those of the EU, facilitating the path toward integration (L. Ghambashidze, personal communication, March 9, 2024). The visa-free arrangement that the EU extends to Georgia epitomizes this strategy. It represents a tangible benefit that fosters goodwill, enhances interpersonal connections, and reinforces the EU's reputation as a partner union that values freedom and cooperation. In contrast, Russia lacks a similar agreement with Georgia, highlighting the restrictive and authoritarian nature of Russian influence in comparison to the openness advocated by the EU. In essence, while Russia's soft power strategy in Georgia is intertwined with coercive tactics and leverages the remnants of Soviet-era influence to maintain a grip on the country, the EU's approach is fundamentally different. It is based on the attraction of shared values, mutual benefits, a partnership that looks towards a future of integrated cooperation, and most importantly the will of the people (See Appendix 2).

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Evaluation of the Commission's Report

The Georgian Government has declared EU membership as its main strategic goal, emphasizing its efforts to make changes of a legislative manner to align with EU values (Commission Report, 2023). With the approval of the 2023 action plan for EU integration, as well as the promise of upholding the 12 priorities first laid out by the Commission in the opinion issued in March 2022, when Georgia applied for EU membership (Commission Opinion, 2022), the EU has started a comprehensively intensive overview of Georgia's actions. Replacing the previously made reports, The 2023 "Commission staff working document" is the first annual enlargement Report on Georgia, which assesses the fulfillment of the 12 priorities and is crucial to this research as it was one of the main appraising documents that finally led to the Commission's recommendation to the Council to grant Georgia the status of a candidate country (on the understanding that the newly laid out 9 steps would be taken) in December of 2023. While the document touches upon many aspects of reform required for Georgia to align with EU values and standards, a few of them are especially crucial to the research. The document focuses on political criteria, civil society, public administration reform, the judiciary, the fight against corruption, fighting organized crime, fundamental rights, freedom of expression, gender equality, migration, asylum, economic criteria, public procurement, statistics, financial control, good neighborly relations, and regional cooperation, assumption of the obligations of EU membership and a few other clusters concerning growth, sustainability, resources, and external relations. The document's "final verdict" after the overview of the aforementioned criteria, showed that the commission expected Georgia to considerably increase its alignment rate with EU statements and Council

decisions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and mostly highlighted steps taken to improve overall alignment (Commission Report, 2023).

A few of the laid-out criteria stand out when it comes to assessing the true path the Georgian government is on concerning EU integration, especially with the developments following the reception of the candidate status and the resulting emboldening of the officials (Young Greens, personal communication, April 16, 2024). The first is the issue of Fundamental Rights. The document assesses Georgia's progress in the topic as mostly satisfactory but highlights a few issues. The document states that Georgia has essentially ratified most of the international human rights conventions and instruments and as a result complies with the overall obligations laid out by the international human rights law (ibid). Nevertheless, the main issues found within the criteria were regarding blatant discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, notably, the document underlines the lack of legislative inclusion, in the 2022 Human Rights strategy, concerning the rights of LGBTIQ persons (ibid). In the recommendations aspect of the working document which is the basis for the 9 steps necessary for the commencement of talks for integration, it is clearly highlighted that the EU expects Georgia to: "Investigate and prosecute the organizers of the violence on 5 July 2021 and 8 July 2023 at Tbilisi Pride, adopt the Human Rights action plan ensuring also the rights of LGBTIQ persons; ensure full respect and protection for freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, in particular by reforming the code on administrative offenses, including through a broad participation by stakeholders" (ibid, p28) in the coming year. In complete opposition to this the Georgian Dream (GD) has announced constitutional changes to outlaw the so-called LGBTIQ+ "propaganda" as well as gender transitioning (Shoshiashvili, 2024), the draft includes points in complete opposition with both EU values,

emphasized recommendations and minimum expectations (more on this in the discussion of the case study).

Another notable aspect of the document is freedom of expression. The document highlights Georgia's limited progress by acknowledging that the country has improved its World Press Freedom Index by 12 places, going from the 89th position in 2022 to 77th in 2023 (ibid). Nevertheless, the documents also acknowledge persisting challenges in exercising freedom of assembly, and while the document mostly concerns itself with the freedom of expression in terms of media, the text does not consider the bill initiation by the GD in February of 2023, regarding "Foreign Agents" or "Agents of Foreign Influence". While the bill was rescinded at the time, the recent reintroduction brings back problematic stances, especially when it comes to freedom of expression both for Media as well as NGOs. The bill not only undermines the credibility of action towards more freedom of expression but also puts under question the issue of Fundamental rights, the implementation of which already has issues of its own. As observed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, in November of 2023 the bill raised (and still raises, as it has been recently reintroduced) issues that directly impact Human Rights defenders (Lawlor, 2023). Through damage in relationships with municipal authorities, increased encouragement to far-right and ultra-conservative groups, aiming to limit the working capacity of both NGOs and independent media outlets aiming to corroborate Western ideals as their agenda has been furthered by the strong legislative backing through the bill (Lawlor, 2023). The recent reintroduction of the bill raises questions not only within the 9th step of the expectations package but around most of them as it creates further distrust and instability in already shaky EU- Georgian relations.

