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**PERFORMING EUROPEANIZATION –
POLITICAL VIS-À-VIS POPULAR DISCOURSES
ON EUROPEANIZATION IN GEORGIA**

Performing Europeanization – Political vis-à-vis Popular Discourses on Europeanization in Georgia

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

CRRC – Caucasus Research Resource Centers

DCFTA – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

ENP – Eastern Neighborhood Policy

EaP – Eastern Partnership

EACU – Eurasian Customs Union

GD – Georgian Dream

ISSP – International Social Survey Program

UNM – United National Movement

INTRODUCTION

Aim of the Research

Europeanization became a focus of scholarly literature in the mid 1990s, when the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe started their integration process with the European Union (EU). It should be noted that Europeanization is not synonymous with European integration, but instead describes the “domestic impact” of the EU not only in its member states, but also in those located outside its borders (Sedelmeier, 2011, 5).

Initially, European integration was studied by specialists of international relations from the perspective of Neo-functionalism or Realism (Jacquot, Woll, 2003). In that view, the EU is a model of “European governance” characterized by regionalism, supranational integration, multilateralism, transnational trade (neoliberal economics) and democratic constitutionalism (Schimmelfennig, 2010). However, later political scientists and sociologists also got involved in European integration studies and shifted the research focus to the Europeanization of national political systems and everyday practices. Thus, European integration has become an independent variable influencing domestic politics, discourses, and identities (Radaelli, 2003), while the concept of Europeanization describes the transformation of national-level variables in the process of adaptation to the European model (Jacquot, Woll, 2003).

Crucially, Europeanization encourages the creation of “domestic analogies” of the EU, which implies the adaptation of national governance principles and mechanisms to those of EU standards and practices (Schimmelfennig, 2012, 10). In order to make sense of the transformation, it is significant to focus not only on the adaptation processes, but also on the “usage of European integration.” The “usage” means both the strategic interaction of state actors with European institutions and the impact of this “usage” as an everyday practice on the actors’ interests and identities (Jacquot, Woll, 2003, 3).

Based on the sociological perspective, the authors develop a typology of the “usage of European integration” that consists of three categories: **Strategic usage** (which implies “the transformation of resources in political practices” in order to achieve a specific goal such as influencing a political decision, getting access to political instruments, increasing one’s capacity of

action, etc.) This is the most widespread strategy used by both governmental and non-governmental actors at both national and supranational levels. **Cognitive usage** provides political actors with certain analytical frameworks to enable them to comprehend and interpret a particular political issue. Therefore, it is used as a persuasion mechanism and implies the participation of various actors at both national and supranational levels. **Legitimising usage** is a mix of the abovementioned two categories and implies “reference to Europe as a way of legitimising national public policies.” This form is mostly applied by governmental actors using the so called “European rhetoric” as it refers to “European interests” or “European constraints.” Despite the fact that this legitimation is based on discourse, its effect is quite strong, as discourse has a significant impact on the flow of Europeanization (Jacquot and Woll, 2003, 6-7). Our research focuses on the discursive aspect of Europeanization as it also combines other aspects of the “usage of European integration” and encourages public attitudes towards this process. It is domestic political and popular discourses that provide legitimacy to Europeanization or deprive it of such legitimacy.

The abovementioned typology resonates with Radaelli’s classification describing three major domains that are Europeanized: (1) domestic structures, (2) public policy, and (3) cognitive and normative structures (2003, 35). The latter is especially significant given that it implies the system of cultural values and social norms, as well as the reproduction and transformation processes of discourses and national identity. This means that Europeanization not only influences domestic political structures, but also to some extent changes dominant values, norms, and discourses in the member and aspirant states. For their part, domestic discourses influence the level of Europeanization in these countries (ibid, 36).

We can categorize discourses related to the EU and Europeanization as follows: the EU’s official discourse, social scientists’ discourse, opinion leaders and intellectuals’ discourse, and informal discourse (Nanz, 2000, 290). Our research aims to reveal the dominant discourses on Europeanization in Georgia, with a special focus on their presentation to wider audiences. Although the official discourse of the EU is beyond the focus of our research, it should be noted that the discourses of opinion leaders and the general population reflect the EU’s official discourse, while offering their narratives in response. Thus, our publication provides analysis of both opinion leaders’ and politicians’ narratives, as well as the general populations’ informal

discourse. It focuses on their assessments of the political, economic, and cultural aspects of Georgia's Europeanization. In addition, this publication can be considered as one example of social scientists' discourse on Georgia's Europeanization.

Research Method

Based on the research aim, there are two main target groups: the political elite and experts (Europeanization discourses at the political level) on one hand, and the general population (Europeanization discourses at the popular level) on the other. The research is based on the triangulation principle and consists of four major components.

In order to analyze the **political discourses** on Europeanization in Georgia:

- 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with politicians (members of both the parliamentary majority and minority) and opinion leaders/experts (NGO representatives, independent experts, and scholars) selected based on purposive sampling. We intended to cover both a variety of political parties and experts from various fields, from international organizations to higher educational institutions. As in-depth interviews took place in the spring of 2015, "ruling government" and "parliamentary majority" here refer to the "Georgian Dream" (GD) coalition, while "former government" and "parliamentary minority" refer to the "United National Movement" (UNM). "Parliamentary minority" also envisages the "Free Democrats" that left the ruling coalition in November 2014. In order to cover a wider spectrum of political views, we tried to interview those members of the Parliament who openly express anti-Western/anti-European sentiments; unfortunately, we did not manage to gain their consent.
- Content and discourse analysis of popular printed and online media outlets were undertaken, which, in the course of our research, reflected on the most important events related to Georgia's Europeanization. There were four rounds of media analysis, each a month long. We have analyzed the high-rated print media (with respective online versions) of pro-European journals ("Liberali" and "Tabula"), and

newspapers (“Kviris Palitra” and “Georgia Today”) and anti-European newspapers (“Asaval-Dasavali” and “Georgia and World”), as well as analytical web portals (“Radio Liberty,” Netgazeti.ge and InterPress-News.ge).

And in order to analyze the **popular discourses** on Europeanization in Georgia,

- Focus group discussions were held for populations residing in different regions of Georgia (autumn 2015). Based on the reasoning that political trends usually originate in the capital and other large cities before spreading to various regions of the country, the focus groups were conducted in Tbilisi and the major cities of Western and Eastern Georgia, namely, Kutaisi, Batumi and Zugdidi (the largest cities of Western Georgia; Zugdidi also bordering the Abkhazian conflict zone) and Telavi and Gori (the major cities of Eastern Georgia; Gori also nearby the South Ossetian conflict zone). Thus, the focus groups were held in these six cities of Georgia. As according to the national representative surveys, younger generation represents the most pro-European segment of Georgia’s population, the respondents were selected and grouped based on their age, which also matches the stages of socialization undergone in the post-Soviet or Soviet times: those aged 18-25 (whose socialization took place in the post-Soviet era), those aged 26-40 (whose socialization took place both in the post-Soviet and Soviet eras), and those aged 41-65 (whose socialization took place in the Soviet era). Three focus groups were held in each city with the respondents of the abovementioned age categories (18 focus groups in total).
- In order to enrich the qualitative data on popular discourses with the ones of national representative surveys, statistical analysis of the latest databases (ISSP, 2013; CRRC, 2015) was done. Particularly, based on our research topic, we have analyzed the respective data of the CRRC 2015 nationwide research on “Knowledge and Attitudes toward the EU in Georgia” and the ISSP 2013 nationwide research on “National Identity.”

DISCOURSES ON EUROPEANIZATION IN PRO- AND ANTI-EUROPEAN PRINT AND ONLINE GEORGIAN MEDIA

Media discourses play a significant role in evaluating the progress of Europeanization and shaping citizens' attitudes in Georgia. Therefore, their study represents an essential component of our research, within which four waves of Georgian media analysis have been implemented. Several printed and online media agents were selected for analysis. The main selection criteria were: (1) popularity rating of a media outlet, (2) its pro-Western/pro-European or anti-Western/anti-European rhetoric, and (3) its focus on not just omnibus-news but views as well.

According to Dennis and DeFleur, media agents can be classified based on what they offer their audience – news or views. Generally, individuals with sufficient cultural capital choose media products that provide *views*, while individuals who lack cultural capital grasp the provided information without critical reflection (Dennis, DeFleur, 2009). Analyzing the media agents who represent opinions is especially interesting as their consumers are socially and politically more active citizens who maintain distinctive positions. Based on Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues' (1944, 151) theory of two-step communication, these individuals serve as a medium through which media disseminate information to a wider audience.

During the research, content- and discourse analysis of popular print and online media outlets were undertaken, reflecting on the most important events related to Georgia's Europeanization. We have analyzed high-rated print media (with electronic versions) including pro-European (journals "Liberali" and "Tabula", and newspapers "Kviris Palitra" and "Georgia Today" as an English-language publication that spreads the discourses meant for the international audience) and anti-European (newspapers "Asaval-Dasavali" and "Saqartvelo da Msoplio" [Georgia and World]) sources, as well as analytical web portals ("Radio Tavisupleba" [Radio Liberty], Netgazeti.ge and InterPressNews.ge).

The first wave of media analysis was triggered by political events taking place inside Georgia. In particular, the resignation of Irakli Alasania from the post of Defense Minister in November 2014 made EU integration a popular topic for both politicians and media. The second wave of media analysis started in February 2015, after the scandalous statements of the ruling party "Georgian Dream" on Georgia's integration in Euro-Atlantic structures,

which were largely criticized by members of the Parliamentary minority and the public. The third wave of media analysis was carried out in May 2015, following the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga. The fourth and final wave was carried out in June 2016, while media outlets were discussing visa liberalization and the British Referendum (Brexit).

The first wave of media analysis – November 2014

In November 2014, print and online media focused on several topics of interest in the context of Georgia's Europeanization. The first related to the investigation and detention of several officials from the Ministry of Defense. As a result of the investigation, the Defense Minister was dismissed. Following his dismissal, both Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Euro-Atlantic Integration resigned, having announced that the country's Euro-Atlantic course was endangered. The second issue was the protest organized by the ex-ruling party UNM on November 15, 2014. The rally, entitled "No to Annexation," was launched against the Russian occupation of Georgian territory, however, as it unfolded, it transformed into a protest against the GD government. The third topic was a Georgian government delegation's visit to Brussels from November 17-18. The visit included the first meeting of the EU-Georgia Association Council; in addition, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili held meetings with EU representatives and the new Secretary General of NATO.

Georgian media actively discussed the abovementioned events. Based on media narratives, a number of discourses can be identified. According to the first one, the statements made by particular political actors on the endangerment of Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic course were not trustworthy. The detention of several high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Defense was not considered sufficient evidence to make the ex-Minister of Defense Irakli Alasania's statement on abandoning the Euro-Atlantic course sound reliable. It is noteworthy that it was the pro-Western media that offered this discourse.

"We need more evidence for this statement in order to confirm that the issue concerns the attacks to our Euro-Atlantic choice and not personal conflicts" (Liberali).

"This statement looks like Irakli Alasania's attempt to claim an exclusive

right on the country's European course" (Radio Liberty).

The media criticized any political actor's claim on such "exclusiveness" saying that Georgia's European course was not any government's, but rather the people's choice.

"The Euro-Atlantic choice has not been made by either the current or former government, it is the choice of the Georgian people" (Radio Liberty).

"The society has made the Euro-Atlantic choice and not this particular team [the UNM]" (Kviris Palitra).

According to another discourse, this situation seemed to be an internal political confrontation and a political maneuver made by the "Free Democrats." Based on the respondents' opinion, they declared that the country's European course was threatened because of their own pragmatic considerations. The main reason for this confrontation was considered to be Irakli Alasania's (the leader of the "Free Democrats") high rating, and his divergent thinking from the governing team. Moreover, based on this discourse, the possibility of the pro-Western party leaving the coalition existed from the very beginning, as the coalition united political agents of various values and views. They consolidated around a common short-term goal to win the 2012 Parliamentary Elections. However, it was unrealistic from the very beginning that the coalition would develop into a united political force.

"He [Bidzina Ivanishvili] invited the "Free Democrats" and the "Republican Party" to the coalition in order to have them as pro-European reference points and avoid any potential confrontation with opponents who might claim the GD was a Russian "project"" (InterPressNews).

"For many people, they [the "Free Democrats" and the "Republican Party"] served as a guarantee that Georgia's foreign policy course would not change dramatically" (InterPressNews).

The abovementioned turmoil was considered the result of internal political clashes, while the reference to the potential shift of the Georgia's Western course was a part of PR campaign (InterPressNews). Alasania and his team's pro-Western orientation was not questioned at all.

"Alasania is a pro-Western politician with a distinct position. His main attraction is his political vision... He is regarded as pro-Western by both the electorate and the West" (Georgia Today).

Moreover, based on another discourse, an internal conflict between “professionals” and “non-professionals” took place within the coalition. The pro-Western media refers to certain pro-Western political agents (the “Free Democrats” and the “Republican Party”) as *professionals*, while the head of the government, Irakli Garibashvili, is perceived as a *non-professional* without political experience. According to *Liberali*, “only the education acquired in Paris, working experience in various sectors or commitment are not sufficient” for being a state leader. Just being “a good family man” is not enough for appointment, especially in the course of “Georgia attempts to adopt Western standards.” At this important stage, the appointment of an insufficiently experienced politician as a leader of the government is perceived as something hindering the country’s development.

The media focused both on the internal conflict within the governing party as well as on the clash between the UNM and the “Free Democrats.” Both of these parties positioned themselves as political powers with pro-Western aspirations. The anti-Western media anticipated that their struggle for ownership of the pro-Western course would soon develop into an open confrontation.

“The unforgettable battle for the title of ‘true pro-Western party’ will take place” (Georgia and World).

A particular group was considered especially active in this “battle.” As the anti-Western media cynically noted, “Irakli Alasania is more American than America is asking Georgians to be!” (Asaval-Dasavali).

If we analyze political actors’ manipulation of pro-Western discourses in the context of Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach to self-presentation, the abovementioned conflict was performed “backstage,” that is, for the Georgian electorate, while it jeopardized the country’s image “on stage,” that is, in Brussels. However, the fact that the “battle” for the pro-Western course took place backstage can be positively assessed. It indicates that it is extremely important for the Georgian electorate to maintain their pro-Western aspirations.

