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# De-Europeanization as discursive disengagement: has Georgia “got lost” on its way to European integration?

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## ABSTRACT

This article looks at de-Europeanization as a progressive disengagement between domestic authorities and EU actors manifested through their discourses. The authors view discursive disengagement as consisting of two major aspects: Discursive opposition between domestic authorities and the EU reflected in their conflicting statements and the intensification of this discursive opposition, whereby the domestic authorities' discourses shift from defensive to offensive ones. The authors trace the respective developments based on the case of Georgia, looking at the discursive interaction between domestic and EU actors in the Georgian TV media from July 2021 to June 2022. The research has revealed Georgian authorities' discursive opposition to EU actors behind the façade of seemingly pro-European statements. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this discursive opposition has escalated and become offensive. The authors use quantitative content analysis to map actor-discourse networks, as well as critical discourse analysis to reveal deeper layers of de-Europeanization discourse.



## KEYWORDS

De-Europeanization; Georgia; discursive disengagement; TV media; critical discourse analysis

## Introduction

In light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the question of resilience of the Europeanization process in the Association Trio of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova has become pressing not only for these countries but also for the EU itself. While Georgia had been considered the Trio's flagship in terms of implementing the Association Agreement conditions, its application for candidate status in June 2022 resulted in the EU's recommendation to give Georgia a 'perspective' for EU membership, deferring from granting candidate status until specific conditions are met; whereas the applications of Ukraine and Moldova yielded candidate status for both of these countries. This development has further intensified oppositional skepticism regarding the foreign policy orientation of the Georgian government, adding the issue of de-Europeanization as yet another layer to the already strongly polarized political sphere.

Although the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party considers Georgia's attempts toward European integration its own accomplishment, as it was GD that signed the

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EU-Georgia Association Agreement in June 2014, it is noteworthy that already in November 2014 a few smaller parties left the GD coalition announcing that the country's Euro-Atlantic course was endangered (Tsuladze et al. 2016, 12–13). The doubts regarding the GD's foreign policy orientation somewhat faded away after Georgia was granted visa liberalization in March 2017. However, the ruling party's European aspirations were questioned again in June 2019, after a member of the Russian Duma occupied the Speaker's seat in the Georgian Parliament during the inter-parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy, which resulted in instant public protest. In fact, public concerns regarding the ruling party's foreign policy course reactivated each consequent year since this event, demanding from GD to implement electoral and judicial reforms set by EU conditionality. The issue further aggravated after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when Georgia's government refused to join the EU's sanctions against Russia and chose to pursue 'non-irritation politics' toward its northern neighbour (Tsuladze 2023, 259). In this context, the contradictory reality has formed, with the ruling party's actions revealing de-Europeanizing trends, while its discourse remaining seemingly pro-European. Considering such a complex reality, it is important to analyze the de-Europeanization process in Georgia that we view as discursive disengagement between domestic and EU actors.

Recently, scholars of European studies have started discussing the concept of de-Europeanization and a few definitions have been introduced, focusing on de-Europeanization processes taking place within EU member states. One can hardly find the discussion of de-Europeanization in the accession or aspirant countries, despite the fact that their de-Europeanization processes might threaten the EU's political agenda and contribute to the strengthening of authoritarian influences in its neighbourhood, which is especially dangerous in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. Furthermore, as the levels of Europeanization differ between the EU and aspirant countries, the peculiarities of de-Europeanization of the former might not properly explain the respective developments of the latter. Therefore, it seems crucial to address de-Europeanization processes in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, focusing on aspirant countries that were successfully Europeanizing in the recent past though might have backslid over time.

To this end, our aim is to trace the de-Europeanization process in Georgia via looking at domestic political actors' (the ruling party and the opposition) and EU officials' discursive interaction. Our elite-based approach derives from the assumption that the Europeanization agenda is set by domestic political elites and enacted through their interaction with the EU. We analyze this discursive interaction in Georgia's mainstream television media, which remains the main source of information for the citizens about ongoing political events. We do not look at the geopolitical factors triggering the abovementioned actors' discourses but attempt to disclose the essence and the dynamics of these discourses. The contribution of this article is twofold: Firstly, it proposes a novel understanding of the concept of de-Europeanization as discursive disengagement between domestic and EU officials, focusing on the level of discursive opposition between them. We argue that the process of de-Europeanization aggravates as this discursive opposition intensifies and shifts from defensive to offensive opposition from the side of domestic political actors. Secondly, the article presents an extensive empirical analysis based on the original dataset obtained as a result of the content analysis of the mainstream Georgian TV media in the crucial period of July 2021–June 2022, the start of the war in Ukraine marking a critical juncture in the research period. Using the principles of Social

Network Analysis (SNA), the actor-discourse networks have been mapped. Furthermore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been applied to reveal deeper layers of de-Europeanization discourse.

### Conceptualizing discursive De-Europeanization

According to the definition we adopt, de-Europeanization occurs where there has been some form of Europeanization before, and hence it points to 'the changing relationship of a state with the EU' manifested through its 'progressive detachment' from the EU's political or normative influence (Tomini and Seda 2021, 286). Approaching de-Europeanization as a progressive 'disengagement between the EU and national level' means that it should be traced over time and perceived as a process and not an outcome (Tomini and Seda 2021, 292). How can this process be empirically measured? Usually, scholars address de-Europeanization at two – policy and discursive – levels, believing that 'the main indicator of de-Europeanisation at the EU-state level is the political elite's declining commitment to the EU, and this is manifested in the form of a lack of or negative reference to the EU in the political elite's discourse' (Tomini and Seda 2021, 293). Thus, the main measurement of the political elite's declining commitment to the EU is considered to be the discourse produced and circulated by this elite. Despite the fact that the abovementioned discourse addresses the EU and its normative order, it predominantly or even exclusively targets domestic audiences (Müller, Pomorska, and Tonra 2021, 524). Usually, local political elites delegitimize EU norms and values in the name of defending their national interests or sovereignty (Tomini and Seda 2021, 296). Juxtaposing EU interests and values with the national ones might represent the domestic political elite's tactic based on certain pragmatic considerations, and this tactic is most likely characteristic to those perceiving Europeanization as harmful to their political agenda or risky for their political longevity. As a result, domestic political elites driven by personal interests and abusing power pragmatically choose to de-Europeanize and their 'strategic usage' (Jacquot and Woll 2003, 6) of de-Europeanization might gradually transform from a tactic to a steady trend (Smith 2021, 640). Thus, de-Europeanization 'is associated with a divergence from societal needs and preferences' (Martin-Russu 2022, 47) often traced through the domestic political elites' instrumentalization of the Europeanization discourse for manipulative purposes. In the current paper, we will focus on this very discursive appropriation of Europeanization by Georgian political elites, aiming to contribute to the deconstruction of the concept of discursive de-Europeanization and questioning whether it might be an indicator of merely performative or even substantive de-Europeanization (Müller, Pomorska, and Tonra 2021, 529–530).

It is argued that a 'distinguishing criterion of de-Europeanisation is the scale of the challenge [...] across a wide range of issues [that] would suggest a basic re-orientation of the [...] state away from European norms' (Müller, Pomorska, and Tonra 2021, 523). Based on the above considerations, this re-orientation or deviation from European norms can be measured via discursive de-Europeanization, which is viewed in the current paper as a 'progressive detachment' or disengagement between the EU's and domestic political actors' discourses. Such a discursive disengagement might have different forms and even change over time. Domestic political actors might start with a rather careful pragmatic approach represented by a discursive balancing act (Dyduch and Müller 2021). They

might attempt not to aggravate their relations with the EU and pay a lip service to European norms and values though simultaneously manipulating national sentiments. However, we assume that this discursive disengagement can also be articulated by the domestic political actors' discursive opposition to the EU, because the compliance with EU norms, especially in terms of democracy and rule of law, might become too costly for them (Tomini and Seda 2021, 296). Hence, the EU's reactions to their non-compliance might invoke respective defense strategies, especially their self-presentation as safeguarding national interests and sovereignty. This discursive opposition might further aggravate, in terms of both intensity and the shift from defensive to offensive strategies, alongside the worsening of relations between the EU and domestic political actors. The present paper aims to trace the dynamics of discursive disengagement between the EU and Georgian political elites within the whole year from July 2021 to June 2022, loaded with events that triggered a growing tension in the EU-Georgia relations. While analyzing the abovementioned dynamics, we aim to contribute to two major themes: on the one hand, to reveal the specifics of discursive opposition between the EU and Georgian ruling elites, and on the other hand, to trace the shift in these elites' discourses from defensive to offensive opposition.