It is also important to note that the document includes other more specific demands that need to be met by the GD for future integration. Some of the relevant include Addressing Polarisation and Fight against Corruption which includes an action plan regarding de-oligarchisation. Both strongly add to the discourse on existing gaps and discrepancies between strategic/legal goals and action, as extensive media and social analysis showcases GD's direct non-cooperativeness on the subject (T. Dekanosidze, personal communication, April 17, 2024). The document itself criticizes the existing cross-party tensions, and the inability of the ruling and opposing parties to collaborate, hence the issue being highlighted as the 3rd step to overcome, to establish a more stable political arena (ibid, page 4). Despite the EU's constant vigilance in mediating between the GD and most notably the UNM, the GD continues to discredit other political parties by calling them an amalgamation of the "Global War Party" which is their name for UNM (L. Ghambashidze, personal communication, March 9, 2024). Furthermore, the clause that addresses the fight against corruption acknowledges Georgia's action plan on de-oligarchisation (DO) which was sent to the Venice Commission in September of 2023. While it is also acknowledged that the action plan builds on the EU Commission's recommendations and the opinion of the Venice Commission, it is highlighted that further action is necessary to complete the action plan and start its implementation by "establishing a track record of investigations, prosecution, adjudication and final convictions of corruption cases, notably at high-level and, in particular, to address the challenge of large-scale vested interests and their influence in both the political, judicial and economic spheres" (ibid, page5,10). Nevertheless, it is interesting how the GD plans to achieve this when, the biggest oligarch in question -Bidzina Ivanishvili, announced in December of 2023, that he would be stepping out of the shadows and returning to the world of politics to "protect the government from human temptation" (Civil.ge, 2023).

Case Study 1: Georgian Foreign Agent Law

4.1.1 Introduction

The analysis prepared by USAID, East-West Management Institute, ICNL, and the European Centre for Non-Profit Law, gives a comprehensive overview of the legal wrongdoings the adoption of Georgia of the Foreign agent law will cause. The analysis revealed several noncompliances with previously taken legal obligations as well as EU standards necessary for integration. The findings were as follows: “As a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights (ICCPR), if the Draft Law is adopted, Georgia will fail to comply with Article 11 of the ECHR and Article 22 of the ICCPR on freedom of association and assembly; Article 14 of ECHR and Article 26 of the ICCPR on prohibition of discrimination; and potentially, Article 8 of the ECHR and Article 17 of the ICCPR on right to respect for private and family life. Further, the provisions of the Draft Law are in violation of several EU laws, including the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 63) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (Articles 7, 8, and 12), creating additional obstacles for Georgia’s EU accession. On June 18, 2020, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that Hungary’s Law on Transparency of Organizations Supported from Abroad (Transparency Law), which had similar provisions to the Draft Law, was in violation of EU law. As a result of the ECJ ruling, Hungary repealed the law in 2021. No other European countries have legislation similar to the Draft Law” (ICNL & ECNL, 2023).

4.1.2 What is the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)?

The background of the United States Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) lies in the time frame before World War II and was enacted in 1938 with the purpose of addressing heavy Nazi propaganda before the war (Frequently Asked Questions (FARA), n.d.). The law aimed to be aware of those “engaging in political activities for or on behalf of foreign governments, foreign political parties, or other foreign principals, so that their statements and activities could be appraised in the light of their associations” (Report of the Attorney General, 2006). The law contains three important features that distinguish it from others (1) FARA requires an agent-principal relationship; (2) FARA contains numerous exceptions to its application; (3) FARA does not specifically target Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) (Laufer, 2017), making FARA far less restrictive than laws created “in its nature”. The most important aspect of FARA is that it recognizes organizations engaging in political lobbying or advocacy of governments, organizations, or individuals in another country as agents (Voskanayan, 2023), more specifically the registration of an entity would be required on grounds that “one must be an agent of a foreign principal, including if one acts at the direction and control of a foreign government,”(Lomsadze, 2023).

It is important however that every foreign agent law targeting CSOs that has sparked in the last decade has been justified by claiming to be based on FARA (Laufer, 2017). In 2012, in response to criticism over Russia’s foreign agents’ law, President Vladimir Putin said, “I believe that in Russia we can have a law similar to that adopted in the United States . . . why can we not do the same in Russia?”. In 2014, while defending the Kyrgyz foreign agents’ law, President Almazbek Atambayev argued that “the terminology (foreign

agent) was first introduced in America...the first of such laws was adopted in the cradle of democracy – the USA.” In 2016 Israel’s Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked wrote an Op-Ed in which she likened the Israeli NGO transparency law to the “similar” U.S. FARA (Sourced from Laufer, 2017). Similarly, when the bill was first brought to the public’s attention in Georgia, the initiating party issued a statement emphasizing that if the law they introduced, which was an analog of the American one with only a few changes, would become a source of speculation within the population, they would in its stead initiate a law that would be the pure copy of FARA (People's Power, 2023)

In response to the newly reinitiated law in Georgia, the U.S ambassador to Georgia Robin Dunnigan once again reiterated the purpose of FARA, stating that “The United States welcomes the role of our civil society organizations and how they help our country,” the Ambassador stressed, adding that “our law specifically requires organizations and individuals who lobby, who are paid to lobby on behalf of foreign governments for foreign governments interests. It requires them to register. It is a very different law“ (Civil.ge, 2024b), once again clearly stating that FARA concerns itself with lobbyists rather than NGOs and independent media.

4.1.3 What is the Russian Foreign Agents Law (RFAL)?

“This policy (GFAL) was first adopted and used in the Russian Federation. Its outcome there is for everyone to see. It has led to a complete dismantling of democratic and civil society structures and the rise of an autocratic and corrupt dictatorship accompanied by numerous arbitrary punishments and incarcerations of innocent individuals. This policy

stands diametrically opposed to legal practices and traditions of freedom in Europe(...)”