According to another important discourse, there were certain signs of progress in terms of European integration, which were positively assessed by pro-Western media. The agreement on the second phase of Georgia’s visa liberalization was mentioned as a vivid example of getting closer to Europe. If we discussed the state of the arts backstage, the pro-Western media

positively assessed the fact that a new phase of political game had started, in which more rational political forces might be involved (*Kviris Palitra*). In the short-term, perspective, the fact that the most popular minister had left the position was regarded as a weakness of the ruling party. However, from a long-term perspective, it was considered a positive change, as it might have resulted in the emergence of three political subjects in the Parliament making the legislative body more effective. In this case, the “Free Democrats” would most probably form an alliance with the “Republican Party.” As pro-Western media agents reported, there was a high likelihood that pro-European political forces would unite.

Pro-Western media positively assessed the fact that non-European methods of governance were openly criticized. The speech given by President Giorgi Margvelashvili in the Parliament was perceived as a protest against a behind-the-scenes governing strategy. In Margvelashvili’s words, *“we should not allow communication between state institutions to be substituted by personal relations between leaders. The decision-making process should be formalized, which is achieved through a constitutional process”* (*Netgazeti*). The creation of a formal environment and the reinforcement of state institutions was regarded as a guarantee that Georgia would transform into a democratic, European state (*Kviris Palitra*, *Liberali*, and *Radio Liberty*).

In this context, another discourse claims that minor steps towards democracy are not sufficient. Although other political agents are considered responsible as well, the main role in this process is ascribed to the “captain of the ship,” that is, the head of the government.

“The main issue is to develop institutions, so that specific actors are forced to serve the needs of the country and not their own interests” (*Liberali*).

Pro-Western media also emphasized that Georgians should not forget that threats from Russia are real, while Europe and the U.S. are the only ones who could ensure Georgia’s security. This issue was touched upon by both political experts and Georgian politicians during their visits to Brussels. According to the experts, unlike the Ukrainian case, war is less probable in Georgia. Georgians, however, should expect severe economic measures, for example, constraints on the export of Georgian products, which will be a *“serious blow to Georgian farmers”* who are *“more motivated by the short-term need to feed their families rather than the long-term benefits of Europeanization”* (*Radio Liberty*). Although entering the European market was

considered very important, it was stressed that the benefits of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) would only be visible in the future, as approximation with EU standards was a long-term perspective.

The protest carried out by the UNM on November 15 could also be discussed within the context of Russian threats. Although the UNM officials announced that it was a protest against the Russian occupation, its main target was actually the new “*collaborationist*” government. The media circulated statements by the ex-governing party claiming that Georgia’s current government had backed off from spreading accurate information about Russia’s actions and was not pursuing a strict policy towards Russia. Even though Prime Minister Gharibashvili stated that Georgia’s EU aspirations were emphasized on all international platforms and that Europe did not have any doubts about that, the fact that the pro-Western party had left the coalition was considered problematic. According to pro-Western media, though it “*does not necessarily mean the change of the country’s pro-Western course, no doubt it is beneficial to Russia and not Europe*” (*Kviris Palitra*).

As for strategies of neutralizing this danger, all parties (the GD government, the UNM, the “Free Democrats,” and pro-Western media) highlighted the importance of the EU’s support. They unanimously agreed that strengthening the country’s security should start from the reinforcement of its economic and political institutions, in which the EU plays a central role. In this context, pro-Western media often compared the EU and the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU) led by Russia. As *Georgia Today* reports, if we compare their economic, institutional, and civil indicators, EU countries show much better results than EACU countries. Therefore, it is much more beneficial for Georgia to integrate with the EU than with the EACU.

Moreover, as *Kviris Palitra* (the most popular Georgian newspaper) stated, more people from Georgia should go to Europe so that they can see the benefits of the European choice themselves and realize that Russia should never become an alternative to Europe. In response, it was expected that Russia would intensify its anti-European propaganda in order to shatter the image of Europe as a reliable partner, alongside reinforcing the image of Christian Russia that would be economically attractive for Georgian peasants. Russia was expected to use its economic leverage while “*Georgian products [were] far from reaching European standards.*” This is why *Kviris Palitra* recommended Georgia send “*more farmers to Europe,*” where they would get familiar with Western standards and innovations. *Netgazeti* also

stressed the necessity of getting “*more Europe to farmers and more farmers to Europe*” in order to underline the significance of approximation with EU standards. Showing that “*economic prosperity with Russia is an illusion, a phantom, which will disappear as soon as Russia brings Georgia back to its sphere of influence*” (Kviris Palitra) was seen as a way of convincing more people of the benefits of Europeanization.

It should be noted here that, unlike other media agents, two particular media sources - *Asaval-Dasavali* and *Georgia and World* – maintained a clearly anti-Western stance. They stated that Europe (and the West at large) were threats to Georgia. One of the main dangers was considered to be the “*legitimation of immorality*” represented by sexual liberation and adoption of the law against discrimination. A battle against the most authoritative institution in the country, that is, the Georgian Orthodox Church, was perceived as another danger (according to the Caucasus Barometer surveys, at least 80% of the respondents from all age groups (18-35, 36-55, 56+) expressed “trust” or “absolute trust” in the Georgian Orthodox Church (crrc.ge)). Due to this fact, but also because *Asaval-Dasavali* is a well-sold newspaper, it can be assumed that this opinion might have been shared by a large number of people. *Georgia and World* offered similar commentary:

“*If we want to neglect God, EU integration will make it inevitable*” (*Georgia and World*).

“*The Western campaign against Orthodox civilization continues*” (*Georgia and World*).

In both *Georgia and World* and *Asaval-Dasavali*, the West is also depicted as a power that cannot help Georgia in critical moments (as exemplified by the Russian-Georgian conflict of August 2008), because they considered Russia to be stronger than the West. Moreover, they claimed that Russia’s next target would be Georgia, and Europe that has been defeated in Ukraine will not be able to protect Georgia. Therefore, Georgia has to join the stronger Russia (with which it shares religion). This choice is bad, but better than pursuing Europeanization. It was also stressed that nothing was decided in the country without Russian involvement, and that the idea of Georgia’s Europeanness was illusory.

“*We are from Eurasia and should maintain harmonious, balanced relations with everyone – with Russia and with the whole world*” (*Asaval-Dasavali*).

The necessity of maintaining balanced relations with Russia is highlighted by other media outlets as well. The context is different there, however. In particular, they typically note that, as a “bridge” between Europe and Asia, Georgia has made the right choice to integrate with the EU, and it should manage to have balanced relations both with Russia and the West (*Liberali*).

One interesting discourse argued that the desire to be “European, modern and democratic” was not enough. Great efforts would be required to achieve Europeanization, especially, since the Eastern European revolution, which began in Germany in 1989, continues until now. This is because the “Berlin Wall” still exist in many places, “both in the heads and in physical barriers.” Based on the views of German Ambassador Ortwin Hennig, *Liberali* wrote that “Maidan” was the continuation of the Eastern European revolution, and that *“this process must continue until we achieve the ideal situation from the political and humanitarian point of view.”*

We may conclude that achievement of the “ideal situation,” (specifically, the creation of a democratic state with European values that would deserve EU membership), is a very hard task, especially considering the internal political confrontation and Russia’s external influence. But there is an important positive factor, that is, a new distribution of agents in the political field, which may be a step forward towards the introduction of more “professional” and “formal” rules of the game. The main advantage is that this change, supported by the electorate, was assessed as a step forward in Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic course.

The second wave of media analysis – February-March 2015

In this period, the main issue was the Georgian Lari’s exchange rate and the economic crisis, which attracted more public attention than the topic interesting in the context of our research, particularly the statement made by Zurab Abashidze, the Prime Minister’s special representative for relations with Russia. In response to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s statement that *“If NATO takes specific steps to integrate Georgia, Russia will have to take practical steps to avoid negative outcomes from this process”* (*Netgazeti*), Abashidze stated that NATO infrastructure would not be placed in Georgia and Georgia’s membership in NATO was not on the agenda in the near future.

A related statement on Georgia's integration with NATO made by ruling party representative Gogi Topadze was also important. Specifically, the representative stated that the country would not integrate with the Alliance *"neither today, nor tomorrow."* Another representative of the ruling party, Gia Volski, stated that this view coincided with the view of the ruling party at large. As a response to this statement, oppositional parties (namely the UNM, "New Rights" and "Free Democrats") accused the ruling party of deviating from the European course and taking a pro-Russian stance. A special emphasis was put on Bidzina Ivanishvili, considered an initiator of this process. The government had to find an excuse, and stressed that Georgia's pro-European course was stable and based on the choice of Georgian people. They also declared that such accusations were part of the UNM's PR campaign. However, the ruling party did not deny the statements made by Abashidze, Topadze and Volski on Georgia's plans vis-a-vis NATO.

Even though Abashidze's statement concerned NATO and not the EU, the debate became generalized to Georgia's pro-Western, and hence pro-European course. This issue was especially important within the context of the upcoming Riga Summit and the document published on March 4, 2015 on the development of a "Joint Consultation Paper," which implied a possible revision of Brussels's relations with Russia.

Expectations that this issue would be widely discussed in the media, especially in social media, before the upcoming Riga Summit were not met. As for media agents involved in our media analysis, it is evident that statements and comments related to NATO were attached to the issue of relations with the EU. According to one discourse, Georgia's integration with various structures does not depend only on Georgia. Although it is stated that Georgia's European choice is unshakeable and that joining the EU depends only on reaching EU standards, becoming a NATO member is considered dependent on US-Russia relations.

"Georgia's integration with NATO depends on external players and not on Georgia. This might happen either in the case of a large-scale war, or if the international players reach an agreement" (Kviris Palitra).

Anti-Western media, especially *Georgia and World*, perceive NATO integration as a threat to Georgia due to Russia's potential response. Meanwhile, Russia is described as a *"caring big brother"* that is interfering in Georgia's foreign policy only because it wants to take care of Georgia (*Georgia*

and World). Another discourse accompanying the previous one states that Georgia's European choice should not hinder its chances of finding a common language with neighbors and maintaining flexible relations with them. What specifically was meant by "flexible relations" with Russia (as "neighbors" implies Russia) was never specified, however.

While the West was viewed by pro-Western media as an example of political, economic, and cultural prosperity, anti-Western *Asaval-Dasavali* viewed it as a "desirable example" only in economic terms and only from a very specific perspective. In particular, in an article that criticized selling land to foreigners, numerous examples were presented from the U.S., Austria, France and Switzerland, which described the difficulties of selling land to a foreigner in those countries (for example, a person should be a resident of Austria for 10 years to gain the right to buy land, in the U.S. only 0.7% of land is sold to foreigners, etc.). Western regulations were positively assessed only because they posed as barriers to selling land to "outsiders." According to the rhetoric of this outlet, following that example would protect Georgia and the Georgian identity from external threats. Thus, anti-Western media manipulated the issue of Western standards; it referred to them as beneficial only when they burdened foreigners, and otherwise it criticized them.

There were interesting discussions on the issue of Brussels' potential revision of its relations with Russia and the question of whether the EU's Neighborhood Policy would be sustained. These issues became relevant in the beginning of March, after the "Joint Consultation Paper" was published. The paper highlighted the fact (and it was also evident on the basis of statements made by EU representatives) that the EU was trying to deepen its relations with Russia. As High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini stated, the EU persistently asked for dialogue and collaboration with Russia in order to avoid any confrontation (*Radio Liberty*). This seems especially noteworthy within the context of the French President's statement that NATO enlargement was not on the agenda at present (*InterPressNews*), which should have "*pleased Russia*."

As a result, a new discourse emerged in pro-European media. It argued that, although the Georgian political elite did not consider the abovementioned document and its separate paragraphs upsetting, in fact it was, because "*only a few would hope that Russia would improve its behavior*" (*Radio Liberty*). The Georgian side should have considered the shifts that were visible in Brussels's attitude towards Russia. Another discourse accompany-

ing the previous one stated that Georgia should not have had high expectations regarding benefits from the EU, not because the country did not meet EU requirements, but due to external factors, especially Russia's presence. It was noted that recent events confirmed that Brussels would be unable to overcome the Russian challenge.

"The events in Ukraine have shown that the EU cannot simply turn the post-Soviet space into its own. Even though there is a great will for that, the EU faces challenges from Russia" (Kviris Palitra).

"Georgia should know that the EU will never start a war with Russia" (Radio Liberty).

A divergent discourse also emerged. According to it, a dialogue with Russia was necessary for pragmatic reasons. Proponents of this view argued that this was especially true since, despite tensions with Moscow, even Kiev was keeping up a dialogue.

"We should tell the West that we are talking to Russia, so that the West cannot reproach us for not having this dialogue. Consequently, our demand that they help us in this dialogue is legitimate. This dialogue will not make the situation worse than it is now. The worst-case scenario would be Russian tanks entering Tbilisi, while the upside of this dialogue is that Russian public opinions towards Georgia has already changed" (InterPressNews).

In this context, it is important to mention the hopes for change that emerged among certain segments of Georgian society after the murder of Boris Nemtsov, a leader of the Russian opposition. Specifically, optimists started to talk about *"Putin's final year"* and the breakdown of the regime, which, in their view, should have been triggered by this tragedy. However, the same narrative offered the idea that it was impossible to rely only on *"sacred victims"* and that real actions were required. This was true especially since there was a strong Kremlin lobby in Brussels, which worked on the revision of the EU's neighborhood policy, potentially bringing both positive and negative outcomes. It might have brought peace, but also might have affected the interests of Eastern Partnership countries, as well as their processes for implementing the Association Agreement. According to this discourse, however, even if the Russian lobby succeeded, the implementation of the document would not fail, but rather be stretched over time.

One more topic the pro-European media focused on was the Riga Sum-

mit, which was scheduled for May. At the summit, all three countries (Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia) would once again *“strive for Europe”* and seek to gain their place in it, not merely wanting *“such technical details as visa liberalization, which will happen sooner or later anyway”* (Kviris Palitra). Despite a general optimism that visa liberalization was inevitable, the necessity of active endeavors to implement the Association Agreement requirements such that they would not be regarded as a *“burden”* (either by the public or by the government) was underlined. It was reiterated several times that there should be a firm belief that implementation of the Association Agreement requirements was *“necessary not for Europe but for the citizens of Georgia”* (Liberali). A somewhat different discourse was found in the *InterPressNews*, however, according to which no matter how badly Georgia did its *“homework,”* the West would still have a strategic interest, and this interest did not relate to the government’s merit.