Where does de-Europeanization as practice come into play in this discursive shift from defensive to offensive opposition? The studies (for instance, see the whole volume on de-Europeanization processes in the EU member states in the *Journal of European Integration*, 2021) conclude that in the case of EU member states de-Europeanization stays more at the level of political discourse and does not really affect political practice (Monteleone 2021), that is, the 'deviation is selective and that contestation at the discursive level doesn't really challenge fundamental EU norms' (Smith 2021, 644). As a result, scholars distinguish between performative and substantive de-Europeanization and argue that the latter does not really take place (or has not been enacted yet) in EU member states (with the exception of certain countries such as Hungary). However, considering distinct sociopolitical realities of the EU and the accession/aspirant countries, as well as their different levels of Europeanization, can the above argument be generalized to the aspirant countries like Georgia? We opine that the intensification of discursive opposition and its shift from defensive to offensive one in Georgia serves to legitimize domestic authorities' de-Europeanization at the level of political practice, and hence it goes beyond the performative level and reveals a deeper changing relationship of the state with the EU.

## Operationalizing discursive De-Europeanization

According to our definition, discursive de-Europeanization is a process of growing disengagement or divergence in the Europeanization discourses between the EU and domestic political actors. To carefully measure discursive de-Europeanization, instead of looking at the frequency of usage or thematic composition of certain discourses, we propose to focus on the discursive interaction between the EU and domestic political actors (Abzianidze 2020). Our rationale is that analyzing merely frequencies or composition of certain discourses might show that domestic political actors' rhetoric is predominantly pro-European; whereas focusing on the discursive interaction between the EU and

domestic political actors might reveal that the disengaging process occurs beneath the façade of seemingly pro-European discourse.

As noted above, we focus on two aspects of discursive disengagement: on the one hand, the specifics of discursive opposition between the EU and domestic authorities, with the latter's statements diverging from and even resisting the former's ones, and on the other hand, the shift in domestic authorities' discourses from defensive to offensive opposition, that is, how their discursive resistance to the EU's statements progressively transforms into their overt critique of the EU. How can these two aspects of discursive de-Europeanization be empirically measured?

We propose to measure the discursive divergence or opposition between the EU and domestic political actors using the concepts of agenda-setting and framing. The former is reflected in the increasing divergence of discursive agenda, that is, the EU and domestic political actors prioritize different topics/issues; while the latter might be reflected in the increasing convergence of discursive agenda though, concurrently, the growing divergence in the contents of these discourses, that is, the EU and domestic political actors prioritize the same topics/issues but frame them differently. When it comes to the domestic political actors' shift from defensive to offensive rhetoric, we propose to focus on the intensification of the abovementioned discursive opposition that can potentially escalate into a discursive conflict (verbal attacks, critical or negative references). In order to measure discursive opposition and its intensification, we adopt a discourse analysis approach with a special focus on CDA.

There is rich experience of using discourse analysis and especially CDA for the study of Europeanization discourses, which is evident from the works of authors such as Ruth Wodak (2009, 2011, 2015), Michal Krzyzanowski (2005), Attila Melegh (2006), Stephen Coleman and Karen Ross (2010), Mats Ekström and Julie Firmstone (2017), Kennet Lynggaard (2019), etc. These authors use various discursive approaches to reveal how a Europeanization agenda is set and enacted at both the EU and local levels. Such an agenda and its framing can be exposed through ideological discourse that is based on two core concepts: ideology and manipulation (van Dijk 2006). It is argued that those in power try to persuade the public in the legitimacy of their ideology through manipulation, which implies the control of human thinking at the cognitive level and various forms of ideological discourse at the discursive level; for instance, juxtaposing 'our' good qualities with 'their' bad ones (van Dijk 2006, 359). Manipulation might be enacted through 'fabrication', which implies an intentional effort to promote a false belief about certain events and happenings (Goffman 1974, 83). Among various discursive strategies for such fabrications 'topoi' are especially effective.

Topoi are the content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules' that connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion or the central claim. They appeal to commonsense knowledge, frequently without providing any evidence for establishing the warrant. [...] topoi are thus central to the analysis of seemingly convincing fallacious arguments that are widely adopted in all political discourse (Wodak 2011, 529).

Another powerful discursive strategy is 'the Politics of Fear' (Wodak 2015). It is based on the rhetoric of exclusion that aims at intentionally provoking a scandal or constructing a conspiracy, especially through what Wodak terms 'arrogance of ignorance that appeals to common-sense and traditional (conservative) values linked to aggressive exclusionary

rhetoric' (Wodak 2015, 44–45). For this purpose, the politics of fear targets various scapegoats such as international organizations, liberal intellectuals, political opposition, migrants, etc.

The abovementioned and other discursive strategies will be analyzed to reveal the discursive usage of Europeanization by Georgia's ruling elites. Some of these strategies are as follows: 'discourses of justification' focused on blaming and denying (a means of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (Wodak 2006)), intertextuality (a linkage between the past and present texts (Wodak 2011, 529)), metaphors (van Dijk 2013, 187), local coherence (representing certain facts as causes or, alternatively, consequences of others facts, or simply disguising connections between them (van Dijk 2013, 184)), etc. As noted above, the proposed discourse analysis aims to capture the essence of discursive opposition and to reveal its transformation from defensive to offensive discourse. In order to trace these dynamics, we will follow the discursive interaction between the EU and Georgian political actors, which results in their discursive disengagement.

## Methodology

We trace the discursive disengagement between the EU and Georgian political actors in the period from July 2021 to June 2022. This period was especially noteworthy in terms of the growing tension in the EU-Georgia relations. We focus on the major events contributing to this tension. We analyze the EU's and domestic authorities' discourses related to these crucial events in television, the most popular media in Georgia. Although the latter's popularity has considerably decreased for the last years with 88% of the population reporting it was their main source of information a decade ago and only 53% of the population sharing this view in 2021, television still remains the main source of information for Georgia's citizens (CRRC Georgia, December 2021).

We have selected TV channels for our analysis based on two main criteria: their ownership (public vs. private) and their popularity (the highest number of viewers). Considering this rationale, three TV channels have been sampled: Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) and two private TV channels – pro-governmental 'Imedi' and pro-oppositional 'Mtavari'. According to public opinion polls, 'Imedi' and 'Mtavari' lead the chart of the most watched TV stations in Georgia, likewise the one of the most trusted TV stations in terms of getting information about politics and ongoing events: 25% of the population report they trust 'Imedi' most, while 12% of the population report they trust 'Mtavari' most. Only 4% of the population say they trust GPB (CRRC Georgia, December 2021), which, in comparison to the abovementioned private TV stations, attempts to discuss the ongoing events in a rather neutral way and provide various actors' perspectives. Despite this, even GPB cannot be considered 'impartial', as according to Transparency International Georgia (2022), at various times the ruling parties in Georgia have attempted to exert their control over GPB via appointing the persons loyal to the government as its executives. However, GPB still manages to maintain a more unbiased stance in comparison to other TV stations in Georgia, while 'Imedi' and 'Mtavari' voice the discourses of two major political rivals: the government represented by the Georgian Dream (GD) party and the largest opposition represented by United National Movement (UNM) and its smaller offspring parties (such as European Georgia, Droa, Girchi), respectively. Our research has confirmed that the

political polarization characteristic to the Georgian society is directly translated into the media polarization and overtly reflected in the discourses produced by the two rival media outlets.