(Jahn, 2023).

Russia’s first-ever Foreign Agent law was introduced in 2012, as an important aspect of Vladimir Putin’s push to limit foreign influence in Russia, during his third term as president (Rebo, 2021). In December 2011, Russia experienced turbulent protests, demanding new elections and political reforms. Vladimir Putin, then-prime minister blamed the protests on the United States. His claim was similar to that of the Georgian officials stating that the foreign grant recipients were being instructed by the foreign governments and interfering with the Russian political process (Human Rights Watch, 2011). RFAL too, was passed quickly to protect Russia from outside attempts to influence its internal politics (BBC, 2012). In general terms, RFAL requires any NGO, media company, or individual who engages in “political activity” and accepts any funding from abroad to register as a “foreign agent” (Rebo, 2021). A few years after the bill was originally passed RFAL’s scope started to incorporate media companies as well as private individuals and increased the Ministry of Justice’s enforcement Powers by further upgrading when on June 4th, 2014, Vladimir Putin signed another amendment to the law which gave the Ministry of Justice power to register organizations as “foreign agents” without their consent (NHC, 2014). RAFL worked in the very manner it was intended and at the time of implementation, caused more than 30% of Russian NGOs to shut down and brought practical ruin to CSOs and any type of constructive opposition (Digges, 2015). Unlike FARA, in which only 5% of those registered are NGOs (ICNL & ECNL, 2023), the RFAL with the list updating almost every week, includes hundreds of individuals and dozens (most) of the NGOs and mass media with a status labeling them as Foreign Agents (Voskanyan, 2023).

4.1.4 What is Georgian Foreign Agent Law (GFAL)?

More than 400 NGOs, Media outlets, and other organizations have signed a declaration with the slogan “Yes - to the EU – No – To the Russian Law”. The statement reads that the law will hinder EU Integration, is not compatible with the values of a democratic country, and will be detrimental to Georgia’s freedom and security (Radio Freedom, 2024b). Why has the reaction been so resolute and united if as the GD says the rule is a copy of FARA? The law #07–3/293; 14.02.2023 later # 07-3/296/10 (Draft law) labels non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities (NNLEs), broadcasters, media outlets, or anyone receiving funding or material support from foreign powers, if such aid constitutes over 20% of their total revenue from the previous year, as “Agents of Foreign Influence” or as the newly amended draft states “Organization Pursuing the Interests of a Foreign Power” (Draft law). The draft introduces obligations on NGOs and mass media, ultimately expanding the Ministry of Justice’s supervisory powers, as well as establishes harsh penalties for any violations (Draft law 2023/2024), (ICNL & ECNL, 2023).

While the first draft of the law categorized NGOs and media outlets under the term “agents of foreign influence” the second draft, changing the name to “Organizations Pursuing the Interests of a Foreign Power” widened the scope so that it would also include individuals. As in, any physical or legal individual could be considered an agent of a foreign power if they, “participate in ongoing political activities in Georgia; act as a public relations adviser, advertising agent, employee of a news service, or political adviser; or finance various organizations in Georgia, lend money or other property, and represent the interests of a foreign power in Georgia in relations with state bodies” (Voskanyan, 2023), the Human Rights Watch categorizes these concepts under the umbrella of political activities as vague

and asserted that while FARA emphasizes the condition of doing political lobbying work and not every organization financed from abroad is considered an agent, there are no such specifications in GFAL (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

4.1.5 Who Initiated GFAL?

GFAL was first initiated in 2022 by a party called the “People’s Power”. The formation of the so-called "People's Power" began on June 28, 2022, with three deputies leaving the "Georgian Dream"(IPN, 2022a). The reason given for leaving was not an opposition in views or any type of disagreement with the ruling party of the country in connection with domestic, or foreign policy or values, instead, the reason was “that they wanted to provide the society with more information” (IPN, 2022b). With time, the number of members grew to nine deputies, all of whom had left the GD. It should be noted that all nine deputies are mentioned within the list of "Georgian Dream”, and they form the parliamentary majority together with the GD. The so-called "People’s power" has also, not been created based on the “Citizens Political Association” Act (,მოქალაქეთა პოლიტიკური გაერთიანებების შესახებ“) a Georgian organic law; and neither is the party a parliamentary subject considered under the regalement of the parliament (Sverige & IDFI, 2023). Moreover, their party formation does not have any legal form and is not registered as a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity. "People's Power" refers to itself as a "social movement", however, this kind of thing does not carry legal status by Georgian law. Thus, as the "People’s Power" does not exist as a legal entity, the only way to identify its members is by calling them members of the parliamentary majority, which is the GD (Sverige & IDFI, 2023).