“It is not fair and true that Georgia has disappeared from the international radar. However, one might also think that the visits of EU and US representatives reflect their interests towards Georgia and the region at large rather than our government’s accomplishments” (InterPressNews).

In this context, it is noteworthy that most media gave a satisfactory assessment to the Georgian government’s progress on performing the EU’s assignments. However, they considered the main problem the fact that the government was not active in promoting Georgia’s interests in the EU, as well as in explaining the reasons for incompatibility between the Georgian and Russian agendas.

“Unfortunately, messages delivered by the Georgian government show that Georgia’s and Russia’s interests are not conflicting. Such a message is understandable for Brussels, which does not want a conflict in the region, though it is not of any use for Moscow. No matter how Russia perceives the messages and what potential threats follow, Georgia should make clear that its choice is unshakable and oriented towards Europe” (Radio Liberty).

Pro-Western media emphasized that statements made by the ruling party regarding NATO were entirely illogical, while the executive government neither distanced from nor commented on them. Instead, they argued, the government should be quite active, as this is how Moldova got visa liberalization and started importing its wine to the EU market. They noted that the

reason for this was that as soon as Russia threatened Moldova by renewing the conflict in Transnistria upon the signing of the Association Agreement, Moldova asked Brussels to take radical measures and directly confronted Moscow. It was Moldova's approach that was believed to have triggered Brussels's political decision in favor of visa liberalization. As for Georgia, it was accused of not taking such steps. On the contrary, pro-Western media argued that Georgia had been sending the message that the country was trying to regulate its relations with Russia by renewing trade, etc., which did not encourage Brussels to make a similar political decision as it had toward Moldova. According to this discourse, the Georgian government should have given up its passive policy and made both its statements and actions regarding the European course more efficacious while engaging with its own public and with Brussels.

"We should deepen and widen our relations with Europe. The government should work 24 hours a day in order to use all its resources to the fullest extent because lately the processes have become slower, and we cannot influence events happening within the EU that are connected to the neighborhood policy" (Tabula).

Pro-Western media also stressed the benefits of the trade agreement with the EU for Georgian businesses, and again underlined the Georgian government's active role in gaining these benefits. It is noteworthy that anti-Western media offered this discourse as well.

"In terms of economics, we are not ready for the Association Agreement. I mean that Georgian companies are not ready for their production to respond to EU standards and approximation takes some time. Investments might improve in this period, but Georgian businesses might be further oppressed. More protectionist actions are required from the government, especially in those sectors that make products for the EU market. If the government fills this gap, then the Association Agreement will be beneficial for us" (Georgia and the World).

For the Europeanization process to be successful, besides implementing various regulations, it is also important to maintain a free space ensured by a strong non-governmental sector. In this context, it is noteworthy that despite the declared pro-European course, Gogi Topadze, a representative of the parliamentary majority, stated that NGOs should be prohibited from

receiving foreign funding as they “undermine Georgia’s statehood” (*Tabula*). This same criticism towards NGO sector was reiterated by the Ex-Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili (*Netgazeti*). Topadze’s statement was not criticized by current government representatives or by NGOs. Pro-European media outlets, however, suggested that NGOs contributing to Georgia’s Europeanization were targeted.

“There will be a confrontation with those NGOs that can really lead the political processes together with the EU and US political institutions” (Inter-PressNews).

It is noteworthy that anti-Western media referred to NGOs as those actors who assist the West in distorting Georgian values and imposing its own.

“They are imposing Western pseudo-values. Protection of human rights takes very ugly forms. Many of those things that local NGOs want to impose are not set forth by the Human Rights Declaration at all. Therefore, certain groups in Europe try to impose their ideology in Georgia through local NGOs” (Georgia and World).

It is not surprising that the discourse on Europeanization as a threat to Georgian identity is offered by anti-European media; it is remarkable, though, that it has appeared in the pro-European *Tabula*’s blog as well. Although the blogosphere is declared a free space, even a superficial observation makes clear that bloggers in Georgia take a stance on which side they support. Therefore, it is surprising to find entries on *Tabula* that present the EU, like Russia, in a negative light, and which develop the narrative that Georgia should have an independent policy.

“Surrendering to a foreign power and ideology, even if it is considered less evil compared to another, and thinking it is the only choice without any alternative is a crime towards oneself and the nation... In the current reality, when Russia is an obvious enemy and a source of threat, the same text would still be applicable if we replaced the Muslim World with Russia and Russia with the ‘Western world.’ Today, another myth and illusion makes us lose our identity and this myth is our ‘family ties’ and belonging to the ‘Western culture’... It is better to look back to our culture and history, and find examples of humanism, tolerance, and liberalism... The alternative is to lead an independent policy” (Tabula).

The discourse of *"I am Georgian and not European"* emerged in anti-Western media, particularly in *Georgia and World*. While in this context "being Georgian" meant being far from Europe, at the same time, it did not exclude having close links with Orthodox Christian Russia. Apart from sharing the same religion, turning to Russia and rejecting Europe would also be caused by *"Europe falling in parts and its countries trying to avoid being caught under the ruins"* (*Georgia and World*). The alternative to being trapped under the ruins was the EACU, which did not mean *"implementing the Russian policy,"* but rather *"protecting Georgia's interests with respect to Turkey, North Caucasian expansion, and radical Islamists. It is the state policy within the frames of Orthodox morality; it means saving Georgian villages by supporting the Russian market, and provides a basis of restoring Georgia's territorial integrity in the future"* (*Georgia and the World*).

Thus, pro-Russian propaganda was still quite active in the Georgian media, which was explicitly revealed in rhetoric related to NATO. It is surprising that pro-Western *Kviris Palitra*, *Tabula*, and *Liberali* were not interested in the abovementioned NATO-related statements (only *Radio Liberty* and *Inter-PressNews* reacted to these statements). In this period, government officials did not comment on Georgia's Western orientation and its aspiration to join NATO either. On March 26, however, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili held a press conference for media representatives, in which he distanced himself from Gogi Topadze's statement and noted that there was nothing tragic in it, as it was Topadze's personal opinion, which was not shared by the coalition:

"I do not agree with this statement. This is his personal opinion and it does not represent the coalition. In general, there is an exaggerated reaction to his comment and I advise you not to waste too much time on it. No doubt, our foreign policy is clear. We have a consensus about it. I repeat that Topadze's statement is unacceptable to me, but there is nothing tragic in it. This is Mr. Topadze's personal view and it is not shared by the coalition" (Irakli Garibashvili).

In addition, the Prime Minister noted that influential Western political actors' evaluations were important to him, not the statements and views of UNM politicians. This once again confirmed how important it was for Georgian political actors, especially for the ruling team, to declare their pro-Western and pro-European orientation in the international arena.

"I do not care what Mikheil Saakashvili, Ako Minashvili or Tsiklauri think

about our policy. I care about the American President's approval of our approach. I care about the German Chancellor's approval of our approach. I care about the French President's approval of our approach. I care that the State Department supports us. As a head of the government, I care that our people are at peace and can avoid any conflict, or re-escalation of the conflict" (Irakli Garibashvili).

The Prime Minister did not deny that the concession policy with Russia was correct because the government's *"reasonable actions have contributed to increasing security not only in our country, but in the whole region."* However, as he distanced himself from Topadze's statement, he performed a socially desirable self-presentation for the majority of the electorate "backstage." The same statement also served as a message for the "front stage," especially prior to the upcoming Riga summit. This was complemented by the fact that on March 26, Germany ratified the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. Thus, it was reasonable for one of the major political actors in Georgia to adequately respond to the expectations of the both international and local audiences. Moreover, this event coincided with the publication of IRI research results, according to which Georgia's integration in NATO was supported by 78% of Georgia's population and opposed by merely 15%. As for the EU, 85% of the population supported EU membership and only 9% opposed it (IRI, March 31, 2015).

The third wave of media analysis – May-June 2015

May was intentionally selected for the third wave of media analysis as it was associated with two significant events related to Georgia's Europeanization, namely, the International Day against Homophobia on May 17, and the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga from May 21-22. Therefore, we expected an active discussion of these events in the media. Unlike on May 17, 2013, the 2015 anti-homophobia rally was peaceful, so there was much less discussion of the event in the media. Only the anti-Western *Asaval-Dasavali* and *Georgia and World* spent much time on the event, and they did so to actively circulate the myth that the West was a source of "perversion" in Georgia. In all other cases, the media was basically guided by the principles of tabloid press, meaning they never tried to critically assess this day or to analyze the factors that contributed to the May 17 rally being peaceful. They

did not question the political or non-political actors that played major roles in directing the process this way, and they did not discuss whether such developments were related to the upcoming Riga Summit.

Asaval-Dasavali and *Georgia and World* both portrayed the Day against Homophobia as “protection of gays,” and as a day against religion, which would have the effect of “gradually distancing us from the Church.”

“The closer we get to European and American ‘values,’ the more we distance ourselves from Christ and the Church” (Georgia and World).

According to this major discourse, Georgia has to choose between membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures and Christianity, which “*sustained Georgia during hard times.*” Based on this discourse, the West forces the country to make this hard choice, while the EU does not really offer its members anything substantial.

“Nowadays, the will of Orthodox Churchgoers in Georgia is not appreciated as much as the clucking of LGBT chickens. It is obvious to everyone, including our ‘strategic partner’ the US, and the West who we idolize, support it. It seems EU integration cannot happen otherwise, and we, ‘the ignorant Gruzins,’ should keep quiet. This ‘historical choice’ requires sacrifice – no rose without a thorn” (Georgia and World).

According to the discourse developed by these media agents, the West is attractive only from a distance because it does not actually perceive us as equals and cannot offer anything important (even in terms of economics), other than importing “perversion” into the country. Moreover, *Georgia and World* considered “EU integration” synonymous with economic colonization.

“Europe does not perceive us as equals. For them we are part of the uncivilized world, for which they express ‘concerns’ at some decisive moments” (Asaval-Dasavali).

“EU integration is a kind of economic conquest, economic colonization of outside countries” (Georgia and World).

It should be noted that while *Kviris Palitra* did not cover the May 17 rally, instead on the same day they dedicated an entire page to a letter written by participants of a regional conference entitled “the World Congress of Families.” The letter was published without any changes and, interestingly, its message differs from the typically mild and balanced position of the news-

paper, resembling more the rhetoric of *Asaval-Dasavali* and *Georgia and World*. According to the letter, the anti-discrimination law, advertisements for gambling, and the marijuana decriminalization movement (which are all linked to the “Western lifestyle”) pose a threat to the institution of family in the country. The letter stated that Georgia, with its ancient culture, which gave “wine, wheat, Amirani-Prometheus, and Medea’s medicine” to the world, where synagogue, church, and mosque have stood side by side for centuries, now lives in “*the era of unprecedented organized attacks on traditional human values by Western liberalism, globalism, and radicalism.*” Consequently, Georgia must protect its unique culture and traditions. Here the anti-discrimination law was presented as the first step towards “*destruction of traditional values and family.*”

“We were extremely worried when we got acquainted with the Georgian version of an anti-discrimination law... This law exceeds its Western counterparts in aggression, as it has a universal nature in Georgia, while it covers only aspects of employment in Europe” (The Congress participants’ letter, *Kviris Palitra*).

This kind of discourse in *Kviris Palitra* can be explained by commercial interests, but it also seems it is not principally unacceptable for the newspaper. It would be interesting to observe what kind of opinions it will offer on this theme in the future.

Regarding the Riga Summit, some media agents presented the topic not as “hot news,” but as “thematic news” instead. *InterPressNews*, *Tabula*, and *Liberali* covered the Riga Summit (prior to and after the summit) in the News format. The readers should have expected this in the case of the news agency (*InterPressNews*), but not for *Tabula* and *Liberali*. Based on past experience, readers might have expected to find some analytical material (even with political connotations) instead of news there. However, if we look at the waves of media analysis, we can say that lately *Tabula* and *Liberali* have offered their readers fewer and fewer reflections, and have shifted more towards news agency format instead.

As for *Radio Liberty*, it worked according to the principles of “thematic press.” An interested reader could find on its webpage quite detailed and consistent information on the Riga Summit, representing various positions. The press also covered this topic (*Kviris Palitra*, *Asaval-Dasavali*, and *Georgia and World*).

The third wave of media analysis can be conditionally divided into pre-Riga Summit and post-Riga Summit discourses. According to the main discourse prior to the Eastern Partnership Summit, no significant decision would be made in Riga on Georgia's visa liberalization.

"This summit will be mediocre... We do not expect to get visa liberalization, but we will get a clear path that will take us to visa liberalization" (Radio Liberty).

"We will not get a concrete result regarding visa liberalization at the Riga Summit" (Kviris Palitra).

Even though it was highlighted that *visa liberalization is the smallest thing the EU can do for Georgia*, it was also agreed that a desirable outcome could not be achieved. According to the major discourse, the explanation for this should not be sought in Tbilisi, but rather in Moscow and in Brussels, as Russian aggression poses a serious problem, while *Brussels tries to protect Ukraine and Georgia from it*.

"Brussels does not want to give Moscow an additional excuse for aggression against both Ukraine and Georgia, and that is why the process is being delayed" (Kviris Palitra).

"The bloc does not want these countries to have further problems with Russia" (Radio Liberty).

According to another discourse, the partnership program did not necessarily mean that the country would be able to get EU membership, but it was important for implementing successful reforms and making progress. According to this discourse, Georgia, like Turkey, might not get membership, but the process itself was crucial.

"The partnership program has never been a guarantee of EU membership, even in the distant future. Nevertheless, Kiev, Tbilisi, and Chisinau have the right to dream, including the European dream" (Donald Tusk, Radio Liberty).

"Talking about the possibility of being promised membership at the Riga Summit would be overly optimistic" (InterPressNews).

"Despite the fact that even Turkey's EU membership is doubtful, this process is clearly positive, as the country is progressing. The stagnation of our country is in Russia's interest" (Kviris Palitra).

Prior to the Riga summit, Georgian NGOs informed EU representatives about the country's progress on the Association Agreement. It was stressed that although there was still much work to be done, Georgia had advanced in many areas. They urged Brussels to take reciprocal steps. Alongside facilitating trade relations and allowing Georgian companies to access the EU market, visa liberalization was identified as a major priority.

"We want to ask the EU to positively respond to the homework that Georgia has done. At least it has tried its best, and we ask for some benefits for the population, be it visa liberalization or something else" (Radio Liberty).