What was the guiding principle for collecting the data from these media outlets? As noted above, we followed key events in the EU-Georgia relations and analyzed prime time news and political talk shows related to these events in the three media outlets. Our starting point was the first day of the event, and we have analyzed all the relevant material in the following week or picked up key dates related to this event so that the analyzed period makes a week. As for the events that have been planned in advance (such as the local Self-Government Elections in autumn 2021), we have targeted the event day as well as three days before and three days after it. Based on the identified events, we have targeted several key periods in our timeline:

- *July 5–11 (2021), events related to the anti-homophobia rally:* Far-right groups attacked the journalists covering the news related to the anti-homophobia rally in Tbilisi (the rally itself was cancelled because of the threat of attack). The police did not ensure the safety of journalists and one journalist died as a consequence of this clash. Far-right groups went on and removed EU flag in front of the Parliament building and erected an iron cross instead of it. The flag was put back next morning by the Head of Parliament.
- *July 19–21 and July 28–31 (2021), the government's withdrawal from Michel's document:* Discussion of the agreement initiated by President of the European Council Charles Michel to help overcome the ongoing political crisis in Georgia. The agreement was initially signed by the ruling GD party and smaller oppositional parties, but not by the largest oppositional UNM party. However, later the government withdrew from the agreement, while UNM signed it.
- *August 22–24 and August 31–September 3 (2021), the government's rejection of the EU's MFA:* The government refused to accept the EU's Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) announcing that the country had experienced a visible economic growth and there was no need of taking an additional debt. However, in the very same period, the government referred to the Asian Development Bank for financial assistance. As noted by EU officials themselves, because the EU's granting of MFA was dependent on Georgia's implementation of the legislative reform regarding the appointment of judges, which the government failed to perform, knowing that it had not satisfied the conditions for MFA, the ruling party acted as if no financial assistance was needed.
- *September 29–October 5 (2021), the self-government elections:* The local Self-Government Elections and the arrival of Georgia's third president Mikheil Saakashvili in the country, who was imprisoned by the GD government.
- *March 1–3 and 14–17 (2022), Russia's invasion of Ukraine:* The events related to Russia's war against Ukraine and the Georgian government's refusal to join the EU's sanctions against Russia.
- *June 17–20 and 24–26 (2022), Georgia not being granted the EU's candidate status:* The EU's decision was announced on Georgia being granted a European perspective instead of candidate status. The Georgian political elites' reactions followed immediately.

The data from the three TV channels have been subject to quantitative and qualitative content analysis and CDA. We have applied a predefined codebook with discursive categories developed based on the former studies on the Europeanization discourses in Georgia (Tsuladze et al. 2016; Tsuladze, Esebua, and Osepashvili 2021). In the current data, we have identified the most dominant discourses by counting what we call the actor-discourse segments that mark a narrative thread by a single actor until the next actor takes a turn. One narrative thread might consist of more than one discourse. As a result of coding 173 TV programs (news and political talk shows), we have identified 3755 actor-discourse segments. Furthermore, we have performed qualitative analysis of the actor-discourse segments. The discursive interaction between three major actors has been analyzed: the government (GD), the opposition (its majority self-positions as pro-European) and the EU. In order to trace the discursive interaction between the EU and domestic political actors, we have developed the actor-discourse networks for six target periods using the MAXQDA software. These networks expose not only the three key actors' agenda related to Georgia's Europeanization but also the transformation of this agenda from July 2021 to June 2022. Thus, they disclose the essence of the above-mentioned discursive disengagement among the three key actors alongside tracing its intensification. In order to reveal the key actors' framing of major discourses and their strategic usage of Europeanization, CDA has been deployed.

The charts below represent the actor-discourse networks based on the six target periods in a cumulative way (the three media outlets' data aggregated). There are two sets of nodes on each chart – one representing actors (Government, Opposition and the EU) and another representing discourses the three actors set on the agenda. The two sets of nodes are depicted with different symbols. Arrows connecting actors with discourses illustrate the instances of a specific actor referring to a discourse. The wider the arrow is, the more intense the reference of this actor is to a particular discourse. There are few principles that are followed in the process of mapping: discourses, which are voiced especially intensely by an actor, are located in the close proximity to this actor. This allows us to identify similarities among actors in their patterns of interacting with certain discourses, and hence enables us to trace their discursive convergence or divergence. Discourses creating the opposition between domestic political actors and EU actors are highlighted in grey (see the charts below).

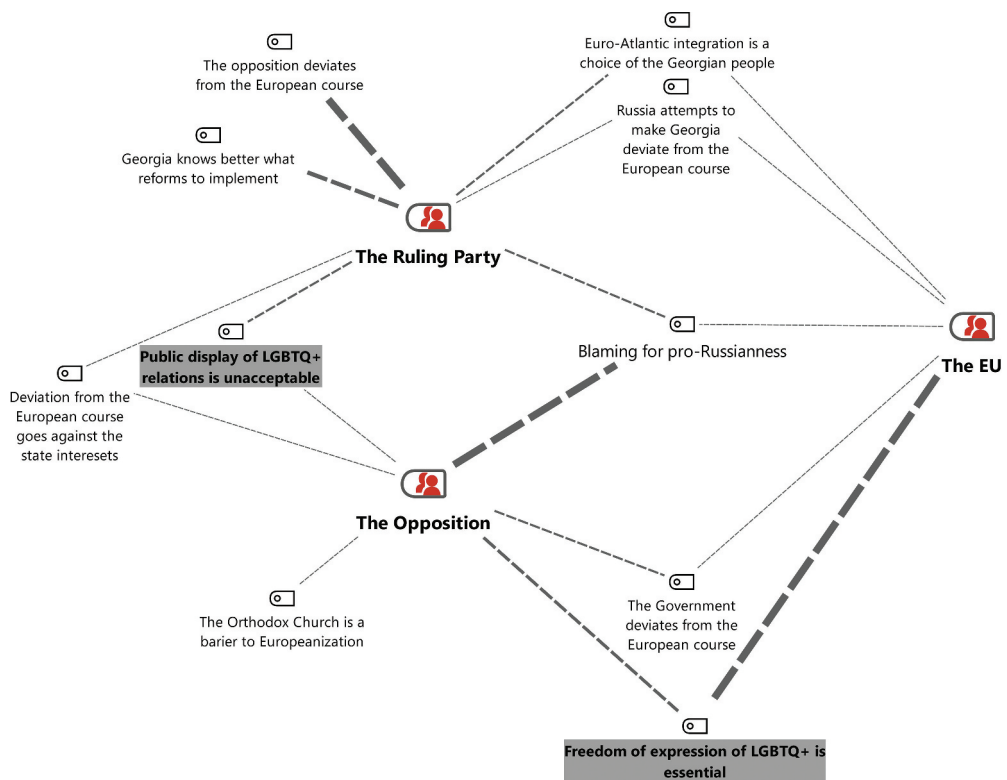
### **Discursive disengagement: major trends**

Based on the presented charts, we can trace both the essence of the discursive disengagement between the EU and Georgian political actors and its intensification over time. We will first summarize the main trends based on the six periods focusing on the major disengaging messages and the actors voicing them.