4.1.6 Assessing the Timelines of GFAL

In the months leading up to the introduction of the Georgian Foreign Agent Law (GFAL), the vagueness of Georgia's standing with the EU made the ruling party's hostility towards the non-government sector more palpable. The spread of misinformation and the discreditation of and around the civil sector gained vigor. The authors of the damaging rhetoric were mostly the members of the ruling party itself, as well as parties and persons affiliated with the GD. The development of the ongoing campaign to discredit the civil sector gradually approached the logical stage where the use of such rhetoric could be instrumentalized into law. Since September 12, 2022, the ruling party actively supported the spread of misinformation and the discussion of the financial means of the civil sector organizations as well as their transparency (Mdinaradze, 2022; Kobakhidze, 2022). This one-sided conversation soon began incorporating the word "agents", with the activities of non-government organizations being deemed "A natural threat to the sovereignty of Georgia" and those affiliated with the ruling party began calling for the "Necessity of bringing the sector into a strict legal framework" (Civil.ge, 2022). It is especially interesting, that this statement was made in light of the discussion held about the decline of democracy in Georgia in the Committee on Foreign Relations of the USA (U.S Foreign Relations Committee, 2022). At the end of 2022, on December 29th, the representatives of the so-called "People's Power" who are also the GD's Deputies held a special meeting where they announced that they would begin the initiation of the Foreign Agents law in January of 2023 (IPN, 2022c). According to the statement, the bill they were announcing had been prepared to take into account the best Western practices, including the US. This deliberate choice of comparison is not new, nor is it entirely original, as both Russia and Hungary have tried to legitimise their laws, by quoting FARA and other European practices (L. Ghambashidze, personal

communication, March 9, 2024). On February 14, 2023, the deputies held another briefing, informing the public that they had initiated the law on the transparency of foreign agents and their influence. The ruling party first responded to the briefing through the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee, Mikheil Sarjveladze who noted that the “Society has the right to see who is being financed, and how as well as what activities they carry out and with which funds they are able to do so” (Sarjveladze, 2023). As the law was met with massive protest from the people, facing down riot police armed with water cannons and tear gas, the ruling party issued a statement on the 9th of March 2023, announcing that they had dropped the drafted law as it had caused “differences of opinion within the society” (Georgian Dream, 2023). Despite having dropped the law the rhetoric around the action continued to question both the CSOs, NGOs, as well as the EU and the US as political entities. The statement continued by asserting that “the machine of lies was able to present the bill in a negative light and mislead a certain part of the public”, the statement also read “As the emotional background subsides, we will better explain to the public what the bill was for and why it was important to ensure transparency of foreign influence in our country. To do this, we will start meetings with the population and let the general public know the truth about each and every detail of the law” (Georgian Dream, 2023). Such populist rhetoric, criticizing those that were against the law was especially puzzling as Georgia was and still is a member of the council of the EU and aspires to become an EU member state. Thus, the reinitiation of the controversial law after even such a faulty statement of withdrawal was welcomed by the EU delegation (EU Delegation Georgia, 2023) undermines Georgia’s path to integration, despite the GD’s vehemence to their dedication to the EU standards. The announcement regarding the reintroduction was made on April 3rd, announced by the parliamentary majority leader Mamuka Mdinardze (who a year prior, announced that dropping the bill was not a light

matter and thus the bill would not just lightly be reintroduced (Radio Freedom, 2024a), the bill's contents would remain the same, but the change would come in the form of the title with the word agent removed and replaced with "Organization Pursuing the Interests of a Foreign Power" (Civil.ge, 2024a). This change called "cosmetic" by Liesl Gerntholtz was deemed a perversion of transparency and accountability bound to weaken Georgian Civil Society and codify judicial harassment (PEN America, 2024)

4.1.7 Analysis of the Statement Regarding the Reintroduction of the Bill

The reinitiated bill has encouraged misinformation regarding the West and has further emphasized that the law serves as the ultimate propaganda against the US and the EU entities and is in absolute conjecture with the RFAL. The statement this time issued by the GD itself affirms the previously made claims of the civil sector being "the most non-transparent sector in Georgia", and claims that this lack of transparency is "the most important challenge for state security", despite 20% of Georgia being occupied by Russia and despite the existence of the concept of "creeping borders" because of which the de-facto border between Georgia and Russia lessens daily (IDFI, 2015). Accusing NGOs of radical agenda in tandem with the UNM not only continues to discredit the NGOs but also pays no attention to the 3rd step of recommendations, which calls for active action towards depolarization. The statement also reiterates the "second front" narrative, stating that the NGOs have coveted interests in Georgia getting involved with the war in Ukraine. One of the most blatant indicators of the target of the law can be seen as the "hysterical campaign" of the NGOs is alleged to be headed by Kelly Degnan the former Ambassador of the United States, the ruling party blames her for not representing the country but representing the UNM. Further notable aspects of the statement include the parliamentary majority blaming the European Endowment for

Democracy (EED), stating that it “already had an illegitimate impact on the 2024 elections, which would have been reported by the so-called local observer organizations, had the corresponding NGOs not been funded from the same sources.” Continued with further discreditation of EU/US entities by stating that “they are not surprised that the former ambassador told the Georgian citizens a disgraceful lie last year, labeling the draft law – which was copied from the American law and had nothing in common with the law in force in Russia – as a “Russian law”. Given that the practice of supporting extremism in Georgia has weakened under the new ambassador, we hope that the incumbent ambassador will not stoop to telling the Georgian people such lies”. The GD statement notes that although the bill was dropped last year, it still had an impact on reducing the funding of extremism, but adds that” such practice has not been completely eliminated”. They conversely attest that during this period, they held consultations concerning the transparency of finances of the largest American and European foundations, including the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). However, have not been able to make any progress in ensuring the transparency of these foundations. (Georgian Dream, 2024).