Visa liberalization was regarded as the main outcome of the Eastern Partnership Summit, and although, according to pre-Summit discourses, nothing important would happen in Riga, post-Summit discourses emphasized the importance of reciprocal steps from Brussels that could reduce the number of Eurosceptics in Georgia.

"The Riga Summit left Georgia and Ukraine without a clear European perspective again and broke the hearts of many Ukrainians and Georgians who expected at least visa-free travel to be granted by their European partners. So much has made them think about the advantages and disadvantages of the European perspective at large" (Radio Liberty).

According to the *Kviris Palitra* narrative, support for the EACU rose to 31% because people were reacting to this disappointment. In addition, there was a certain "Soviet nostalgia" and a shared illusion that Russia would offer better economic conditions.

In the anti-Western media, the EU's refusal to grant Georgians visa-free travel was assessed as an "insult." In addition, the Riga Summit was portrayed as disappointing because of ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili's presence in Riga and because he was not handed over to Georgia's enforcement bodies there.

"Do we need a Europe that nurses perpetrators like Saakashvili while insulting Georgia and the Georgian people?" (Asaval-Dasavali).

Such rhetoric, however, triggered irony in pro-Western media outlets, which focused on particular groups' use of media to present Russia not only as a desirable market for Georgia, but also as an alternative to the "perverted West."

"We will not abandon the idea of joining the NATO and the EU. [Some fear that] we 'will be deprived of our Georgianness,' and left without this treasure. The readers, excited and tearful, are filled with fear and hatred for Europe and the U.S., wanting neither of them. They want only Georgia (and Russia). Although they say Georgia, they mean Russia. They do not say it out loud, but their like-minded people and their gurus are perfectly aware that there is no other alternative in the modern world except for these two: either the West, or Russia. The rhetoric about other civilizations is a bluff, like the possibility of life on Mars or Jupiter. They know this, but play naive quite successfully. Since 2012, the number of people who do not want the West has increased dramatically, and the propagandists of Asaval-Dasavali are definitely responsible for such results. Their impact is enormous" (Liberali).

Despite this situation, pro-Western media argued that no matter how strong the public disappointment caused by Brussels's decision, it was unacceptable to choose integration with the EACU because a *"choice made in favor of Russia means the loss of independence and freedom."* An active discussion of this topic began on social media, especially on the *Radio Liberty* blogs. Even though the discussants noted that the results of the Riga Summit raised doubts amongst Georgians and Ukrainians, the most important thing was to take it as a lesson to learn from. In addition, they advised Georgians to face the fact that *"we will not be welcome as a full member of the European Family soon"* (*Radio Liberty*).

In this context, the Estonian President's statement during his official visit to Georgia is especially interesting. In his words, *"although the Association Agreement is not an entry ticket to the EU, this document does not exclude such a perspective either"* (Toomas Hendrik Ilves, *Radio Liberty*). In addition, he noted that the idea of joining NATO before joining the EU is an illusion, and the country should show obvious progress before joining both.

Here we come across another interesting discourse expressing some disappointment related to the EU's double standard: On one hand, the EU needed an economically strong, democratic Georgia, but on the other hand, it knew that Georgia would not be able to reach this goal on its own and needed the EU's help. Nonetheless, the EU still imposed such requirements in advance. As a result, even *Kviris Palitra* resentfully noted that if Georgia reaches this goal independently, *"we would be less eager to join the EU then."* According to another discourse that emphasized the same double standard, many of those in the EU considered Russia as a far more important actor than Georgia and

Ukraine, and even wanted to normalize their countries' relations with Russia, a fact that should not be forgotten by local political actors.

"The ultimate goal of their policies is to normalize their relations with Russia, and although they cannot and will not abandon the basic values of European security, the Eastern Partnership countries are still secondary for them. The deal among big countries at the expense of the smaller ones is the remains of XIX century European politics, known as 'Realpolitik.' Changing this approach merely by means of intellectual discussions and references to European values would be difficult" (Radio Liberty).

No country could manage to outweigh Russia in Riga, and consequently, the solution should be "dictated by the created situation." With this in mind, media reflected on former Georgian government representatives having been invited to work for the Ukrainian government. It was stated that this situation caused a certain de facto integration of Georgia and Ukraine, thus cutting Georgia out of *"the already cliché Caucasus region (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) and putting it into a new context, geopolitically closer to Europe (Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia)" (Radio Liberty).*

The musical contest "Eurovision" was also discussed in the context of European integration, the contest being perceived more as a political contest than a musical one. Whether Georgians' performance there is successful or not, the opportunity to present Georgia to a European audience of millions was considered invaluable, as it was argued that any kind of positioning in the European space is decisive for Georgia.

"'Eurovision' is rubbish, but necessary rubbish... No matter how mediocre Eurovision is, Georgia's participation in this contest is very important because 122 million people, mostly in Europe, watch it. It does not matter why they watch it. The main thing is that they watch it. Therefore, it is necessary that Georgia once again gets the attention of the German Burgher, the Russian Obyvatel, the Dutch – whatever synonymous word is relevant, and the Austrians, Norwegians, Polish, and everyone. Moreover, there is 'Euro' involved in the title of the contest. If we are successful, that will be great, but if we are not, that is okay too. The main thing is to be involved with European affairs. Of course, this will not result in great outcomes, but every inch is important for us when it comes to integration with Europe" (Radio Liberty).

According to another discourse, it was very important for the Georgian gov-

ernment to clearly voice its positions on both the international and local stages. It was stressed that the government should raise adequate expectations among the public and avoid such mistakes as unrealistic expectations regarding visa liberalization. For this purpose, the government should raise public awareness and also inform society about the EACU, so that the public could clearly see the difference between the two unions. According to the same discourse, not only the Georgian government should avoid creating illusions, but the EU as well.

“What European ambitions are we talking about when pensions are 150 GEL in this country? It is time for both Tbilisi and Brussels to get rid of the falsely optimistic views and face real Georgia and its actual problems instead. This will be the first step to eliminating Euroscepticism” (Kviris Palitra).

According to one of the major post-Riga summit opinions, although visa liberalization could not be reached, the country was promised that the European Commission would help both Tbilisi and Kiev to successfully accomplish the second, decisive phase of the agreement giving them a chance to *“be granted the right of visa-free travel to the EU by the end of the year.”* This fact was viewed by pro-European media as an important step towards Georgian citizens’ direct contact with European culture and the dissemination of more information about Georgia in Europe. In addition, according to *Kviris Palitra’s* narrative, visa liberalization was one of the important factors of regulating relations with Abkhazians and South Ossetians, as in this case they would also be given the chance for free travel to Europe via Georgia.

“Visa-free travel has a great importance for enhancing contacts among people, so that Georgia is not only perceived as a source of criminals and illegal migration. Only then will our European perspective be supported not only by EU member countries from Eastern Europe but also by Western European countries, which has not yet happened” (InterPressNews).

Thus, for the purpose of Georgia’s successful approximation with the EU, the necessity of support not only from Eastern Europe, but also from Western Europe was emphasized. This was especially true given foreign media’s rather critical attitude towards EU enlargement that *Radio Liberty* shared with its readers. In addition, it noted that the Eastern Partnership was considered “mediocre from the beginning,” because the EU “has no strength” to carry out its policies.

“The Eastern Partnership has been a strange phenomenon – mediocre from the beginning. The idea is to increase the EU’s sphere of influence gradually, but

without any particular political agenda. Until the EU is able to offer these countries a tangible economic partnership that would finally result in their full membership, the maneuvering space will be minimal. For example, there is not enough pressure on the Ukrainian government to carry out necessary reforms and confidently handle recent developments. Many parties, especially Russia, blame the EU for interfering too much abroad. The truth is that the EU weakens its own position because it has a limited impact. The EU demands that these countries change their orientation, but has no strength to lead them” (Radio Liberty).

One could argue that despite the pre-summit positions, according to which the summit would not bring any concrete results, the post-summit discourses emphasize public frustration, the government’s insufficient dedication, and a lack of EU support. Even the pro-Western media declared that *“if Europe does not try to somehow attract us, Russia is close” (Radio Liberty)*. However, according to opinions revealed during the first two waves of media analysis, the most important things are to continue trying, to have relevant expectations, and to implement activities *“resulting in a concrete outcome [visa liberalization] by next autumn.”* According to this discourse, the country has to be active, convince Europe that it will not create problems, and realize that all failures open up new opportunities.

“Every obstacle and even every failure is a new opportunity for a true fighter. I believe that you [Nina Sublati, the Eurovision contestant] know it and I hope our country will also learn this from you” (Radio Liberty).

“It is important to be patient and choose the right moment to get the best result. It is necessary to convince Europe that we will not create problems and that Georgia is a state that will enrich and strengthen the common European Family” (InterPressNews).

The fourth wave of media analysis – June 2016

The fourth and last wave of media analysis was carried out in June 2016. This month was crucial because a decision on Georgia’s visa liberalization was supposed to be made at the EU Council meeting on June 9-10 (though the process was later postponed to June 20). This time, the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs were to make a decision on Georgia’s visa liberalization. Instead, the issue was returned to the Committee of Permanent Represen-

tatives of the EU (COREPER II), and the decision-making process was postponed again, this time until autumn 2016. Therefore, there was a high expectation that the media would focus on events surrounding this topic.

One of the major media discourses focused on the security issue, and argued that Europe is a safeguard against Russian threats. According to the pro-European media, the EU can rescue Georgia. In a globalized world, they argue, little Georgia needs a powerful ally, and the EU can be such an ally. In addition to ensuring the country's security, enhancement of cooperation with the EU was considered significant in terms of receiving economic benefits in the form of foreign investment.

"A small country like Georgia has less and less chance to survive independently in a globalized world... Through cooperation with our European friends we will be able to improve future resource distribution in the world market. Therefore, the only way to survive is to increase our participation in these institutions" (Radio Liberty).

Unlike pro-European media, the anti-European one stated that Russia is the only guarantee of Georgia's unification and the sooner the public understands this, the better for the country.

"Russia is not annexing Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, it is waiting for us. Is that so difficult to understand?!" (Asaval-Dasavali).

The decision made in Brussels in early June (which delayed a final decision on Georgia's visa liberalization) raised concerns among the community. There were active discussions on what had caused this delay and what reactions the decision would invoke in Georgia. Media highlighted that the Georgian government had performed all its obligations. Therefore, the reasons for refusing to grant visa liberalization should be explained more clearly. Several factors having an impact on Brussels's decision were listed. The problem of migration to Europe was considered one of the main obstacles, but that was not a dominant opinion.

"There is no threat of excessive migration flows from Georgia due to the country's small population" (Liberali).

Anti-European media considered the growth of crime in Europe originating in Georgia a "far-fetched" topic. According to Asaval-Dasavali, "Europe has deeply insulted Georgia" by refusing to grant it visa liberalization. The

outlet also accused the government of having a “slavish attitude” for adhering to all directives of the Association Agreement. Pro-European media sounded rather angry as well, however, expressing its hope that *“the EU will make a reasonable decision in the end.”*

“It is not appropriate to justify the decision with reference to Georgian criminals. This is a political game. Germany needs to work more with Turkey and not with Georgia in this regard. The entirety of Europe is in a deep crisis and the Schengen area is also threatened. The delay of visa liberalization is not a result of Georgia’s mistakes. The country is unlucky at this stage – that is all. Unfortunately, this is the reality, but I hope that the EU will make a reasonable decision in the end” (Kviris Palitra).

Another factor hindering visa liberalization for Georgia is considered the fact that decisions should have been made not only on Georgia, but also on Turkey and Ukraine, which would dramatically increase EU fears of a migration increase. However, the media focused less on these circumstances and more on the fact that Georgia had performed all obligations and was simply “unlucky at this stage.” The Georgian government’s errors were often mentioned in this context. Representatives of the government themselves talked about these errors. In public statements, government representatives reflected on their self-confidence and noted that *“the successful performance of tasks alone is not sufficient,”* saying that many details had not been properly thought through.

“It turns out that the Ministries of Internal Affairs of Germany and France are against it and they had the same position two months ago. In December, when the Commission made a statement, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Germany refused to grant visa liberalization. Everybody thought he was not the one to decide, but it turned out he was. It is not a minor issue that we have not fully realized all the details and procedures. We were progressing smoothly and did not expect any obstacles” (an interview with a government representative, Liberali).

“The successful performance of tasks alone is not sufficient, the EU needs [to hear] a solid argument that there is a democracy in this country, that human rights are protected, and that justice will not be threatened in the pre-election period” (an interview with a government representative, Kviris Palitra).

In addition to accentuating excessive expectations on the part of Georgians, an attempt to find the problem within the EU itself was evident. This was demonstrated by government representatives' statements in the media. They noted that they had performed all duties, which was not expected in Brussels, and hence the EU was confused and did not know how to respond.

"Today we encounter a situation that is quite similar to one in the movie 'Sherekilebi.' Nobody thought that they would fly, but they did. I think that many of our European colleagues look at the visa liberalization process the same way. We moved to the end, only the final button needs to be pushed, and some have just realized that we may actually be granted visa liberalization" (an interview with a government representative, InterPressNews).

As noted above, although Brussels acknowledged the Georgian government's performance of all tasks, Georgia still was not granted visa liberalization in the summer of 2016. For this reason, the EU's reliability as a partner was questioned. It was noted that the delay in decision-making was a problem not only for Georgia, but for Europe as well because it should also fulfill all of its commitments. As Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for the European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, stated prior to the Foreign Affairs Ministers' meeting, the delay in this process threatened the authority of the EU itself. The Georgian media instantly disseminated this view.

"These requirements were met and now we must keep our word – at least, to confirm our reliability" (Johannes Hahn, Radio Liberty).

"Georgia has satisfied all technical parameters. Now the ball is in the EU's court, and it must make a political decision" (Radio Liberty).

Anti-European media enthusiastically questioned the EU's reliability. It stated that the EU was a *"union based on a lie,"* which aimed to *"distance people from God,"* and which would itself ultimately have to *"turn to Russia for help."*

"The time will come when Europeans will turn to Russia for help because the European population can see that this is a union based on a lie ... Given the collapse of the EU, Russia will become a superpower" (Georgia and World).

Thus, it is evident that discourses on the same issue differ considerably between pro- and anti-Western media. To roughly summarize the anti-Euro-

pean media discourses, they try to depict Europe as a threat to both Georgia's security and the Georgian identity.