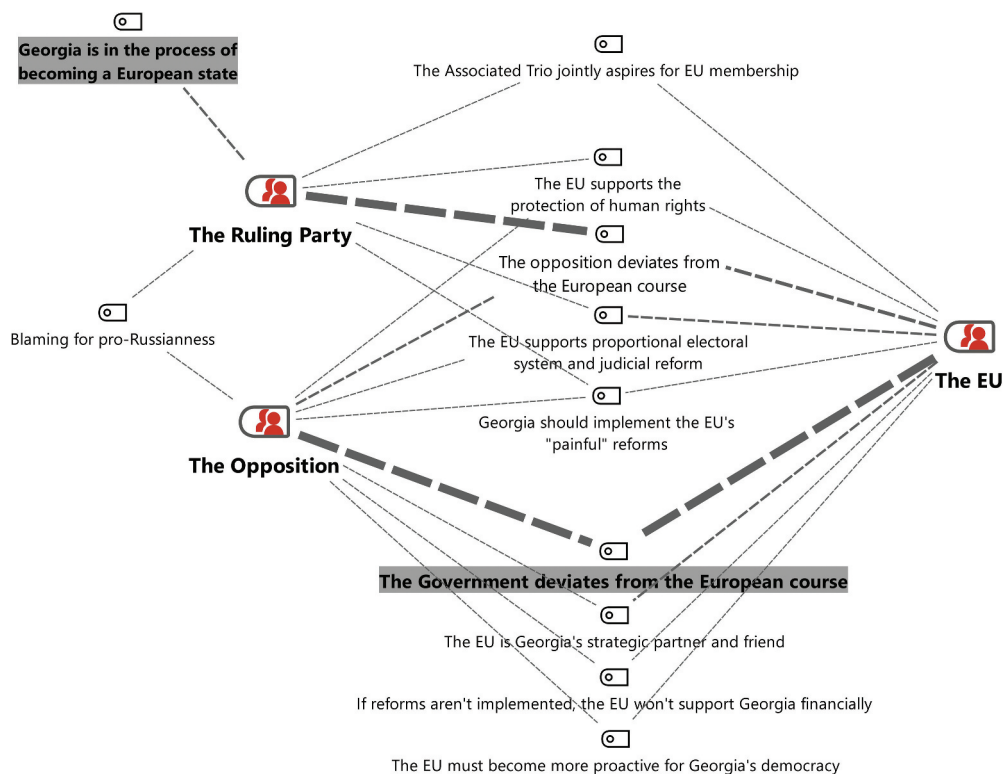
As the charts show, the leitmotiv of all six periods is what we call the 'deviation discourse.' In particular, the government blames the opposition for the deviation from the European course and it is its dominant discourse, while the opposition blames the government for the deviation from the European course that is also its dominant discourse. However, we will not focus on this discursive battle between the

government and the opposition, as we aim to scrutinize de-Europeanization defined as discursive disengagement between the EU and domestic political actors. In fact, the EU also voices the deviation discourse targeting both the government and the opposition though with a visible difference, namely, the deviation discourse addressing the government persists along the whole analyzed period and even becomes the EU's dominant discourse in two periods – upon the government's withdrawal from Michel's document and its rejection of the EU's MFA. In the same two periods, the EU also voices the discourse that the opposition deviates from the European course, though it never becomes the EU's dominant discourse and fully disappears from the EU's agenda since the self-government elections of October 2021. It is noteworthy that the government is rather defensive when accused of the deviation from the European course and along the whole analyzed period persistently circulates the discourse that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state, which is not only one of its dominant discourses but also its exclusive discourse, as no other actor voices it. In contrast to the ruling party, the opposition is not engaged in the discursive contest with the EU (only a few instances of mild critique were revealed in the analyzed period), and hence we will not focus on the opposition's and the EU's discursive disengagement in the further analysis.

To highlight the major discourses voiced by the EU and the ruling party within the six identified periods, following the far-right groups' attack on the journalists covering the

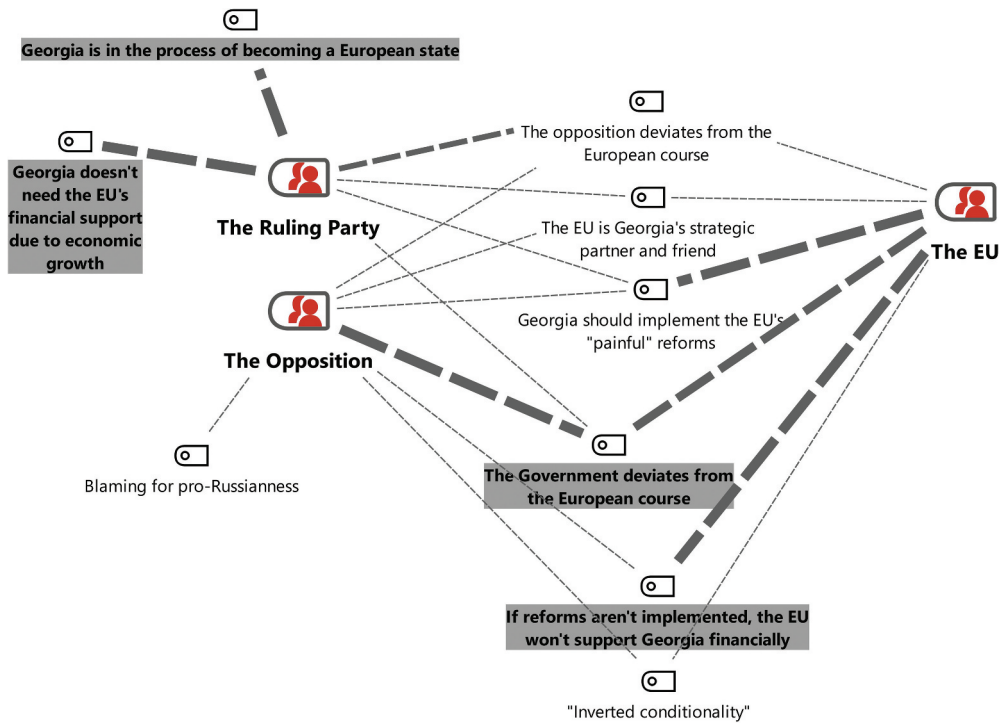


**Chart 1.** Period 1: events related to the anti-homophobia rally (July 2021).



**Chart 2.** Period 2: the government's withdrawal from Michel's document (July 2021).

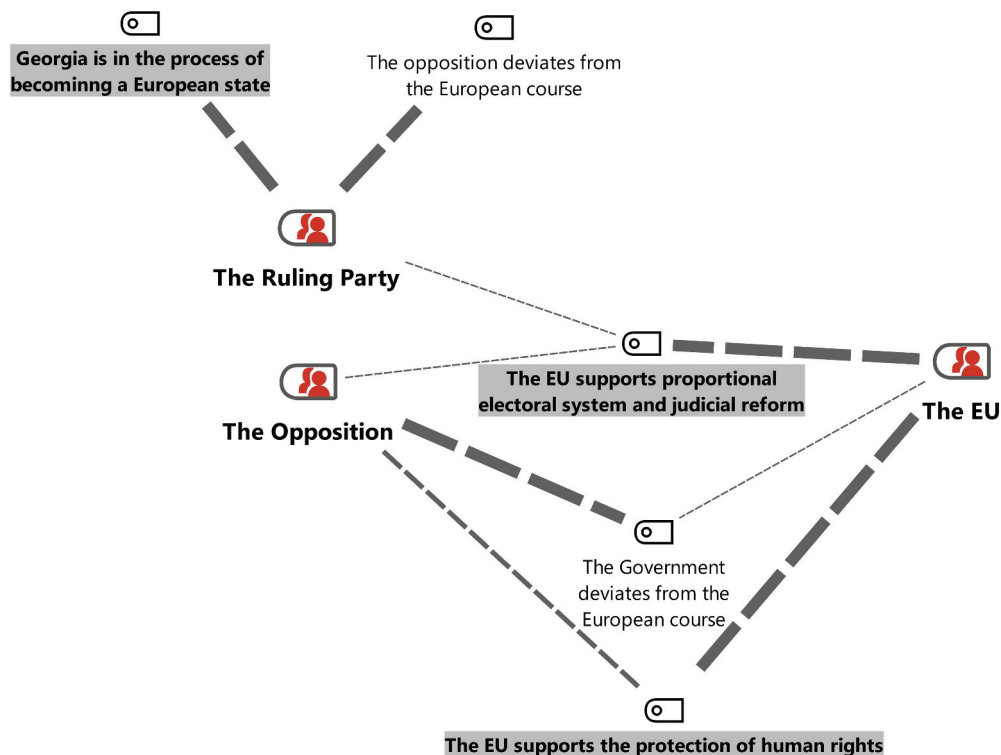
news related to the anti-homophobia rally in Tbilisi, the key message of the EU towards Georgia is that the freedom of expression of sexual minorities is essential. The government's immediate response follows that the public display of LGBTQ relations is unacceptable (see [chart 1](#)). In fact, this message is also voiced by one of the leaders of the oppositional party 'Lelo.' However, it is particularly vocal in the discourse of the ruling party and especially Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili himself. The EU's key discourse in the period when the Georgian government withdraws from Charles Michel's agreement (19 July 2021) is that the government deviates from the European course, which is followed by the ruling party's defensive discourse that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state (see [chart 2](#)). When the government rejects the EU's MFA, the EU has a twofold discourse: 1. The government deviates from the European course, to which the ruling party responds again that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state, and 2. If the reforms are not implemented (primarily implying judicial and electoral reforms), the EU will not further financially support the country, while the government's dominant discourse is that Georgia does not need the EU's financial support because of the country's unprecedented economic growth. It is noteworthy that in this period, the EU and the opposition even talk about the ruling party's tactic, which we call 'inverted conditionality', that is, the government refuses to implement required reforms though still awaits the EU's awards (see [chart 3](#)). In the period of self-government elections, the EU criticizes the government for not guaranteeing