With Georgia getting the candidate status, and the GD leaders taking all the credit for it, their rhetoric seems to indicate that the country now faces lower Geopolitical stakes (T. Dekanosidze, personal communication, April 17, 2024). Additionally, the elections which are scheduled in October of this year, are fast approaching and the Georgian dream is likely to face resistance, despite the crumbling and fractured opposition. The Agent law is simply a way for them to keep their grip on power for as long as possible (L. Ghambashidze, personal communication, March 9, 2024). Especially as the elections season is also approaching in

both the US and the EU and as Kornely Kakachia the head of the Tbilisi think tank Georgian Institute of Politics said the GD might think, Georgian domestic strife might not be the priority for the West (Sourced from, Kucera, 2024). While the then chairman (now Prime Minister) Kobakhidze repeats Putin's 2012 sentiment word-for-word stating "The draft law is far more lenient than its American version," (Lomsadze,2023), the continued stigmatization and villainization of NGOs in the name of FARA which does not directly target CSOs (Laufer, 2017), and actually allow many U.S. non-profit groups and media organizations to receive foreign grants and other support, without having to register as foreign agents under FARA (and as a fact only five percent of those registered under FARA are non-profit organizations and most of them are branches of foreign political parties.) (ICNL & ECNL, 2023), very clearly showcases the true nature of the law as well as the aim of the two-faced-statement.

4.1.8 GFAL=RFAL not FARA Why?

On April 10th, 2024, Robin Dunnigan, the United States ambassador to Georgia scrutinized the ruling party's decision to adopt the law, she stated that most of Georgia's friends have expressed their apprehension following the announcement of the law, yet the ones that have welcomed the bill have been those (Russia) occupying Georgia (Front News Georgia, 2024). The response to this by the leader of the parliamentary majority Mamuka Mdinardze was the following: "Do we speak Georgian? And should we continue speaking Georgian as long as the world exists? I think we should. Once again, I'm very sorry for dramatizing and exaggerating. If our friends tell us to stop speaking Georgian, and the Russians say- it's fine to speak Georgian. Should we stop speaking Georgian or should we continue?!" - said Mdinardze" (Formula Originals, 2024b). The blatant disregard of

European and American recommendations along with the populist and nationalistic sentiment, recurring within the GD's statements is the first indicator that the law is not as they say a "copy" of FARA nor is it a copy of any European laws as well as an indicator that GD must have another backbone rather than the west (L. Ghambashidze, personal communication, March 9, 2024).

The evaluation of RFAL laws "Law on Foreign Agents" (Law N. 121-FZ) of 13 July 2012, as well as Laws N. 18- FZ of 21 February 2014 and N. 147-FZ of 4 June 2014, highlights several issues within the Russian Law (Venice Commission opinion,2014), all of which are present in GFAL as well. In Russian the term "foreign agent" and in the Georgian draft the newly changed term "Organization Pursuing the Interests of a Foreign Power" (OPIFP) is highly controversial and carries negative connotations, accentuating communist rhetoric, which stigmatizes NGOs/CSOs. Furthermore, the expression "political activities" which is the basis for the law and the term "Foreign agent", is extremely broad and non-specific, raising questions about the scope the law intends to take. Similar to the Russian law N. 147-FZ of 4 June 2014, the GFAL allows for the authoritative body, to examine an entity's work and deem it fit to be under the label of "the foreign agent" or OPIFP, in the case that an entity has not personally applied to be named as such the entity is charged with "avoidance of registration" and is subject to a fine, which in Russia amounts to 300,000 Roubles (Venice Commission opinion,2014), and in Georgia to 25,000 GEL (Georgian Draft Law on Agents of Foreign Influence, Article 9). Unlike FARA which has adopted clauses of exemption none of the other two contain such a clause.

Both laws have adopted surveillance techniques, and both contain a clause on unplanned and unscheduled monitoring of entities under question. While the RFAL allows for such monitoring to happen once a year (Article 32(4.2)), the Georgian draft law authorizes it every six months (Draft Law, Article 8).

To compare, under FARA an agent of a foreign principal is an individual or an organization: “Who directly or through any other person—engages within the United States in political activities for or in the interests of such foreign principal. Acts within the United States as a public relations counsel, publicity agent, information-service employee, or political consultant for or in the interests of such foreign principal; within the United States solicits, collects, disburses, or dispenses contributions, loans, money, or other things of value for or in the interest of such foreign principal; or within the United States represents the interests of such foreign principal before any agency or official of the Government of the United States (22U.S.C. §611(c)(1))” (Sourced from Congressional Research Service, 2024). On the other hand, GFAL requires any organization, non-commercial individual, media source, or legal individual with more than 20% of overseas (mainly Western) funding to register as an organization pursuing the interests of a foreign power (Draft Law, Article 2(s)).

While article 3 of GFAL and article (22 U.S.C. §611(b)(2)) of FARA regarding the definition of a Foreign Principal are identical it is imperative here, that FARA contains an exemption clause, §3685 stating that “Several exemptions exist to exclude media, news, and press services incorporated in the United States. This includes newspapers, magazines, periodicals, and other publications that file periodic disclosure statements with the U.S. Postal Service pursuant to 39 U.S.C. §3685” (Congressional Research Service, 2024). GFAL,

article 3 notably has omitted such an exemption clause and has instead categorized the entities mentioned above as those under the largest scrutiny (Draft Law, Article 2(ბ)).

Even if there were no notable differences, what GFAL promises to do is limit NGO and media presence funded from the West within the country which would be detrimental, as the money coming from the US and EU donors, has contributed to the support of forcefully relocated persons as a result of war, regional development, water security, cancer treatment centers, food security, disabled persons, and more (T. Dekanosidze, personal communication, April 17, 2024).