"We are Eurorealists, not Eurosceptics, as we understand that compulsory Europeanism is just a method for the U.S. and Europe to irritate Russia using us" (Georgia and World).

"About 80% of Georgian citizens do not want to look towards Europe because Conchita [Eurovision 2014 winner Conchita Wurst] is looking back at us with a strange passion" (Asaval-Dasavali).

One more important discourse was related to the possible outcomes of the delayed decision on visa liberalization. Both anti- and pro-European media discussed this question. Pro-European media talked about public frustration. It opined, however, that this delay did not mean a refusal and the main question should be "when" and not "if" it will happen.

"The rationally expecting part of society will be strongly frustrated regarding extension of the visa liberalization process... Despite this, analysts remind us that extension of the process for several months in no way signifies the EU's refusal of Georgia" (Radio Liberty).

"In respect to Georgia, the decision was made and the country will be granted visa liberalization. This decision is not questioned today. We are talking merely about the process and its progress. The message is that the population of Georgia should not be frustrated if this does not happen in June, July, or later. We will do our best to achieve this soon, at least in July" (Tabula).

Anti-European media, on the other hand, viewed the delay in visa liberalization as "mocking" and "insulting" Georgia. Moreover, according to Asaval-Dasavali's narrative, *"Georgia puts itself in the position of self-humiliation."* The outlet hopes that at least after this episode *"the country will come out of [its] lethargic sleep."*

Despite the fact that Brussels postponed the decision on Georgia's visa liberalization until autumn, according to pro-European media, this should not distract Georgians' attention and cause work to slow down. On the contrary, they argued, it was crucial for the government to continue working on visa liberalization and not to "lay this issue on the shelf." To avoid the spread of nihilism, false propaganda should be resisted and the public should be

notified that *“if we perform our duties, if we are committed to our objectives, this will necessarily turn in our favor”* (Radio Liberty).

Although decision-making was postponed until autumn and may take place even after the Parliamentary elections of October 8, nobody in the pro-European media doubted that the decision would be positive and made by the end of year. At the same time, they considered the decision-making process quite complex, especially since it was assumed that Germany would want to avoid tensions with Russia and would delay the process for that reason. Despite a belief that Georgia was oppressed because of these events, pro-European media firmly stated that the country's European course should never be questioned.

“It will be unfair if Georgia is oppressed because of the political context ... [however] we must not start thinking of changing direction just because we are upset by the West” (Kviris Palitra).

In addition to the government's activity, pro-European media considered an electronic petition initiated by the public significant. The petition, urging EU structures to take an individual and fair approach to Georgia's visa liberalization, was published online on June 9. In their interviews, the petition's authors stressed that along with political actors, media agents, and NGOs, citizens should also involve themselves in this process, as they are the ones who would benefit most from visa liberalization.

“We should forget that there are politicians in our country; we should change things and show that we, the common people, need it” (an interview with one of the petition's authors, Radio Liberty).

The government's narrative in that month is also noteworthy. Specifically, the government emphasized that the West had not fallen short of Georgia's expectations (*“We do not think Germany has fallen short of our expectations”* – Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia) and that it was important to consider the state of affairs in contemporary Europe (the migration crisis, Brexit, etc.).

Another significant topic discussed during the fourth wave of media analysis related to the results of the British Referendum (Brexit), debates around the EU's future, and the prospects of Georgia's EU integration in the post-Brexit era. Pro-European media discourses revealed that Brexit was perceived as a threat for Georgia too, as it both reinforces local Eurosceptics

and creates additional problems for the EU. As a result, the EU may not have time for Georgia, enabling pro-Russian forces to become more active.

According to one discourse expressed in the media, Georgia may be left without the EU's attention in the short run, but in the long run, it *"might cause favorable transformations in Georgia."* Brexit allows some analysts to make more optimistic forecasts because it might cause Brussels to show more appreciation for countries pursuing EU integration.

"... On the contrary, EU officials should express more appreciation for those countries that aspire to the EU and which have connected their fate to the future of Europe" (Tabula).

Expected threats were also touched upon. In particular, an increase in the number of Eurosceptics in Georgia was considered almost inevitable after the Brexit vote. Pro-European media argued that Russia would seek to take advantage of this process because an increase in the number of Eurosceptics implies an increase in pro-Russian attitudes in the country as well.

"The EU as an organization will be in a state of shock and will have less time for others. Unlike Britain (but like some continental nations), "Eurosceptic" in Georgia primarily means pro-Russian, so as a result of this situation Russia will feel more confident" (Netgazeti).

The issue of Russia as the main challenge to Georgia's security was raised again. Pro-European media anticipated that Russia would try to enhance its presence in Ukraine and Georgia. If Europe has no time for Georgia, Russia definitely will, and Eurosceptics will be further reinforced. Europe should show the rest of the world that *"the EU will not end over Brexit."*

The overtly anti-European *Asaval-Dasavali* viewed Brexit as the beginning of a revolution in Europe, which *"will lead to the collapse of the EU first and then of NATO and the U.S."* Moreover, according to this newspaper's forecasts, after *"the self-preservation instinct"* awakened among the British people and they gave up the EU, other EU countries will follow the example of Britain and will later join an enlarged EACU. Against this background, the question *"why does Georgia need to join the EU if a powerful state like Britain does not want it?"* is of particular interest to the newspaper.

"Conservative Britain is fed up with a decaying Europe and they made a choice in favor of their own national interest" (Asaval-Dasavali).

“Britain has escaped [by Brexit]. It is time for Georgia to come round and reject its European foreign policy course” (Georgia and the World).

The discourse of pro-Western media is significant here. It united arguments on security and identity, and declared that Europe is an existential choice and not a far-fetched idea. Unlike Britain, which had a different motivation for initially joining the EU, Georgia needs EU membership to be safeguarded from Russian expansionism. There is no such threat in the case of Britain. At the same time, whether it is the EU member or not, Britain remains a European state, which is questionable in the case of Georgia.

“Our attitude and Britain’s attitude towards the EU are not the same. Therefore, asking why we need to join the EU when the Brits are running away from it demonstrates an inadequate perception of the situation. For Britain, the referendum does not represent an attempt to revise their civilizational choice. It was and remains a European country and a NATO member with European values” (InterPressNews).

In contrast, according to the discourse of anti-European media, Georgia has never been part of Europe and the idea of Georgia as a European state is “far-fetched.”

“In which period of history was Georgia part of Europe? [...] Our choice is not Europe, this is a lie imposed on Georgians by Saakashvili” (Georgia and World).

Within the fourth wave of media analysis, the main message of anti-European media was that Europe is on the edge of collapse, while Russia will soon become a superpower. Georgia, they argued, should “wake up” and give up “perverted” Europe. On the other side, the main message of pro-European media was that there are serious problems in Europe, but this should not make Georgians want to deviate from the country’s European course. Continuing on their current path, they should seek to integrate into a space where there is an incessant aspiration for a better future and a shared effort to protect human rights and democratic values.

It can be said that the pro-European media did not try to idealize the EU. According to their narratives, the EU does not represent an “ideal” union, but is nonetheless the most effective union in Europe, and hence Georgia’s main goal should be to integrate with it. Pro-European media outlets depicted the EU as a safeguard of security and identity, and argued that aspira-

tion towards it therefore means aspiration towards progress. Although they haven't considered the EU to be an "ideal" entity, they emphasized that *"no bloc more effective and oriented towards human wellbeing has been created in Europe yet"* (Kviris Palitra).

Conclusion

If we summarize the results of all four waves of media analysis, *Radio Liberty*, *InterPressNews*, *Kviris Palitra*, *Netgazeti*, *Liberali* and *Tabula* can be considered pro-Western/pro-European media agents. Although the intensity of pro-Western/pro-European discourses presented varied across media agents, general attitudes stressing the importance of European integration and supporting the country's Europeanization are clearly observed in all of them. Newspapers *Asaval-Dasavali* and *Georgia and the World* are anti-Western/anti-European media agents. They offer the public the following discourses:

- *Georgia has to make a choice between membership in European structures and Christianity;*
- *Europe threatens Georgian identity by disseminating European values;*
- *The EU cannot offer anything to potential or even current members, which strive for independence from it;*
- *Europe and the West at large are not ready to help Georgia at critical times.*

As for pro-Western/pro-European media agents, on the basis of our four waves of media analysis, the following discourses turn out to be particularly important:

- *The Russian threat is real and the West, especially Europe, can safeguard Georgia's security;*
- *Although the keys for solving certain problems cannot be found only in Tbilisi, and Brussels does not and cannot ignore Russia's interests, Georgians should intensify their efforts to integrate with the EU by*

strengthening social and political institutions and implementing EU standards. Finally, the government should become more active in voicing Georgia's interests in the international arena;

- *The Georgian government should avoid creating inadequate expectations, as happened in the case of visa liberalization before the Riga summit. Inadequate expectations may cause an increase in the number of Eurosceptics and contribute to pro-Russian attitudes;*
- *Despite the fact that the EU is not an ideal union and there are a number of obstacles in the process of EU integration, it is the best choice for Georgia and the country should pursue this course alone.*

Thus, the results of our media analysis show that both pro- and anti-European media operate with two main discourses – those of security and identity. Pro-European media outlets see EU integration as a safeguard against the hegemonic ambitions of neighboring Russia, as well as a means of maintaining Georgia's "European" identity. Meanwhile, anti-European media outlets use the same themes of security and identity to criticize Georgia's European choice, claiming that the EU is not ready to support Georgia at critical times, and therefore Georgia should prioritize its relations with Russia. At the same time, anti-European outlets view the Europeanization process as a threat to Georgian identity, especially its religious identity, and they argue that Georgia must choose between membership in Euro-Atlantic structures and Orthodox Christianity. As a result, in response to the expression, "I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European," which enjoys widespread public acceptance, anti-European media offer the alternative, "I am Georgian and, therefore, not European."

During our media analysis, the most important issue regarding Georgia's EU integration was visa liberalization. The EU's delay on the visa liberalization decision resulted in Georgian media discourses that stressed a lack of initiative from both the Georgian government and the EU. While pro-European media were anxious about the Georgian government's insufficient dedication to the European project and viewed the EU's lack of support as grounds for concern, anti-European media claimed that Georgia's government was insufficiently dedicated to the national project, and viewed the EU's lack of support as a new opportunity for Georgia going forward.

ANALYSIS OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH POLITICIANS AND EXPERTS

The EU and Europeanization: Major Associations

In-depth interviews with politicians and political experts represent a major component for studying political discourses on Georgia's Europeanization. In the course of research, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with politicians (members of both the parliamentary majority and minority) and opinion leaders/experts (NGO representatives, independent experts, and scholars) selected based on purposive sampling. We intended to cover both a variety of political parties and experts from various fields, from international organizations to higher educational institutions. As in-depth interviews took place in the spring of 2015, "ruling government" and "parliamentary majority" here refer to the "Georgian Dream" (GD) coalition, while "former government" and "parliamentary minority" refer to the "United National Movement" (UNM). "Parliamentary minority" also envisages the "Free Democrats" that left the ruling coalition in November 2014. In order to cover a wider spectrum of political views, we tried to interview those members of Parliament who openly express anti-Western/anti-European sentiments; unfortunately, we did not manage to gain their consent.

The research reveals that the respondents perceive approximation with the EU as a means of achieving "complex welfare." The participants express unquestionably positive attitudes towards the EU and Georgia's EU integration process that, based on each state actor's or expert's professional domain, is associated with particular benefits, such as political and individual freedoms, access to quality education, economic development, social security, rule of law, etc. It is noteworthy that all of the abovementioned items are exclusively associated with European values that are considered fundamental democratic values, while Georgia is perceived as having a strong aspiration to become a member of this democratic space.

In this context, it is important to compare the case of Georgia with the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), which in the recent past have successfully integrated with the EU. Research shows that because of the painful communist experience, these countries are especially susceptible to EU influence. Their common aspiration is to reject communist practices, while attempting to establish capitalist market economies. Such

circumstances made the CEE countries more eager to grasp new, European paradigms (Grabbe, 2003) that seem especially attractive, as in the context of “civilian power” (Duchêne, 1970) the EU represents a new actor on the international stage prioritizing the civilized forms of governance over “military power.” Thus, the EU creates a model of governance, which perceives rule of law as a basis of power; simultaneously, using this model, the EU transforms the international political system and makes it more democratic. In addition, the discourse of “normative power” (Manners, 2002), which defines a “norm” based on the EU’s fundamental principles (peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law) is of crucial importance (Schimmelfennig, 2010, 11). Georgia is a post-communist country that, like other CEE countries, is strongly attracted by the European discourse of “civilian power” explicitly contradicting the dominance of “military power.”

“Deepening democracy in the country is directly linked to the country’s Europeanization process. For me, as a citizen, Europeanization is associated with promoting democracy and European values like freedom” (O.L., Expert, NGO).

“Overall, we can say that Europeanized countries are those which can freely enjoy fundamental European rights and freedoms” (L.D., Expert, State Agency).

One of the key concepts in the context of EU integration and Europeanization is the “standard of civilization” (Stivachtis, 2006, 3), which enables us to compare the historical enlargement of European society and the current EU enlargement. Based on this argument, in the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, European societies developed a “standard of civilization” that implies certain preconditions for allowing extra-European states in the European space. Likewise, nowadays, the EU has defined certain conditions necessary for its membership, in which political and economic criteria related to the “standard of civilization” are still dominant (Kliewer, Stivachtis, 2007).

Indeed, our research participants view the EU as a democratic space with a developed economy, which is an exemplary model of the balance between culture and civilization.

“While speaking about European integration and Europeanization, one immediately imagines a highly civilized state that maintains its cultural heritage” (I.L., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

Georgia after Signing the Association Agreement

Assessing Georgia's progress on the Europeanization scale, the respondents believe that the country has reached the stage of "melted ice." So far the largest achievement is considered to be the signing of the Association Agreement. Regarding the overall progress after signing this document, it is argued that the most visible outcome has been approximation of the local legislative system to the European one, the adoption of new laws, and implementation of EU standards in various fields (agriculture, trade, food safety, market competition, public broadcast, human rights, etc.)