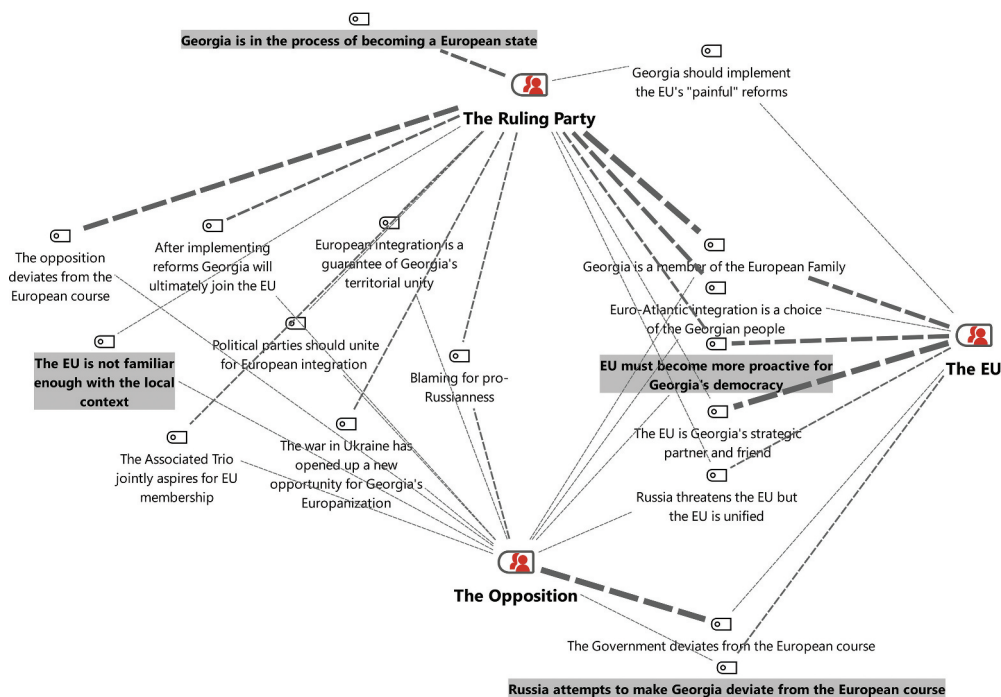
**Chart 3.** Period 3: the government's rejection of the EU's MFA (August–September 2021).

a competitive environment for all parties and its dominant discourse focuses on the need for protecting human rights and ensuring a proportional electoral system, while the government's dominant discourse persistently reiterates that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state (see [chart 4](#)).

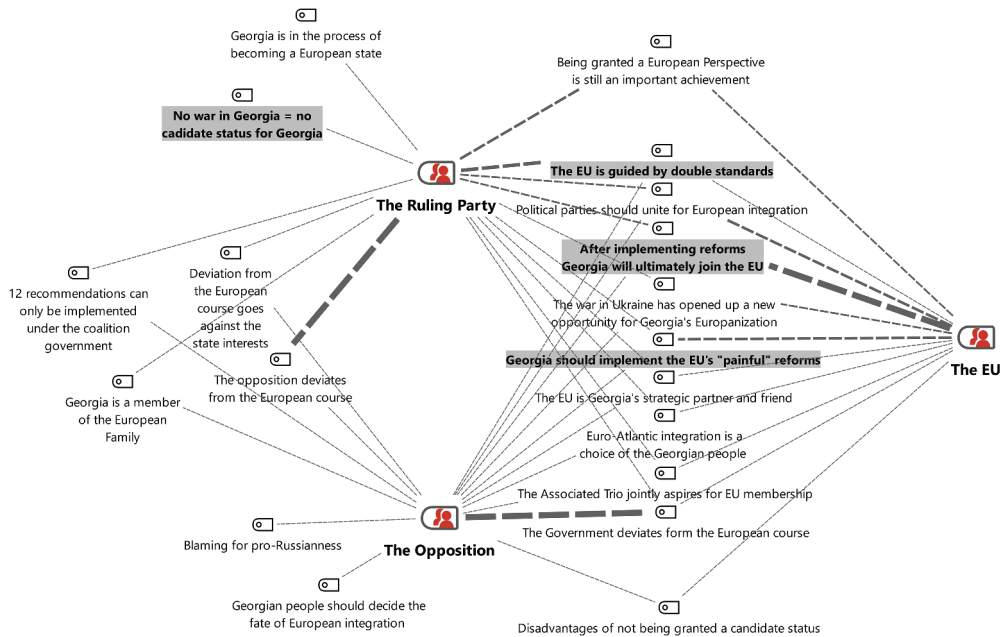
A new stage in the EU-Georgia discursive disengagement starts upon Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is evident even from a superficial glance at the charts. The discourses circulated by the three actors become much more complex and, at the same time, more interwoven. However, despite the seeming convergence of these discourses, the government's discursive opposition to the EU steadily transforms from defensive to offensive opposition. Upon the Georgian government's refusal to join the EU's sanctions against Russia, the EU voices the discourse that Russia tries to make Georgia deviate from the European course, while the government continues restating that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state. In this very period, alongside the EU's self-reflection that it should become more proactive in its support of Georgia's democracy, we witness both the government's and the opposition's somewhat mild critique of the EU, stating that the latter is not well familiar with the Georgian context (see [chart 5](#)). However, this critique escalates into an overt discursive conflict of the ruling party with the EU in the next target period, when in contrast to Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia is not granted candidate status but merely a European perspective. Here, it seems the ruling party agrees with the EU's dominant discourses that Georgia should implement necessary reforms and this will ultimately result in its membership status. However, concurrently, it voices its rather vocal discourse that the EU is guided by double standards, that is, it readily sets its own



**Chart 4.** Period 4: the self-government elections (September–October 2021).



**Chart 5.** Period 5: Russia's invasion of Ukraine (March 2022).



**Chart 6.** Period 6: Georgia not being granted the EU's candidate status (June 2022).

conditions though is unwilling to reward Georgia (in fact, this discourse is also voiced a few times by the opposition representatives and even some members of the European Parliament) (see [chart 6](#)). Furthermore, the ruling party even circulates the discourse that Georgia is not granted candidate status as a 'punishment' for not being involved in war (Parliament of Georgia 2022), simultaneously labeling all the oppositional parties that openly support Ukraine as 'war parties.'