4.1.9 Offshoring Law

On the backdrop of the recent (April 2024) mass protests in Georgia regarding GFAL, the ruling party, possibly preparing for international sanctions (M. Khurtsilava, personal communication, April 18, 2024) has initiated a temporary norm, along with tax amnesty according to which, an individual moving a company from offshore territories to Georgia, will not be taxed (now they are taxed to prevent money laundering). In addition, if the same individual brings his property to Georgia in the process, for example, an airplane or a car, he will also not be taxed with import tax or property tax up to the year 2030 (Proposed bill on amendments to the tax code of Georgia, 2024) (JAMnews, 2024). Parallel with the Russian law, whose clear goal is to isolate Georgia, the change in the tax code will allow the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili to hide his property from the sanctions announced by the West. With this Georgia has the potential to become an isolated country that the West cannot reach, an ultimate money laundering destination for Russian money (M. Khurtsilava, personal communication, April 18, 2024). Russia's positive command of the GFAL with notable

political figures like Sergey Lavrov, Vyacheslav Volodin, Alexander Dugin, Dmitry Peskov, etc (Real Politika, 2024b) praising Georgia, for fighting for its sovereignty with this law, it is clear that Russian Soft power influence will turn into something much direr if Georgia becomes a safe space for Oligarch's money and by default turns into a strategic space for Russia to uphold its own political needs, either by making Georgia a military corridor, or its dumpster for money (Young Greens, personal communication, April 16, 2024).

Case study 2: “Anti-LGBTQ” law proposal

4.2.1 Introduction

The ninth step of the commission's recommendations reads as follows: “Improve the protection of human rights including by implementing an ambitious human rights strategy and ensuring freedom of assembly and expression. Launch impartial, effective, and timely investigations in cases of threats against the safety of vulnerable groups, media professionals, and civil society activists, and bring organizers and perpetrators of violence to justice. Consult and engage with civil society, allowing for their meaningful involvement in legislative and policymaking processes and ensure they can operate freely”(CSO; 9 steps response sheet, sourced from various Commission reports on Enlargement).

Following several incidents analyzed by the Commission, the EU made evaluations as well as set concrete demands. Both of these were made based on two different incidents; the first one, where the police stood by as the Far-Right Groups attacked the Tbilisi Pride Festival on July 8, 2023 (Civil Georgia, 2023), and the second was on July 5, 2021, when the

same Far-Right groups attacked the same festival and ultimately killed one Journalist who was documenting the riot (Jam News, 2023), here too the police were nowhere near as vigilant as it can be when peaceful protests take place against the “Russian law” (Nechepurenko, 2023).

Following the events, the EU has evaluated that: “The LGBTIQ community is one of the most marginalized groups in Georgia. Essentially, a victim of systemic homophobia, negative social stereotypes, and the use of homophobic sentiments for political purposes. The hateful language used by politicians and public figures towards the LGBTIQ community aggravates the situation and increases the risks of violence; The government does not recognise the systemic nature of discriminatory attitudes and inequality and therefore does not take appropriate measures. In Georgia, there are no concrete mechanisms to support the LGBTIQ community and fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation” (CSO; 9 steps response sheet, sourced from various Commission reports on Enlargement). The EU has also demanded that the GD “investigate and punish the organizers of the violence committed at Tbilisi Pride on July 5, 2021; ensure the protection of the rights of the LGBTIQ community in the human rights action plan; ensure the protection of the right to freedom of assembly and expression, including by amending the Code of Administrative Offenses with the broad participation of interested parties” (CSO; 9 steps response sheet, sourced from various Commission reports on Enlargement).

4.2.2 GD’s “Response” to the EU despite the pledge

In 2014 GD adopted a “Law of Georgia on the elimination of all forms of discrimination”. The purpose of the law is to ensure equal rights of all natural and legal persons; the law emphasizes the importance of this irrespective of sexual orientation (Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, 2014), Mamuka Mdinardze personally accentuated in his speech against the LGBTQ community that GD had “adopted the anti-discrimination law, and agree on the principle that no one – especially the government – has the authority to pass judgment on others” (Mdinardze, 2024).

The indirect response to the EU criteria first surfaced when once again, the parliamentary majority leader Mamuka Mdinardze decided to continue the rhetoric sown by the Press-Secretary of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). Andria Jaghmadze (Press Secretary) asserted that LGBTQ people “attack the church” as a result of the “anti-church campaign” started by the very same group of people. Similarly, Mdinardze responded to this during a press conference blaming “Pseudo-Liberal” ideologists for attacking the church (Formula, 2022). While at the time this was simply a populist statement made in efforts of testing homophobia as a campaign pillar (Kobakhidze, 2024), the narrative was disturbingly similar to the Russian “Gay Propaganda Law”. The amalgamation of this came in the form of GD pushing the Anti-LGBTQ constitutional law, with Mdinardze announcing the initiation of two draft constitutional laws on the “protection of family values and minors” (Civil Georgia, 2024). “Georgian society has always been tolerant; however, Georgian society is not and cannot be tolerant of pseudo-liberal propaganda” (Eurasianet, 2024), was Mdinardze’s argument capitalizing on the “Georgian’s” intolerance of non-traditional propaganda. When the said society expressed intolerance of the law rather than the “propaganda” the Deputy’s response was to speculate” Who would dare oppose the initiative” (Formula, 2024).