"The fact that the EU-Georgia Association Agreement is signed is definitely an important step towards Georgia's European integration. Of course, this is not an accession treaty, but it is a very important stage in Georgia's political and economic integration with Europe. I think we have already gone through the significant phase" (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

"Unfortunately, I cannot say we have gone too far on our way to European integration. There are still many reforms to be implemented. However, those already implemented are of immense importance. For example, the Visa Liberalization Action Plan and the Association Agreement Action Plan cover a broad range of economic and legal aspects, as well as those of good governance. The media enjoys more freedom than ever before, human rights are better protected, important economic reforms have been initiated, the Competition Agency has been established, phytosanitary measures have been taken, etc. However, the most crucial phase of the Association Agreement is scheduled for the fourth and fifth years of its implementation" (B.S., State Agency).

Independent experts and representatives of NGOs underline de facto issues that are visible despite de jure progress. The problem that is most often mentioned is that of negative outcomes of sensitive, inadequately implemented reforms (such as vehicle inspection, changes in the legislation on land ownership and migration, etc.), which are often ascribed to the EU. Experts fear that policy makers' attempts to avoid public discontent by blaming the EU will result in reduced trust in the EU amongst the general population. This is acknowledged not only by the representatives of opposition parties, but also by representatives of the ruling party. Such a strategy is considered dangerous given limited informational campaigns about the EU, despite the

fact that the necessity of such campaigns was stressed by the representatives of the European Commission both prior to (Stefan Fule's visit to Georgia on March 4, 2014) and following the signing of the Association Agreement (Johannes Hahn's visit to Georgia on January 16, 2015).

"What we are fighting against is that unpopular reforms are ascribed to the EU and the Association Agreement requirements. This is what State Agencies usually think and do in order to simplify their work. And this is not right. For example, it was said that the EU demands a technical inspection of vehicles that caused public anxiety. Such an approach can push negative attitudes towards EU integration" (N.D., State Agency).

"There is certain progress, indeed. However, the problem is that the EU is blamed for all the complications or side effects following the implementation of reforms. And this is not right because no one has imposed these reforms on us. We agreed on these commitments ourselves; we haven't been forced to do so. Thus, we harm the EU's support, especially in the regions, where its rating is not that high" (T.L., Expert, Representative of Former Government).

In this context, we should stress current and former government representatives' diverse assessments of their contributions to the Europeanization process. In a former government officials' words, "we have not moved forward since the Association Agreement was signed." The signing of the document is viewed as the current government's socially desirable performance meant to please the electorate, because "not signing it would bring lots of harm, the population would revolt" (D.L., Politician, Representative of former government). Therefore, they perceive the signing of the Association Agreement not as real progress, but rather as a "political homage" to the population.

"Because of the government's poor performance, Georgia's visa liberalization was postponed. Besides, the export rates have declined instead of gaining significant benefits from entering the European free trade area. There is no other country I know with such experience. It means the government is not good. I can say the same about NATO-Georgia relations. Georgia is only delivering 'talking points' to the NATO platform" (D.L., Politician, Representative of Former Government).

It is noteworthy that one of the participants, a parliamentary majority representative, is also critical of his own team's "Europeanness" and thinks

that the parliamentary minority has more expertise in this domain; however, he disagrees with their assessment that without their involvement Georgia's Europeanization process is endangered.

"To be frank, our Parliament also needs Europeanization, it needs a different quality. In this respect, the majority is not distinguished by its Europeanness, but rather the other way around. However, those whose awareness is high have an absolutely different understanding, thinking 'without me the country will fall apart.' This thinking is characteristic not only to the United National Movement but also to the Free Democrats, who declare that without them, the country will be ruined" (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

The politicians' and experts' discourse on the difference between the basic principles upon which the EU and Georgia are built is also noteworthy. It is believed that Europe is oriented towards expanding its citizens' welfare, while Georgia is still oriented towards its citizens' physical survival. This view reflects the well-known distinction between "self-expression" and "survival" values (Inglehart, Welzel, 2005). The list of self-expression values consists of such items as life satisfaction, tolerance, freedom of speech and expression, etc., while survival values imply that only basic economic needs are satisfied. The authors state that cultural transformations are in place only when the economy progresses for a certain time; therefore, formal democratization cannot stimulate the country's modernization process, part of which is also Europeanization. Thus, in this case, Europeanization stays on the normative level and instead of penetrating the behavioral level, remains a mere rhetorical tool. This is well evidenced by the popularity of a famous expression by the then Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania "I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European" in Georgia. According to the CRRC 2013 and 2015 public opinion polls, 56% of the respondents readily agree with Zhvania's statement. However, when asked how close they feel to Europe, only 18.4% of Georgians consider themselves European, as demonstrated by the ISSP 2013 nationwide survey.

Impact of Europeanization on the Population's Everyday Life and Attitudes towards the EU

The foreign policy visions of citizens and respective discourses are influenced by various sociocultural and political factors. The formation of or changes in their attitudes are especially manifest in the course of drastic sociopolitical changes. It is argued that in such conditions, endangering ontological safety and everyday routines might result in the emergence of “hot” nationalism, which is otherwise undeclared and invisible, and therefore “banal” (Billig, 1995, 44). No doubt, such changes might cause considerable shifts in the general populations’ attitude. For instance, Russia’s aggression in its neighboring countries might result in an increase in the number of those who wish to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic space, while a fast implementation of EU norms and standards might cause anxiety among the local population that their cultural values and identity are endangered.

This context should be taken into consideration when we study the impact of Europeanization on citizens’ foreign policy vision and their attitudes towards and discourses about the EU. As mentioned above, the process of Europeanization covers three main domains: domestic structures, public policy, and cognitive and normative structures. The latter implies discourses, norms, values, and identities. Scholars believe that cognitive and normative structures have a transformative effect on all aspects of politics. At the same time, Europeanization itself affects not only formal political structures, but also EU member and aspirant states’ norms, values and discourses, respectively (Radaelli, 2003, 36).

Our research has revealed several significant discourses about the impact of EU integration and the accompanying Europeanization process on the population’s everyday life. According to the dominant discourse, EU integration is a **safeguard of the country’s security**. Although it is underlined that the EU does not have a common security system and does not represent a military union, the research participants still expect that EU integration will defend the country against external threats and give it a real chance to survive.

“Through it [EU integration], we will support the survival of not only our generation, but also future generations, the citizens of Georgia, because we think it is the only way for our country, as a small component involved in the modern international structures, to survive” (I. Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

In this context, the respondents stress the role of Russia, which “is annoyed by Georgia’s progress towards EU integration” (O.L., Expert, NGO). The respondents believe that it is the EU that counterbalances the Russian factor, especially since the security discourse depicts them as located on the extreme poles – the EU as Georgia’s guard and Russia as its main threat. The same discourses of security (EU membership perceived as a safeguard against Russian aggression) turned out to be characteristic of the Baltic countries before they joined the EU (Kuus, 2007; Mole 2007). Our respondents state that Georgian politicians use the security issue as a means of legitimizing EU integration among the public. Although the EU is not a military union and hence a guarantee of security, such a representation is considered a part of “political marketing.”

According to another discourse, however, Georgia does not need to become a EU member state to maintain its security. The most important thing is to become an associated partner with a developed economy and well-planned politics, which will enable good-neighborly relations with Russia, thus ensuring security.

“If you have a developed economy and political structures, are not aggressive, do not impose your opinion on others, and do not benefit from their problems, that is, you follow the same principle as Finland did, then you will have a better chance to establish stable relations with Russia” (N.C., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

A sub-discourse within this discourse stresses the importance of EU integration to reinforce Georgia’s position on the international arena. The respondents believe that the EU is a “hegemonic actor” (Grabbe, 2006, 37) and will be the main mediator in the process of conflict resolution, defending small and weak Georgia’s interests.

“The EU is engaged in the process of conflict resolution and is the main mediator in the Geneva Talks. Besides this, the EU Observation Mission is observing the implementation of the 2008 cease-fire agreement and assisting Georgia to maintain through non-recognition politics” (E.T. Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Alongside being viewed in terms of security, EU integration and its accompanying Europeanization process are considered the key instruments of influencing the country’s **democratic transformation**. In this context, the

main outcome envisioned is democratic development, followed by the development of a market economy.

“The main outcome of this process is a total transformation of the country, the change of social relations and structures in a way that it, first and foremost, establishes European values, promotes the development of a free market and a market economy” (L.D. Expert, State Agency).

Thus, one of the main benefits of Europeanization is expected to be the country’s economic progress. Some think that in the beginning, instead of gaining benefits, the country might encounter economic problems. In the long term, though, respondents anticipate economic welfare, which will result in the development of export capacity and an increase in GDP.

In terms of democratic transformation, the interviewed experts and politicians anticipate improvement of the electoral system. Besides, they consider crucial to develop liberal values and hence find more effective solutions to the minority related issues. In this context, they emphasize the importance of adopting anti-discrimination laws.

“A European-style and Europeanized society is one, which is focused on individuals, human rights, their freedom, welfare, and the protection of each member of society” (L.D., Expert, State Agency).

Georgia’s modernization process is one of the main outcomes of Europeanization directly linked to the abovementioned democratic and economic transformations. In this respect, Georgians’ views are very close to those of Eastern and Central European countries that perceived Europeanization as “the most authentic form of modernization” (Melegh, 2006, 118). Furthermore, Europeanization is viewed as an instrument of modernization in the hands of not only the local elite but also the civil society, which is supposed to control the government’s actions, taking similar responsibility for the country’s modernization.

“I think it [Europeanization] is an instrument for modernizing the country that, on the one hand, can be used by the government itself and, on the other hand, is a tool for civil society to exert a real pressure on the government in order to modernize the country” (Z.T., Expert, NGO).

Although in the respondents’ views, Europeanization accelerates the modernization process, it is not sufficient to modernize merely political and

economic systems. “Europe is another world with different customs” and “mental modernization” is required to align with it. Otherwise, the Association Agreement and Europeanization will stay on paper, instead of transferring from the normative to behavioral level.

“We are talking about Europeanization and modernization, but these terms are mixed up... We are following a direction that is indeed very good... This course takes us to those European standards, which we have seen in Germany, Britain, or even Switzerland... Does this road lead to Europe?... This is a unique chance for our country and our citizens to mentally modernize, which will accelerate those domestic reforms without which both Europeanization and the Association Agreement will be empty words. This is not an easy task... Europe is another world with different customs... One can talk about Europe for a long time, but ‘Europe’ ends where a Georgian citizen, be they an academician or an ordinary citizen, steps over garbage and moves on, instead of throwing it away in a plastic bag, no matter how many agreements are signed” (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

Despite stressing the importance of the “mental modernization” accompanying the Europeanization process, the respondents simultaneously see it as a threat to Georgian identity. Blindly adopting the EU’s institutional practices is considered harmful to Georgian identity and lifestyle, especially since Georgia is believed to be a “civilized” country that should preserve its historical achievements. By representing Georgia as a civilized country and referring to its past glory, the respondents attempt to weaken the power of the Western “civilizational discourse” (Elias, 1994) with regards to Georgia.

“At the same time, we are a civilized country, which used to be rather successful. We should try to maintain this because Europeanization, our integration with the EU, no matter in which form, might be a process endangering our identity, lifestyle, and traditions” (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

Another attempt to weaken the Western “civilizational discourse” is exemplified by emphasizing one’s own “Westernness” (as opposed to “Asian-ess”), while defining Georgia’s place in the East-West dichotomy. Such a strategy is described by Maria Todorova (1997), who analyzes the current expressions of Orientalism within Europe, based on the Balkan case. She talks about Occidentalism, a defense strategy of the “victims” of Oriental-

ism, which implies an attempt to position oneself as someone's West.

"Stressing one's own Europeanness is a strategy for the population to declare their own culture, which is not right, as one cannot say that Asia is less cultured. However, there is a popular perception that Europe is more cultured. I think it is not so, it is just the case that Europe and the USA are leading countries today from the perspective of political and economic development" (M.I., Expert, NGO).

The abovementioned discourse that EU integration endangers Georgian identity, is counterbalanced by the position that EU integration should not be perceived as a danger but as a means of preserving Georgian identity. It is noted that Georgian society will acknowledge this after directly getting familiar with Europe, its lifestyle and its multicultural environment, in which each nation has a proper capacity for self-realization. Hereby, the respondents emphasize that it is anti-European – and especially pro-Russian – propaganda that plays a key role in disseminating fears about losing one's identity. The respondents believe that having closer ties to Europe is the best means to refute such myths.

"The more opportunities for exchange and visa-free travel are provided, the more that myths disseminated by anti-European agents and Russian propaganda will be dissolved, particularly those stating that the European environment is a threat to our identity and that our Georgianness will be taken away. It will be easy to see that European society is based on rules, following rules that apply to everyone" (D.L., Parliamentary Minority).

Population's Awareness about Questions related to EU Integration

Discussing the population's awareness about the EU and the EU integration process, the interviewed politicians and experts acknowledge Georgian citizens' lack of information, which can evoke inadequate expectations in society. They fear that if citizens find it difficult to transfer "attractive slogans" to practice, they will start doubting whether the laborious process of Europeanization is worth it. In terms of economic relations, Georgians have had long-term collaboration with the Russians. Therefore, if Russia makes a better offer, the population might choose an easier solution, as it has to do

with economic benefits and not Russia as a political partner. To avoid this, especially in the conditions of “powerful pro-Russian and anti-European propaganda,” the respondents consider it necessary to carry out wide-scale informational campaigns and raise public awareness about the EU, both via politicians’ face-to-face interaction with the population and through media campaigns.

“The majority of our population is accidentally involved in this process; they have neither thought of nor understood it, and quite often cannot even make sense of what is happening. For the majority, these are all attractive slogans imposed from above. Suddenly, it turns out that these slogans are followed by certain requirements, so the population wonders whether it is worth it. If this road seems difficult, there is a chance that they will search for an easy solution. This process is not simple and it is a real challenge. So if our Northern neighbour makes a better proposal, even of lower merit, there is a chance that part of the population will find it attractive” (C.M., Expert, Non-governmental organization).

“The essence of Europeanization is not understood. Our aim is to ensure that support is conscious, especially in the conditions of Russian propaganda. We do our best to be active, however, we want to be more active. We appoint meetings on a daily basis – 300 meetings were held attended by 15,000 people, which is not too many considering the size of the country. We should interact with the population more actively and carry out media campaigns. We are working in this direction” (B.S., State Agency).

Indeed, the government’s insufficient and ineffective communication with the population is considered one of the main reasons for limited public awareness. Although this government official notes that various activities are being held to raise awareness, the experts stress that such activities are quite scarce indicating that politicians themselves are not adequately prepared and they have not developed proper strategies meant to inform the public. One of the respondents even gave an example to illustrate that the government is unable to explain the benefits of Europeanization to an ordinary farmer. Respondents believe that leaving significant questions unanswered causes citizens to become at least indifferent to the EU, if not opposed to Europeanization.