Despite the intensified discursive disengagement traced in the last two periods, it is noteworthy that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also activated the identity discourse among both the Georgian political elites and the EU. All the three actors voice the discourse that Euro-Atlantic integration is the choice of the Georgian people. Furthermore, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, first time in the analyzed period, the EU spreads the message that Georgia is a member of the 'European family', which becomes one of its dominant discourses (see [chart 5](#)).

Likewise, after Georgia has been granted a European perspective instead of candidate status, first time in the analyzed period, the EU voices the discourse (which becomes its major one) that after implementing necessary reforms, Georgia will ultimately become the EU's member state (see [chart 6](#)). It seems alongside the intensification of the government's discursive opposition to the EU, the latter's message box is increasingly loaded with positive messages referring to both identity and pragmatic (especially EU membership as a major reward) considerations related to Georgia's Europeanization (Tsuladze 2021). In order to scrutinize the specifics of discursive disengagement, the following sections will analyze the essence of discursive opposition and its intensification.

## The essence of discursive opposition

As noted above, in the first analyzed period focusing on the events related to the anti-homophobia rally, the EU's major discourse towards Georgia is that the freedom of expression of sexual minorities is essential, while the government officials state that the public display of LGBTQ relations is unacceptable. Simultaneously, the government circulates the discourse that Georgia knows better what reforms it needs to implement (which is another example of the ruling party's discursive opposition to the EU). However, because the latter does not address the LGBTQ-related issues, we will not discuss it in this context. In fact, because of the lack of space, we will pick up only a few exemplary discourses from each key period to describe the essence of the government's discursive opposition to the EU.

On 7 July 2021, President of the European Council Charles Michel and members of the European Parliament commented on the far-right groups' attack of the journalists reporting on the anti-homophobia rally planned to be held on July 5, which was broadcast by pro-oppositional TV 'Mtavari' and not pro-governmental TV 'Imedi.' According to Charles Michel, 'the rights of the LGBT community are not a secondary issue but exemplify the societies' attitudes towards diversity and human dignity. In the EU, we do not discriminate but unite' (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 07 July 2021). Thus, in this short but sharp message, the President of the European Council draws a clear demarcation line between 'us' who do not discriminate and 'them' who do. The message from members of the European Parliament follows on the same day, where they express their 'regret that the government of Georgia does not seem to be ready to ensure the safety of assembly devoted to tolerance [...] we expect that the government of Georgia will strictly penalize those who are guilty' (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 07 July 2021). In the same address, members of the European Parliament remind the government that ensuring the protection of human rights, especially the rights of minorities, is a necessary precondition for being granted EU candidacy. In this way, they caution the Georgian government they do not consider ready to safeguard human rights that the country should not await the hoped-for reward if EU standards are not followed.

The ruling party's adjacent discourse is predominantly based on the strategic use of *topoi*, which is utilized as both an excuse before the EU reproves of the government's actions and a blaming and denying strategy after the EU officials' assessments are publicized. The first discursive strategy is utilized by Leader of the Parliamentary Majority Irakli Kobakhidze, who states that 'for the majority of our society the Pride is unacceptable and insulting. I will repeat that whether we like it or not, this is the perception of the majority' (Imedi, *Imedi Live*, 06 July 2021). We certainly read through these lines the government's excuse that it might not like the societal attitude though it has to respect the majority's will, which indirectly implies that it is the wider society itself that is responsible for the violence against journalists. Furthermore, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili announces the next day that 'it was not appropriate to organize this march in the center of Tbilisi, because it bore huge risks and there was a danger of civil confrontation. [...] These provocations are in the interest of the revanchist, radical opposition [implying UNM] and a hostile state [implying Russia]' (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 07 July 2021). This short passage is a vivid example of the use of ideological discourse with a clear segregation between 'us'

(safeguarding the society against risks and confrontations) and ‘them’ (representing a revanchist and radical actor). While the EU criticizes the government for not being ready to ensure the protection of minority rights, the latter, lacking respective argumentation, immediately utilizes the topoi strategy and shifts the focus towards the opposition, concurrently enacting the politics of fear and aligning its own political rivals with the country’s enemy. Thus, in this blame game all the actors except for the ruling party – the majority of Georgia’s citizens, the opposition and the hostile state – are depicted as accountable for the far-right groups’ attack of journalists.

The abovementioned discursive opposition becomes even more obvious in the second target period, that is, the government’s withdrawal from Michel’s document on 19 July 2021. The EU voices its concern that the government deviates from the European course, which is both the EU’s and the oppositional parties’ major discourse in this period, while the government offers a defensive discourse underlining that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state. This discursive contest is especially active on pro-governmental TV ‘Imedi.’ The former discourse is well evidenced by the words of Viola von Cramon, member of the European Parliament, who directly states: ‘We do not want to see Georgia deviating from the Transatlantic and European path’ (Imedi, *Kronika*, 29 July 2021) and stresses that ‘annulling the agreement harms Georgian Dream’s credibility and makes it an actor who is not trustworthy. [...] I think the EU will have to reconsider its relations with the government of Georgia if the latter does not return to the agreement’ (Imedi, *Kronika*, 30 July 2021). Based on the abovementioned quote, the government’s withdrawal from Michel’s document is viewed as an indicator of its deviation from the Euro-Atlantic course, while the government of Georgia is perceived as an unreliable partner for the EU.

The ruling party’s defensive discourse develops in two directions: On the one hand, it attempts to refute the above deviation discourse, while on the other hand, it uses fabrication and topoi to attack its main political rival and divert the deviation discourse towards the latter. Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili’s words exemplify the government’s attempt to persuade the EU that the ruling party’s annulling of Michel’s document will not affect the implementation of required reforms in Georgia: ‘We have done everything, we do everything unilaterally [implying that the largest oppositional party has refused to sign the agreement]. It has been said and I will repeat that the reforms will continue’ (Imedi, *Kronika*, 30 July 2021). An example of the concurrent use of fabrication and topoi is a passage from Irakli Kobakhidze’s monologue, who starts with an irony addressing the ruling party’s critics and questioning ‘how come that Georgian Dream has been changing its orientation since 2012 and has not changed it until now?’ He immediately enacts ideological discourse introducing the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ dichotomy: The former represented by GD with a long list of contributions to Euro-Atlantic integration, while the latter by its main political rival UNM, whose pro-Western orientation is considered questionable. In Kobakhidze’s words,

The former government fully obstructed our Western path and we had an absolute collapse in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration before 2012. Although they claim to be Russia’s enemies,

they have handed 20% of our territories to the Russian Federation. Their words and deeds diverge. (Imedi, *Kronika*, 30 July 2021)

This short passage combines a few strategies of discursive manipulation: First, Kobakhidze uses exaggerations to invoke negative emotions towards the GD's opponents ('fully obstructed', 'absolute collapse'). Besides, he uses fabrication and blames UNM for what it cannot be really accountable for ('they have handed 20% of our territories to the Russian Federation'), as UNM came to power 10 years later after Russia's occupation of Abkhazia. Furthermore, he uses topoi to shift the blame towards GD's main political rival UNM: While European partners question the ruling party's credibility, the leader of the Parliamentary majority stresses its major political opponent's unreliability, stating that its 'words and deeds diverge.' Finally, similar to the Prime Minister in the former target period, Kobakhidze enacts the politics of fear, aligning UNM with the enemy that has occupied 20% of Georgia's land, thus using intertextuality to reinforce the respective message.