4.2.3 Russia's "Gay Propaganda Law"

The Russian "Gay Propaganda Law," which is officially called the law "for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values," was signed into law by President Vladimir Putin in June 2013. The law makes it illegal to spread "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships" among minors. It prohibits public discussion of gay rights and relationships around children and has raised the crime rate against LGBTIQ persons almost threefold (Katsuba, 2023). Violators of this law face fines and, if they are foreigners, possible deportation. The law itself is heavily influenced as well as popularized by the ROC. With Patriarch Kirill, calling same-sex partnership "a dangerous apocalyptic symptom" capable of destroying the nation and called for Russians to protect themselves against the "sin and the dictatorship that would come with it" (Manson, 2013).

4.2.4 A result of the ROC soft power

On April 22, 2024, the conference called "Russia and the World - Forces of Attraction" started in Tbilisi. As reported by Russian independent media "Agency/АГЕНСТВО" one of the organizers of the conference is the National Research Institute of Communications Research (НИИКР) - the founders of said institute are veterans of the Russian Federal Security Service (ФСБ), foreign intelligence (СБП) and the KGB (Zatirko, 2024). According to the announcement published on the institute's website, the main topic of the meeting will be "Traditional values as a factor of rapprochement of nations" and the plan is to hold a total of 5 conferences in this format, in addition to Tbilisi, one of the conferences was held in the occupied territory of Tskhinvali, with the main session planned

to take place in Moscow (Real Politika, 2024a). The government allowing all this encourages the "story of the brotherhood with Russia" and is siding with an organization that supports the separatists in Georgia to preach traditional values (Abashidze, 2024). Parallel to the conference the GD has started conducting meetings and discussions on the draft law restricting LGBT in the regions. The first public meeting was held in Kutaisi theater, the meeting was attended by prominent figures from the GD like Mamuka Mdinaradze and Shalva Papuashvili, where homophobic statements were made as well as encouraged and scripted by the leaders (Radio Freedom, 2024c).

The adoption of the law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination in 2014, was followed as well as preceded by fierce opposition from the Church, where GOC accused the “West” of promoting “depravity” through propaganda (Tolkachev and Tolordava, 2020). The response to this was, that in 2014, with the blessing of the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II, May 17 was declared as the day of the sanctity of the family, respect for parents, and the upkeep of traditional values (Formulanews.ge, 2023). Similarly, The Decree made by Putin established the need to protect the Russian spiritual and moral values in the new version of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (OPRF, 2022). It is imperative that The Kremlin has borrowed the concept of “spiritual and moral values,” or rather “traditional values,” from ROC. With, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow popularizing the idea of Traditional values and their upkeep beginning in the 1970s (Hovorun, 2023).

With “traditional values” deemed as Russia’s geopolitical weapons (Hovorun, 2023), and the popular assumption that “under the influence of Russian Orthodoxy, the Georgian

Church duplicates conservative ideas and worldviews that originate in Russia” (Chedia, 2022), the Russian Soft power exerted through ROC is the most considerable and problematic foe against the pledges made for EU integration, leading to direct copying of Russian legislation by Georgia.

4.2.5 Connecting the Dots

Following the reception of the candidate status as well as the pledges made by the GD to do everything in their power to bring Georgia closer to EU integration, the officials emboldened by the reception of the status have completely altered their strategy regarding the West and Russia. Instead of the expected diligence in completing the 9 steps for further integration, the government has in turn slowly started copying legislations present in Russia that were the basis for the deterioration of Russia’s standing within the global community. The years of systemically exerted soft power that in the case of Russia exhibit qualities that liken it to hard power, allowed the manipulation of the public to the extent that more blatant pro-Russian moves by the GD were the only thing capable of inviting mass protests against the government. The growing legislative hold/influence of Russia on Georgia along with the already existing institutions exerting soft power (ROC, media, etc) paired with the possibility of Georgia becoming a destination for money laundering through the offshoring law, creates a reality that sets the country back at least ten years on its quest of acquiring a place in the western world. The loud dissonance of the people’s voice vs the government’s actions is the only thing tethering the EU and Georgia’s partnership as well as maintaining the candidate status. The situation makes it necessary for the EU to take resolute action against the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili and his team of GD, through necessary sanctions.

Conclusion

While the dissatisfaction towards the officials of Georgia for their actions has been a topic of conversation, since the reintroduction of the “Foreign Agent” law, the freshness of the topic has not allowed for much constructive literature to accumulate on the topic. There is especially a lack of research on Georgia directly copying Russian legislation and slowly following in their footsteps. While many researchers explore a plethora of conduits for Russian Soft Power in Georgia, there are considerably fewer opinions on the “Russification” of the Georgian government. Through the analysis of direct deviation from EU values and the alignment with Russian narratives researchers could identify crucial patterns and informational gaps, allowing them to begin creating fresh narratives.

Accordingly, the research has focused on emphasizing the general exertion of soft power in Georgia, by both the EU and Russia. Finding that the approaches of the two differ considerably, especially in the manner of exertion and concrete results. Where Russia bases its influence on coercion and a hybrid mix of soft/hard power, the EU has constantly re-established itself as a stable partner of Georgia, supporting it on its quest for territorial integrity and the establishment of democratic institutions. Through interviews, reviews of official documents as well as media analysis on public discourse, the thesis has established clear patterns of divergence with EU aspirations/recommendations and obvious convergence with Russian narratives. Following the objective of the thesis, which was to establish nuanced dynamics of Georgia's pursuit of European integration in the shadow of Russian influence, the parallel development of events regarding the “Foreign-Agent”, “offshoring” and the “Anti-LGBTQ” laws has shed light on coveted influence, slowly acquiring a more direct approach.