“A person was giving a lecture on NATO and EU integration in a village and

one of the attendees asked what benefit it would bring to his small beehive production. The presenter could not give an answer. Not only government agents, but also NGOs lack awareness of how to provide sufficient information. They have not thought through the project of how to make members of society supporters and participants in the EU integration process" (M.I., Expert, NGO).

It is noteworthy that a government official himself has emphasized the lack of communication with the population, illustrating that political actors are aware of this problem. The respondents consider it problematic that members of the ruling party cannot explain the benefits of Europeanization to the population. Moreover, sometimes this process is referred to as the one dictated from Brussels, which causes citizens to believe that the Georgian government's sovereignty has been weakened.

"I think we do not use proper language and do not explain to the population why Europe and Europeanness is good. For the citizens to understand why it is good, you must explain exactly how it is going to affect them; however, we do not talk about this. We talk to the citizens the same way I am talking now, while we should explain that the Association Agreement results in concrete outcomes. We always talk about the first or second round of the Association Agreement, etc. However, the society is not interested in whether or not certain directives have been implemented. When they hear the word 'directive,' they think that someone dictates something to us from above" (I.L., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

As the interviewed experts note, improper communication and inadequate expectations result in public nihilism, as the population does not believe in the benefits to be gained from EU integration. Experts note that the lack of awareness and the state of nihilism are characteristic not only of the general population, but also of state officials themselves.

"My colleague carried out trainings for 67 statesmen from the municipalities. A majority of them also had feelings of nihilism and hopelessness; believing that it is impossible to get established on the European market. The government should work in this direction" (M.I., Expert, NGO).

Respondents believed that one of the reasons for public nihilism is the fact that the public's desire for and belief in joining the EU do not match one another. Despite a considerable number of people wishing to join the

EU, only a few believe in such a possibility, which is perceived as dangerous given that an alternative to the EU might emerge. Therefore, it is argued that belief in the possibility of joining the EU is essential.

“Not only the percentage of supporters of EU-integration is interesting, but also the percentage of people who believe that we will become members of the EU. That number is very low. People who support EU-integration do not also believe that it will happen eventually, which is very bad. Someone might use this opportunity to make you believe that it is not a real possibility, and tell you to move in the other direction” (T.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Do the interviewed politicians and experts see any changes in the level of public awareness about the EU? Some respondents see obvious progress, but do not consider it sufficient. They emphasize that it is especially important to carry out informational campaigns about the EU among the population residing in the occupied territories. Some participants opine that this population has a choice between two options, either living under the Russian occupation or in a Europeanized Georgia with visa-free movement, more freedom, more security, and all the related virtues. They believe this is hardly a choice at all; a “European Georgia” is unquestionably superior.

“No doubt, the situation is better. We meet a lot of people both in the cities and in the regions, and I have a feeling that their awareness has considerably raised compared to last year or before. However, it is not enough, of course. More pro-active actions are required, so that the citizens are provided with a complete list of the benefits gained from the integration process. This is especially important on the occupied territories; a “European Georgia” will become more attractive as soon as visa-free movement is possible with the EU. Moldova is a good example. The people from Transnistria are travelling to Europe and there are queues of people. They will have a possibility to make the right choice, either living under the Russian occupation or in a European Georgia with visa-free movement, increased business communication, more integration with the EU, more freedom and more security. We should work carefully on this. It requires intensive communication with our society” (Z.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

According to nationwide representative surveys, the percentage of those wishing to integrate with the EU is quite high (based on the CRRC public

opinion poll of March 2016, it reaches 77%). Respondents, however, especially experts, approach it with some caution. In their words, this percentage might not really represent the supporters of EU integration, but rather those who are antagonistic to Russia. They think it is a pragmatic hope of gaining security, economic and other benefits that accounts for such a reality, not dedication to the European idea itself.

“The mistake made by Russia in 2008 resulted in our antagonistic attitudes. Even many pro-Russians acknowledge that Russia is an occupant, but they say we just have to regulate our relations. This ‘but’ is found in their rhetoric. If not for Russia’s mistake, including the recognition of our territories, we would definitely have more openly pro-Russian people” (K.U., Expert, NGO).

What are the means of reinforcing dedication to the European idea and increasing pro-European attitudes in Georgia? In this respect, politicians and experts’ roles are considered crucial. Media outlets are believed to be their main medium in order to adequately disseminate pro-European messages among the population. A special role is ascribed to television and social media as the key sources of information in Georgia today.

“The impact of electronic media is very strong as almost no one reads newspapers in Georgia. Facebook and television are the main sources of information. Authorities like politicians and experts should speak there” (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

A view emphasizing the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in raising the public awareness about the EU deserves special attention. The interviewed experts argue that, given their authority in Georgian society, the Church and its representatives should disseminate information about EU integration.

“The ice has melted: this is the government’s cooperation with the Church and the provision of information to the Church representatives as they have a significant influence on the population. Therefore, it is crucial to explain them what the EU means, why biometric IDs are necessary, etc.” (Z.T., Expert, NGO).

Although informational campaigns are considered vital, the respondents believe that members of the public should personally see the merits of EU

integration. Visa-free movement should be launched and cheap airlines should operate, as the population compares Russia and the EU thinking the former is quite close and familiar, while the latter is rather distant. Therefore, it is considered crucial to persuade the population that Europe is not inaccessible and it is a more desirable partner than Russia.

“Providing information is very important, however, it should not be the main strategy. The people should clearly see why the EU is good. Probably they compare it with Russia; they do it unconsciously. Currently they can export products to the Russian market, and not to the EU market. The EU is seen as very distant and inaccessible, while Russia is very close. These are the population’s associations. We should deconstruct them. We should make them realize that this is not a long-term perspective – export to the EU is possible. It has already started and will be further expanded in the future” (N.D., State Agency).

Despite the fact that research has revealed a lack of public awareness about EU integration in Georgia, the overall attitude is still optimistic. Georgian youth, especially students, give the respondents grounds for optimism as it is unanimously recognized as the most informed and pro-European segment of the population.

“One thing that is comforting is that Georgian youth, especially students, are characterized by proper thinking and this is a generation for whom these [European] values matter” (T.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Politicians’ Awareness about Questions related to EU Integration

According to the research participants, politicians are more aware of questions related to EU integration and Europeanization than the general population. Although they stress that the political spectrum is rather diverse, they still recognize that overall the government understands the importance of Europeanization and the majority of politicians support the country’s European and Euro-Atlantic course.

“It depends on political parties. Some think that the EACU can ensure Georgia’s bright future, some believe only the EU and NATO can do it. Attitudes vary. I am happy that the main political choice is Euro-Atlantic integra-

tion and it is a number one foreign policy and national security priority” (Z.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

“Based on the example of a few officials, I can say that they understand what Europeanization is. For instance, let us take the current amendments to legislation. I think a new head of the Supreme Court, the Minister and the Deputy Minister of Justice, the Ministry of Economics and Sustainable Development, and the government overall are all aware of these amendments” (N.S., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

At the same time, the respondents focus on the politicians’ foreign policy priorities, which they consider more intertwined with their political interests rather than their awareness. According to this discourse, regardless of their awareness, politicians are not necessarily characterized by pro-European orientations.

“Statements that politicians make regarding the EU and NATO show that they are probably informed. It is a matter of their political orientation and taste that they do not want to lead the country in this direction” (T.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Thus, the respondents believe that certain politicians’ anti-EU statements represent their political positions rather than their unawareness about the EU. In this context, the respondents make a distinction between pro- and anti-EU groups among the oppositional parties (the UNM and “Free Democrats” vs. Nino Burjanadze and the “Alliance of Patriots”), as well as those within the ruling party. While the respondents assess such a diversity of views amongst oppositional parties as acceptable, they consider it problematic that some politicians within the ruling party express anti-EU sentiments. They often refer to Gogi Topadze and his party as a case in point.

“This idea naturally requires legitimization among both the politicians and the population, and not only the opposition but also the Parliamentary Majority needs it. It is understandable in Topadze’s case, he has such a political platform and it will not change. Here I am referring to the members of ‘Georgian Dream.’ Of course, I am not talking about all of them, many of them are also supporters [of EU integration]” (T.L., Expert, Representative of Former Government).

According to another discourse, Georgian politicians understand the im-

portance of Europeanization, but do not possess sufficient knowledge about the specifics of the Association Agreement and are scared by the respective activities.

“I know only a few who have read the Association Agreement from the beginning to the end” (Z.T., Expert, NGO).

“I can see politicians’ willingness. I have not personally met anyone who openly claimed that we do not want European Integration. There is a manifest desire, but also fear that the benchmark is too high and these regulations are too difficult for us” (M.I., Expert, NGO).

It is a lack of knowledge, which, in the interviewed experts’ words, results in the government’s inadequate messaging to the population, threatening the legitimacy of the EU in their eyes. They note that the implementation of certain regulations, especially ineffective ones (changes in legislation on migration, for example), is often ascribed to EU demands, while either they are not set forth by the Association Agreement, or the Georgian side has enough time to prepare for their implementation and does not need to hurry with amendments.

“I think there is a lack of awareness among politicians and very often they use the EU to justify their decisions, sometimes with fake motives, without any real facts... They blame the EU, while EU officials are diplomatic and do not get involved in such public polemics with our government. Our politicians benefit from it” (Z.L., Expert, NGO).

According to scholarly literature, it is crucial to maintain political unification in the course of Europeanization, which means that no other alternative is envisioned as a foreign policy priority (Moumoutzis, 2011, 609). To summarize the interviewed experts’ opinions, political unification is rather problematic in Georgia and the idea of the EU as the main foreign policy vector needs legitimation, even among politicians. Such legitimation is even more important, however, in regards to the general population, as political actors try to respond to public demands. Research shows that in countries with higher rates of pro-European attitudes, the EU can more easily achieve its goals (Pickering, 2011). It is through the respective discourses that legitimation of Europeanization takes place. In Radaelli’s words, these discourses play a decisive role in establishing new rules, values, and practices, as well as making them attractive to the public. The author distinguishes between two

types of discourses: coordinative discourses and communicative discourses. The latter implies forms of political communication targeting society as a whole and legitimizing Europeanization in their eyes, while the former suggests legitimizing Europeanization only at the level of political elites (2003, 40). Our research reveals that both types of activities are needed in Georgia, especially considering the results of the 2015 nationwide survey, which illustrates that alongside a high rate of support for EU integration, there is also significant support for joining the Eurasian Customs Union (31%) (NDI, CRRC, 2015).

“We should focus on raising public awareness, because politicians mostly respond to impulses coming from below. If demand to follow the EU path is a priority for citizens, politicians will naturally respond, and only those politicians who do so adequately will be successful” (I.Ch., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

“Today, based on the real picture, it is necessary to work with politicians. They are ordinary citizens who are also involved in public life; therefore, they should be informed of and involved in these processes too” (V.D., Expert, NGO).

On one hand, respondents think that in order to disseminate their messages among the population, pro-European politicians have to choose proper strategies. They believe that quite often the population sympathizes with populist slogans evoking their sentiments rather than with politicians’ sensible arguments. Thus, in order for pro-European politicians to be successful, they should target public sentiments in Georgia so that those sentiments, which are already strong, become intertwined with Europeanization (this can explain the popularity of Zurab Zhvania’s phrase “I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European” among the Georgian public).

“Many politicians understand it [the essence of Europeanization] but the people cannot understand them. Some are well prepared, for example, the ‘Republicans’ in the ‘Georgian Dream’ Coalition... However, people listen to them (directors and actors) because they use populist slogans, while the ‘Republicans’ provide a well-thought out idea of the country’s future direction” (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

On the other hand, respondents consider it problematic that politicians deliver inadequate messages to the population. As mentioned above, un-

popular decisions are often ascribed to EU demands. This depicts the EU as a hegemonic actor that imposes its regulations on Georgia. In this respect, Georgians view the EU similarly to how they view Russia.

“Provision of information does not happen properly. People are told that the EU imposes regulations, just like in the case of Russia. For a farmer it does not make any difference [who is dictating regulations] – unless you explain why it is good for him, he will feel he is being dictated to. Despite the fact that it might be a bit difficult now, we will benefit in the future. The messages are not adequate: officials say one thing, but mean or are perceived as meaning another thing. Those officials have not been prepared, have not been trained not to say such things on TV” (M.I., Expert, NGO).

In this respect, research participants stressed the need for politicians to constantly update their knowledge on EU related issues and, simultaneously, to carry out intensive, even “aggressive” PR campaigns to persuade the population that there is no alternative to the pro-European course.

“The problem is that at some point politicians do not bother to build upon and deepen their knowledge. For example, there were a number of projects implying certain trainings in Parliament and only the ordinary staff attended them. High officials and members of Parliament almost never attend such lectures to learn something new... European integration is not an easy topic to comprehend and it is still a novel direction. Each politician should attend these trainings” (L.D., Expert, State Agency).

“To put it roughly, the population should not be given the opportunity to think about anything else but Europe and an aggressive PR campaign should be carried out to achieve this” (M.N., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

In terms of legitimizing Europeanization, representatives of former and current governments offer different discourses. Former government officials report that during their tenure a number of effective measures were taken to legitimize Europeanization, whereas such measures are now lacking. In contrast, current government officials emphasize that EU integration is a common goal and political actors should stop fighting for its monopolization.

“If we remember the statements made by Topadze, they are not coming out of the blue. In fact, they represent the ideas at the core of ‘Georgian Dream.’ However, the reality is that we have pro-European public opinion

and political opposition, which attack the government from the pro-European perspective. Those like Topadze, who represent the majority of 'Georgian Dream,' are bound by this reality... The 'Georgian Dream' caused anti-Western ideas to become mainstream. To overcome this, it is necessary to push these ideas out of the mainstream. When a politician says something like this, it should be political suicide" (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

"The main thing is that everyone should agree that this topic is not owned by anyone... This is a unique possibility for the country to become normal and orderly, and to develop institutions; we are reinforcing this... We should develop the strategic political message that we do it not for the sake of the French or the Italians, but for ourselves" (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

Horizontal or Vertical Europeanization?