In the third target period, when the government rejects the EU's MFA, the EU voices a twofold discourse: On the one hand, it further expresses its concern that the government deviates from the European course, while the ruling party reiterates that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state. On the other hand, EU officials underline that if the reforms are not implemented (primarily implying judicial and electoral reforms), the EU will not further financially support the country, while the government claims that Georgia does not need the EU's financial support because of the country's unprecedented economic growth, meanwhile referring to the Asian Development Bank for financial assistance. This fact has not remained unnoticed by certain members of the European Parliament, whose assessments are circulated by pro-oppositional TV 'Mtavari' (and not discussed on pro-governmental TV 'Imedi'), noting that because the government of Georgia has not implemented an obligatory judicial reform, it does not deserve the MFA's second tranche (75 million EUR). They stress that being aware of this fact, in order to save its face the ruling party has rejected the MFA before the EU would refuse to grant it (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 02 September 2021). They also note that

Whether the government of Georgia accepts or rejects the MFA, it should continue implementing reforms, as it has to regain its international partners' trust that is currently damaged and lost. While the Georgian people should clearly state whether they agree or not with the government's deviation from the European course . . . (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 01 September 2021)

Despite the fact that pro-governmental TV 'Imedi' does not transmit the EU's critique of the ruling party, it does transmit the ruling party's responses to this critique. However, the same government officials' narratives differ when circulated by pro-governmental 'Imedi' and pro-oppositional 'Mtavari.' For instance, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili's defensive discourse on 'Imedi' TV is that certain 'hostile' actors [implying the opposition] did their best 'to prevent the country from being granted visa-free movement in the conditions of the current ruling party and they still continue intentionally harming their own people' (Imedi, *Kronika*, 31 August 2021). Thus, the Prime Minister indirectly implies that it is the opposition that has been long attempting to discredit the government in the eyes of the EU and that this attempt only harms the Georgian people. Continuing his blame game in the context of the well-practiced 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy, the Prime Minister again depicts the opposition as the

people's enemy. In contrast to 'Imedi', pro-oppositional TV 'Mtavari' transmits a very different passage from the Prime Minister's discourse: As the EU criticizes the government of Georgia for not implementing the required judicial reform, the Prime Minister's following comment is circulated:

We remember very well what kind of judiciary has been inherited by GD. We have implemented a number of real and tangible reforms. [...] Besides, I would like to remind everyone that the current judicial system in Georgia is much more advanced than that of the EU member states (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 01 September 2021).

No doubt, this is an irony directed towards the ruling party. When members of the European Parliament overtly criticize the government for not implementing the judicial reform, which makes the country ineligible for the MFA, the Prime Minister's declaration that Georgia's judicial system is 'much more advanced' than those of the EU countries sounds out of touch with reality. It is obvious that the two TV channels are driven by different motivations: the pro-governmental TV attempts to show that the government continues following the European course though its political opponents try to discredit it, while the pro-oppositional TV aims to reveal how the government self-discredits itself declaring that it has created the judicial system that is superior to that of the EU's. In fact, the ruling party's certain irritation with and discursive opposition to the EU's critique is clearly exemplified by the words of Minister of Foreign Affairs Davit Zalkaliani, who states that 'the government of Georgia has done a lot to make the country's European course irreversible. The rejection of *debt* does not mean the rejection of Europe' (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 01 September 2021). It is noteworthy that the word 'debt' – having a negative connotation and perceived as a burden – is used instead of the EU's financial assistance. The same term is used by other ruling party officials while searching for an excuse why the government has rejected the EU's MFA (Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 31 August 2021), Leader of the Parliamentary Majority Irakli Kobakhidze (Imedi, *Kronika*, 01 September 2021), Head of Parliamentary Committee of Foreign Affairs Nikoloz Samkharadze (Imedi, *Kronika*, 03 September 2021), Mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze (Imedi, *Kronika*, 03 September 2021), etc.).

In the fourth target period that matches the self-government elections in Georgia, the EU sends direct messages to the ruling party stressing that via upholding a proportional electoral system the EU supports the country's democratic development, as well as that it supports human rights protection in Georgia. The government's response is not different from that in the former periods, as it continues restating that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state. After the self-government elections, the EU's mission in Georgia disseminates the following assessment:

The mission has underlined significant drawbacks, especially the widespread reports on threatening, bribing and exerting a pressure on the candidates and the electorate, as well as an unequal electoral environment. Besides, the ruling party has benefitted from a considerable disbalance between the resources, an insufficient monitoring of funding the campaign and the privilege of being in power. (Public Broadcaster, *Moambe*, 04 October 2021)

Thus, the EU's mission criticizes the ruling party for not creating a competitive electoral environment and even using various illegal means to achieve desirable outcomes. The ruling party seems to have a different view about its contributions and this view is well

illustrated by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili's rhetoric, who suggests the opponents to look at the progress achieved by the ruling party. He proudly underlines

the progress that started when I became a Prime Minister, from the signing of the Association Agreement, visa liberalization, free trade, ideal relations with NATO ... [...] There is a progress at all levels, all directions and it is a truly tangible progress for our population. (Imedi, *Imedis Kvira*, 03.10.2021)

Using exaggerations, the Prime Minister tries to stress not only the ruling party's but also his personal contribution to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. Therefore, even if EU officials criticize the government for certain election-related issues, they are expected to recognize the ruling party's 'progress at all levels, all directions' (depicted as a commonsense truth recognized by the population), when it comes to the country's European integration.

### From defensive to offensive discursive opposition

The Georgian government's discursive opposition to the EU noticeably intensifies in March 2022, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As noted above, despite a seeming convergence between the three actors' discourses (see the charts), concurrently, a growing divergence can be traced among their views, which ultimately transforms into the ruling party's offensive opposition to the EU and escalates when Georgia's application for candidate status is not satisfied. At first sight, the convergence between the ruling party's and the EU's discourses increases. In particular, Russia's full-scale invasion has activated identity discourses among both local and EU officials, stressing that Georgia is a member of the European 'family' (it is the first time within our analyzed period this discourse is voiced by EU officials). Likewise, the discourse that Euro-Atlantic integration is the choice of the Georgian people is voiced by both the governmental and EU actors. Furthermore, another discourse actively circulated by EU officials, stressing that the EU should become more proactive in its support for Georgia's democracy, is readily adopted by members of the ruling party and the opposition. However, the data also reveal that upon the Georgian government's refusal to join the EU's sanctions against Russia, the EU voices the discourse that Russia tries to make Georgia deviate from the European course, while the government persistently restates that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state.

In his speech, Charles Michel tries to persuade the Georgian government to join the EU's sanctions against Russia:

Together with the European Commission and the European Parliament we want to strengthen the ties between Georgia and Ukraine [...] in these challenging times, it is crucial to stand together in order to make clear that we support international law, international order .... (Public Broadcaster, *Moambe*, 01 March 2022)

Thus, the government of Georgia is reminded that via supporting Ukraine it supports international conventions, as well as that a country with the experience of Russia's invasion should stand with Ukraine. Furthermore, member of the European Parliament Viola von Cramon notes that once Russia has invaded Georgia, while now it tries to influence its decisions. In response, Deputy Head of Parliamentary Committee of Foreign Affairs, MP Giorgi Khelashvili notes that 'it is a pity that a member of the European

Parliament [referring to Viola von Cramon] relies on uninformed TV announcements' (Imedi, *Kronika*, 14 March 2022), while Leader of the ruling party, MP Mamuka Mdinardze warns 'everyone, within and outside Georgia, to avoid telling lies and with these lies harming Georgia and its government' (Imedi, *Kronika*, 14 March 2022). Thus, first time in the analyzed period, the ruling party representatives openly criticize members of the European Parliament for making 'uninformed' statements and even 'telling lies.' The government officials' blaming and denying strategy seems to transform into a more offensive one over time, with a stronger focus on the shaming discourse that classifies the critique of the ruling party as a harm made to both the government and the country.