The thesis argues that the analysis of GD's discourse in comparison to the official documents is capable of directly showcasing Russian influence in Georgian politics and as a result Georgian legislation. The exploration of two recent draft proposals in comparison with the already existing laws of a similar format in Russia revealed correlations because of the systemic exertion of soft/hard power. The research has also revealed a deliberate spread of misinformation by the government around the mentioned laws, through wrongful characterisation. Despite the public outcry of partner countries, the research establishes that the GD keeps pushing European and American labels on the criticised laws, despite openly critiquing both entities.

Summary

The Thesis “The Path to Georgia's European Dream: A Media Analysis of Rhetoric, Reality, and Russian Influence” explores the complex interplay between Georgia's European integration efforts and the impact of Russian soft power within the country. The research employs Joseph Nye’s Soft Power as the main theoretical basis for the thesis, exploring the presence of Soft Power in Georgia as used by both Russia and the EU. Highlighting obvious differences in the use of soft power by the EU and Russia the thesis goes on to emphasize the role of Russian influence in Georgian Politics through two legislative case studies, both of which first materialized in Russia. The research focuses on conducting extensive media analysis spanning recent important political events to establish themes of the rhetoric sown by the ruling party and contributes to the study investigating the dichotomy between Georgia's official foreign policy documents and the informal public and political discourse that deviates from pledged responsibilities. To do this the thesis employs qualitative research and employs expert interviews to strengthen developed ideas. The exploration of rhetoric vs reality in Georgian politics highlights the challenges and opportunities facing Georgia at the geopolitical crossroads between Russia and Europe. The research finds notable gaps between official aspirations and reality as a result of Russian interference in Georgian politics and consequently argues that not only is Russia influencing Georgian politics through the warped use of soft power, leading it away from the West, but that such influence has directly inspired Georgian legislation, leading Politicians to directly copy Russian rhetoric and laws.

Souhrn

Diplomová práce „Cesta k evropskému snu Gruzie: Analýza mediální rétoriky, reality a ruského vlivu“ zkoumá složitou souhru mezi snahami Gruzie o evropskou integraci a vlivem ruské měkké moci v zemi. Výzkum využívá jako hlavní teoretický základ práce měkkou moc Josepha Nyeho a zkoumá přítomnost měkké moci v Gruzii, jak ji využívá Rusko i EU. S důrazem na zjevné rozdíly ve využívání měkké moci ze strany EU a Ruska práce dále zdůrazňuje roli ruského vlivu v gruzínské politice prostřednictvím dvou legislativních případových studií, z nichž obě se poprvé zhmotnily v Rusku. Výzkum se zaměřuje na provedení rozsáhlé mediální analýzy zahrnující nedávné významné politické události s cílem stanovit témata rétoriky zasévané vládnoucí stranou a přispívá ke studiu zkoumajícímu dichotomii mezi oficiálními zahraničněpolitickými dokumenty Gruzie a neformálním veřejným a politickým diskurzem, který se odchyluje od slíbených povinností. K tomu práce využívá kvalitativní výzkum a k posílení rozpracovaných myšlenek využívá expertní rozhovory. Zkoumání rétoriky vs. reality v gruzínské politice poukazuje na výzvy a příležitosti, kterým Gruzie čelí na geopolitické křižovatce mezi Ruskem a Evropou. Výzkum shledává výrazné rozdíly mezi oficiálními aspiracemi a realitou v důsledku ruského vměšování do gruzínské politiky a následně tvrdí, že Rusko nejenže ovlivňuje gruzínskou politiku prostřednictvím pokřiveného využívání měkké moci, čímž ji odvádí od Západu, ale že tento vliv přímo inspiruje gruzínskou legislativu, což vede politiku k přímému kopírování ruské rétoriky a zákonů.

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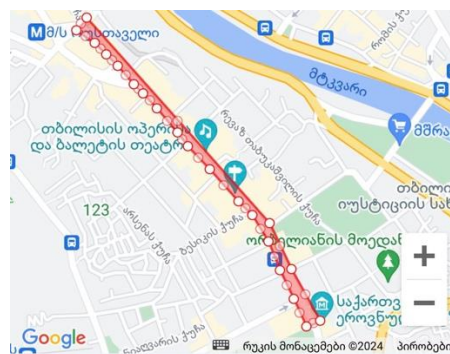
List of Appendices

Appendix No. 1: Interviewees:

1. Tamar Dekanosidze – Journalist, Abkhazia War Veteran.
2. Levan Ghambashidze – Philosopher, Activist, and Expert in Georgian Politics.
3. Murtaz Khurtsilava – A civilian activist, interviewed during a protest.
4. Young Greens – NGO, fighting against the Russian influence in Georgian Legislation.

Appendix No. 2: Protest Statistics

1. As reported by Visioner Georgia anti-law protest on the 28th of April was attended by at least 100,000 people. Which is a historic number of people on a single protest in Tbilisi, further showcasing that the government stands against the people.



Surface area 35524sqm · 382383sqft [Reset the area](#)

Crowd density [What does it look like?](#)

Light Crowded Packed

3.00 people per sqm (~10 sqft)

106573 estimated

(Visioner Georgia, 2024)