As noted above, this offensive discourse escalates in the last analyzed period, when the EU announces its decision on Georgia's European perspective. Although the government agrees with the EU's dominant discourses that Georgia should implement necessary reforms and this will ultimately result in its membership status, at the same time, it states that the EU is guided by double standards readily setting its own conditions though being unwilling to reward Georgia. Furthermore, the ruling party even circulates the discourse that Georgia is not granted candidate status just because it is not involved in war, thus both shaming the EU for making an unfair decision towards Georgia and indicating that Ukraine has got candidate status only due to the ongoing war. It is noteworthy that in this very period, through its official social media, the government actively circulates the statistics of the three associated countries' alignment with EU regulations, economic growth, criminal situation and other indicators, where Georgia is represented as an unconditional leader. Thus, in response to the EU's discourse that Georgia is not yet ready for being granted candidate status, as confirmed by the EU's 12 recommendations set for the country to implement, the ruling party disseminates the discourse that Georgia is a leader among the association trio and has been unjustly 'punished.' In fact, the ruling party circulates a dual message aimed at both criticizing the EU for its hypocrisy ('the EU is guided by double standards') and highlighting one's own contribution to Georgia's European integration ('being granted a European perspective is still an important achievement'). Both of them represent the ruling party's dominant discourses in this period. As noted above, although such discourses target the EU, they are predominantly or even exclusively directed towards domestic audiences.

The discourse on the EU's hypocrisy is represented by the words of MP Giorgi Khelashvili who builds his argument on French President Emmanuel Macron's note on Georgia's different 'geopolitical and geographical situation' (Civil.ge 2022) and underlines that despite the government's will and responsibility,

if there is a wall that cannot be broken, it is very difficult to do anything. When you are told that you do not belong geopolitically and you are also told that you are not involved in war and do not have a sufficient number of victims for a European perspective ... (Imedi, *Kronika*, 18 June 2022).

It seems the speaker does not finish the sentence himself not to sound too critical. Despite this, it is obvious that the EU is openly blamed and shamed for its hypocrisy as, no matter what efforts the Georgian government makes towards European integration, it will fail anyway. To make the argument more powerful, the speaker uses a metaphor, comparing the EU with 'the wall that cannot be broken' – Georgia can neither change its geopolitical situation nor ensure a 'sufficient number of victims.' As it has not been considered an

obstacle on the way to Georgia's European integration before, it is certainly viewed as a pretext to block the country now, and hence all the blame goes to the EU and not the Georgian government asked to implement 12 recommendations and improve its democratic performance (Charles Michel, Imedi, *Kronika*, 24 June 2022). The discourse on the EU's hypocrisy is further reinforced by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili who compares Georgia's achievements on its way to European integration with those of Ukraine and Moldova, stating that

If anyone deserves it, my friends, it is Georgia, and only then Ukraine and Moldova. When they say Ukraine is in war and therefore, it should be granted [candidate status], excuse me. If war defines the granting of candidate status, we do not want war, my friends. (Imedi, *Kronika*, 17 June 2022)

Indeed, this passage is another confirmation that the governmental discourse targeting the EU is exclusively staged for local audiences. The way the Prime Minister interprets the granting of candidate status is that it comes at the expense of being involved in war. A powerful ideological discourse is enacted with 'us' – Georgians, who the Prime Minister calls 'my friends' and 'them' – refusing to grant 'us' candidate status because 'we' are not involved in war. Besides, the topoi strategy is used to appeal to the commonsense knowledge that no one wants war, even if the EU offers its candidate status in exchange. Thus, local coherence is also masterfully utilized to disguise the connection between the facts and represent the war as a necessary precondition for being granted the EU's candidacy. Therefore, the EU's decision is represented as a political one that is not based on the candidates' merits ('If anyone deserves it, [...] it is Georgia'), but on certain external factors that are out of Georgia's control.

As for the parallel discourse stressing that a European perspective is still an important achievement and praising the government's contribution to European integration, it is evident from the rhetoric of another MP from the ruling party Sozar Subari, who refers to the presidents of the European Commission and the European Council, claiming that their words confirm the ruling party's true contribution to Georgia's European integration (Imedi, *Imedi Live*, 24 June 2022). Despite positive references to EU authorities to justify own achievements, the ruling party intensifies its use of topoi, especially *argumentum ad hominem*, that is, a verbal attack on the opponent's personality (Wodak 2011, 530). Leader of the ruling party Irakli Kobakhidze verbally attacks and even insults those members of the European Parliament who criticize the ruling party's democratic backsliding and organize meetings with representatives of the oppositional parties, especially UNM: 'These perceptions are imposed by UNM here and by vonCramons, Fotygas and others there. These very people are anti-EU, defenders of criminals' (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 18 June 2022). It is noteworthy that pro-governmental TV 'Imedi' avoids broadcasting the ruling party's overt attacks on EU officials, while pro-oppositional TV 'Mtavari' never misses a chance to broadcast each occasion of such attacks, exemplified by both the above passage and the following one voiced by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili: 'Let us not represent the situation as if we were begging someone and pleading for something [candidate status]. I will open the curtain ...' (Mtavari, *Mtavari*, 18 June 2022). In this case, another technique of topoi – *argumentum ad baculum*, that is, 'threatening with the stick' (Wodak 2011, 530) is utilized. In order to make his argument more powerful, the Prime Minister uses

a metaphor of ‘opening the curtain’ that implies the uncovering of someone’s (negative) deeds. The ideological discourse is enacted again with ‘them’ wanting to put ‘us’ in the position of begging/pleading. It seems the Georgian government attempts to challenge its asymmetrically dependent position via inverting conditionality and threatening the EU that the truth about it will be disclosed to the Georgian people, whose national pride is touched. This is the first occasion within the analyzed period when the Georgian government threatens to ‘punish’ the EU, which points to the escalation of its offensive discourse towards its strategic partner.

## Conclusion

Our conceptualization of de-Europeanization as discursive disengagement and the concomitant shift of focus from merely the content of discourse to the patterns of actor interaction has revealed a complex character of de-Europeanization discourse in Georgia. For example, while Georgia’s ruling party persistently claims throughout the analyzed period that Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state, a closer look at its interaction with EU actors uncovers rather vocal discursive oppositions between the two. It is through the analysis of interactions that we reveal that this persistent claim about Georgia forming as a European state is in fact a defensive response against EU officials’ critique of the government’s deviation from the European course. Having analyzed the discourses around the crucial events throughout the year (July 2021–June 2022), we find out that these discursive oppositions persist though they can take a context-specific shape. For example, in the period of events related to the antihomophobia rally, the EU’s dominant discourse about the freedom of expression of sexual minorities is met with the ruling party’s claim about the public display of LGBTQ relations being unacceptable; during the events related to the rejection of the EU’s financial support, we witness EU actors conditioning financial support on the implementation of reforms, while the government neglects this conditionality by arguing that Georgia does not need the EU’s financial support due to the unprecedented economic growth.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine marks the turning point in the process of discursive disengagement between the Georgian government and the EU. While at first sight, the agenda of both of these actors – that is, what they talk about – seem to converge, a deeper analysis of framing – that is, how they talk about these issues – shows a clear transformation of the government’s discourses from defensive to offensive opposition. For the first time, it brings up the discourse of the EU being guided by double standards and attributes the EU’s reluctance to grant candidate status to the fact that Georgia is not involved in war. The offensive opposition further escalates in June 2022 and manifests itself in the shaming discourse and personal insults towards EU actors. Our analysis of discursive oppositions has also shown that the Georgian government actively uses various strategies of discursive manipulation, especially blaming and denying as articulations of the politics of fear.

Finally, we argue that through intensification of discursive opposition and its shift from defensive to offensive one the Georgian authorities attempt to legitimize de-Europeanization at the level of political practice. By the time of writing this paper, the ruling party’s discursive opposition to the EU further escalated. In the same period, GD blocked the election of a public defender, imprisoned the director of the oppositional TV

station 'Mtavari', and initiated a law 'On Transparency of Foreign Influence' (briefly referred to as the 'Foreign Agents' law), which was highly criticized by the European Commission and the European Parliament, stating that this law was an impediment on Georgia's way to European integration (Civil.ge 2023a). GD also resumed direct flights with Russia (banned by President Putin on 8 July 2019), prompting a diplomatic démarche to Georgia's government by all 27 EU member states (Civil.ge 2023b). Considering the above developments, we believe that further research would benefit from an in-depth analysis of the interrelationship between discursive de-Europeanization and the respective political practice in Georgia.

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