Because Europeanization is a two-way process – the EU and a non-member country undergoing the Europeanization process together – it is important to take into consideration not only signals coming from Brussels and reactions to them, but also the political paradigms and norms that non-member countries develop in the process of adapting to the EU. In this case, the EU represents the source of paradigms and not just a mechanism of pressure (Radaelli, Pasquier, 2007). As a rule, Europeanization is perceived as a EU-centric (Olsen, 1996) and top-down process (Grabbe, 2003, 2006; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Sedelmeier, 2011; Copeland, 2014; Borzel, 2015; Zhelyazkova et al., 2015), at the same time, it is also considered a bottom-up process (Borzel, 2002, 2005; Goetz, 2005). The countries "upload their preferences to Brussels via complex negotiations and download them from various EU policy menus" (Radaelli, 2003, 34). As research shows, old candidates have a better chance to influence this process than new candidate and aspirant states, especially because the EU has recently made the formal conditions for membership more complex and has restricted applicants' negotiation capacities (Grabbe, 2003, 305).

Research reveals that the status not only of aspirant states, but also of new member states, even after 10 years of EU enlargement, can be considered that of "junior partner," despite the declared parity of all EU member states (Copeland, 2014). However, according to recent studies, smaller,

wealthier, better governed and Eurosceptic candidate and aspirant countries are more likely to avoid discrimination and obtain exemptions from the EU (Zhelyazkova, Borzel, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeire, 2015). In this respect, Georgia, as a rather poor country in the process of a democratic transition characterized by manifest pro-European aspirations, is in a position of asymmetrical dependence on the EU. This asymmetry was obviously revealed in June 2016 when the EU refused to grant Georgia with visa free movement, despite the fact that the country satisfied all the conditions set forth for obtaining visa liberalization. The EU postponed making the final decision until autumn. Taking into consideration this context, it is interesting to find out how the interviewed politicians and experts assess the EU-Georgia relations in terms of the existing power hierarchy.

Current and former ("Free Democrats") representatives of the GD coalition avoid referring to the EU as a senior partner and Europeanization as a vertical process. The fact that Georgia voluntarily signed the Association Agreement with the EU and agreed to implement EU regulations is brought as an argument of Georgia's equal partnership with the EU. In their words, approximation with the EU has not been imposed on the country but is its independent political choice.

"I think we have horizontal relations with the EU. The EU has its rules and we want to follow them as well; the EU says we are welcome. By the way, the Association Agreement has no hierarchy, not even an enumeration on the page of signatures" (I.L., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

"The EU-Georgia Association Agreement lists concrete activities. They have been working on this document and negotiating its text for years. Of course, the document contains certain directives, which provide an opportunity to approximate to EU standards, but the government of Georgia implements them voluntarily" (V.D., Expert, NGO).

However, in the course of discussion, such words and assessments emerged that clearly pointed to the EU's superior position compared to Georgia. For instance, the EU "demands," "rules," "directs," "controls," "supports," etc. In addition, the respondents' narratives also reveal the "if... then..." approach in the EU-Georgia relations.

"It depends on Georgia and its attempt to make the EU develop a positive attitude towards the country. If you adequately respond to EU requirements

and have no problem with their implementation, of course, the EU treats you as an equal partner. I think the implementation of EU practices is voluntary, as we have chosen it ourselves and it is an expression of the citizens' will. The EU does not tell you how to do something and does not impose dogmatic instructions on you. These are just recommendations and the standards that one should adjust to its national standards" (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

"The EU is a union of different states with its own standards. If one wants to approximate to the EU's standards, one should adopt its rules and then the EU will provide support. The EU will not adjust to one's local rules. In other words, the demand for changes is unidirectional. If we want, we should undertake these changes, but no one forces us to. That is why we follow the EU's recommendations. In addition, the EU not only provides the recommendations, but also helps us with the whole process" (B.S., State Agency).

The interviewed representatives of the parliamentary majority reinforce the argument about asymmetrical relations between the EU and Georgia by emphasizing the EU's loyal and friendly attitude towards the country. One of the officials provided as an example the flexibility of negotiations with the EU and noted that it is the EU, which possesses experience, experts, and finances, that assists Georgia in overcoming the hardships involved in the Europeanization process. It is up to Georgia itself to identify such problematic areas, however. The respondents also note that in the case of providing proper argumentation, the EU allows Georgia to make certain changes or amendments in the process of implementing the Association Agreement.

"In the course of preliminary negotiations on the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, the main discussion focused on adjusting EU regulations to our reality. We were telling the EU that we were unable to do something or that we would do it differently..." (B.S., State Agency).

Independent experts and NGO representatives are more critical in assessing the hierarchy in the EU-Georgia relations. They note that parity between the EU and its partner states is a declared value that can be read in the Association Agreement preamble. However, only the EU sets the rules of the game and if a country decides to enter its space, certain imperatives are automatically set forth encouraging asymmetrical power relations.

"The EU-Georgia Association Agreement preamble says that the EU in-

formally establishes the rules of the game one should follow. Europe tells Georgia what should be done, though it is packaged as if it is better for Georgia, and indeed, it is. But the fact is that these negotiations are asymmetrical” (Z.T., Expert, NGO).

In addition to the abovementioned discourses, some respondents argue that Europeanization simultaneously implies vertical and horizontal relations. Vertical relations are in place when dealing with EU regulations, while horizontal ones are in place when dealing with the schedule of their implementation.

Some NGO representative and experts try to “romanticize” EU-Georgia relations. This is exemplified by those who depict the EU-Georgia relationship as that of a mentor and mentee. Certainly the mentor’s role is ascribed to the EU and the mentee’s to Georgia. Through this analogy, research participants emphasize parity between the EU and Georgia by stating that both sides simply perform their duties: the EU (the institutionally developed side), as a mentor, disseminates knowledge, while Georgia (the partner in the process of development), as a mentee, follows its mentor’s advice. Here the power of “civilizational discourse” (Elias, 1994) is revealed. It is obvious that the Georgian case resembles those of Central and Eastern European countries, where the local elite viewed the process of Europeanization as “the most authentic form of modernization” (Melegh, 2006, 118).

“A ‘mentor’ EU calls its ‘mentee’ Georgia for individual thinking, requesting to evaluate the impact of European directives. The mentor does not make Georgia copy European legislation and continuously provides feedback. In other words, the EU treats Georgia as a junior partner, but in a good sense” (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

“A mentor is interested in performing his or her professional duties and a mentee is eager to expand his or her knowledge. Of course, we – the EU and Georgia – are absolutely equal from a legal perspective. However, the EU is like a mentor and we are like a mentee, which means that we adopt, share and implement whatever the EU tells us. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the EU demands that we analyze the impact of all the legislation we adopt. We tell the EU we need to postpone the implementation of certain norms, as currently we are not ready to implement them. And the EU welcomes our decision as otherwise it would bring more harm. Of course, we do more to satisfy EU requirements than the EU does to satisfy ours, but ultimately it is as beneficial for us as it is for the EU” (L.D., Expert, State Agency).

In this context, a few respondents emphasize the ambiguity of the EU's political will to encourage Georgia's further integration. They perceive it as a true challenge for the country and argue that despite the foundations created by the Association Agreement, the EU has a capacity to artificially prolong Georgia's further integration. A few reasons have been listed why this might be the case, especially because the EU is "too afraid of irritating Russia" (T.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority), as well as because, based on the Ukrainian case, "whatever we do for Georgia and Ukraine, while we might think we are doing good, in fact it might be bad" (C.M., Expert, NGO). Thus, the Russian factor is considered a major barrier in the EU integration process for the Eastern Partnership countries.

In addition, the respondents note that a serious barrier to EU integration is Georgia's undesirable image in Europe. In the respondents' words, *"The Georgian mafia is active in Spain, Greece, and Italy. It is not too active in Germany, but still certain things happen there from time to time. That is why we are impeded, not because of those who live here"* (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

Thus, taking into consideration the fact that "Brussels watches us" (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority) and that "there is no consensus on Georgia's prospects for further EU integration" (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority), the aim of the country is to persuade the EU that Europeanization is its main priority. Therefore, the respondents consider crucial for the country to be active on the international stage, which, according to the research participants, is lacking today.

"It is a challenge for Georgia to be active and disturb its friends. This is how foreign policy is run, especially in the case of small countries. One should push forward one's own interests. Unfortunately, the Georgian government does not do this at any level" (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Mechanisms of Europeanization in Georgia

According to one of the most popular definitions, Europeanization is a process of implementation of the EU's formal and informal rules, norms, and "ways of doing things" at the national level. This process covers various spheres, from public policy to domestic discourses and identities (Radaelli, 2003, 30). Thus, the term "Europeanization" denotes the transformation of

national-level variables in the process of adaptation to the European model. As an initial attempt to develop an explanatory theory, the “Misfit Model” was created. The model tries to interpret adaptation at the national level through studying the fit or misfit between local and European levels (Börzel and Risse, 2000; Caporaso et al., 2001).

The authors studying Europeanization mainly focus on its four possible outcomes. The first is *inertia*, which is when no transformation takes place. Second, *retrenchment* is the “paradoxical effect” that occurs when, instead of decreasing, the number of misfits increases. *Absorption* means that certain adaptations occur, though EU standards are integrated in the national political system in such a way that no fundamental changes take place. Last, *transformation* means that the domestic system undergoes significant progressive changes in response to EU requirements (Börzel and Risse, 2003). No doubt, it is crucial to study the outcomes of Europeanization; however, in contrast to political scientists, sociologists suggest that we focus not only on the adaptation process, but also on the “usage of European integration.” As noted in the introduction, the “usage” means both the strategic interaction of state actors with European institutions and the impact of this “usage” as an everyday practice on the actors’ interests and identities (Jacquot and Woll, 2003, 3).

Two phases are distinguished in the process of Europeanization: pre-accession and post-accession. They are related to two stages of enacting the EU *acquis*: the transposition of standards first, and their implementation and enforcement second. The transposition and implementation are, on one hand, led by the EU or the aspirant country itself, or on the other hand, based on the “logic of consequences” or the “logic of appropriateness” (Schimmelfenning, 2012, 6).

According to the “logic of consequences”, the Europeanization process is driven by the EU’s *conditionality* based on the application of sanctions and rewards. Conditionality might be negative, for instance, a warning that the EU might cancel a bilateral agreement or use political sanctions (for instance, hinder a visa liberalization process). Alternatively, conditionality might be positive, which means that the EU might reward a particular country’s progress by integrating that country more quickly into the EU market, accelerating the visa liberalization process, etc. It is noteworthy that the EU tries to avoid using negative conditionality, hence its main mechanism to encourage political transformations is positive conditionality (Borzel, 2015, 21).

According to the “logic of appropriateness,” the main mechanism of Europeanization is *social learning* or *socialization*. Target countries consider EU norms beneficial if they perceive these norms as legitimate and identify themselves with the EU (Schimmelfennig, 2012, 7). It is argued that the socialization process is of key importance for the candidate and aspirant countries to get recognition and legitimation of their status (Stivachtis, 2006). There are two essential components in their socialization. First, in the pre-accession period, the candidate/aspirant countries should make sure they are prepared for the implementation of EU requirements and, second, they should persuade the European community that they are worthy potential members. Political elites might be so preoccupied with a desirable performance, however, that instead of fostering Europeanization, they might produce a phantom effect in order to better position their country and ensure fast acquisition of an expected reward (Schimmelfennig, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial that the socialization process be accompanied by certain “cognitive change” so that Europeanization does not stay on paper (Sotiropoulos, 2004, 267).

The adoption of EU norms might be driven not by conditionality or socialization, but by the fact that a country is dissatisfied with the local governance capacity, while considering efficient EU regulations and believing that their implementation might assist in overcoming local problems. This process is known as “Europeanization without the EU” (Irondele, 2003). However, as studies reveal, this phenomenon is an exception rather than the rule, and aspirant countries (in the case of both Eastern Enlargement and the European Neighborhood Policy [ENP]), are driven predominantly by conditionality (Schimmelfennig, 2010; Sedelmeier, 2011).

The conditionality mechanism is especially powerful in the pre-accession stage in order for administrative units to be able to control the harmonization of the local legislative framework with the EU’s framework (Maniokas, 2009). It turns out that another common mechanism of Europeanization in the countries of ENP is *self-conditionality*, which means that the countries aiming to integrate with the EU behave as if they were considered under more conditionality, send obvious signals they are ready to join the member states, and try to persuade the EU to treat them as candidates (Schimmelfennig, 2010, 15). However, the readiness to implement EU norms is high only in those ENP countries that expect to ultimately join the EU (Sedelmeier, 2011; Schimmelfennig, 2012; Borzel, 2015). Otherwise, two main

factors might push them to implement EU regulations: their asymmetrical dependence on the EU and their bargaining power, which seems to be influenced by the country's size, economic prosperity, governance capacity, and the prevalence of pro- and anti-European attitudes. As research illustrates, smaller, richer, better governed, and more Eurosceptic countries are characterized by a stronger bargaining power, and hence obtain more exemptions from the EU (Zhelyazkova, Borzel, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeire, 2015).

It is the ENP that should be considered the framework for Europeanization in the case of countries like Georgia (Schimmelfennig, 2012). Three main principles are dominant within this framework. 1. Political conditionality is used as the main instrument for disseminating EU norms. In this context, the key principle is "differentiation," which means that EU regulations do not equally spread to all aspirant countries. Differentiation is expressed through the EU's exemptions and discrimination. It's no wonder, then, that aspirant states try to obtain exemptions and avoid discrimination, which is dependent on their heterogeneity (that is their difference from states that are already members) and the abovementioned bargaining power. Higher heterogeneity and weaker bargaining power result in a more differentiated integration (Zhelyankova et al., 2015, 21). 2. The EU attempts to disseminate liberal values in these countries, and the success of this effort depends not only on local veto players (for instance, supporters of the EACU), but also on political elites' "normative emulation" of the EU (when, for instance, Georgia attempts to implement rather costly EU policy prescriptions as if it was clearly a prospective member (Borzel, 2015, 24)). As research shows, the weaker political institutions in a country and the more that country is motivated to adopt EU *acquis* as a basis for its local legislation, the more open the country is to the EU's influence (Maniokas, 2009). 3. The same procedures of planning, accounting and support are used in the Eastern Partnership countries (EaP) as in the CEE countries. It is important to note, however, that the "resonance of EU norms and values with the domestic institutions of EaP countries is far lower than in case of CEE countries... [as] by declaring the EaP countries 'friends' and 'neighbours' [even under the title of 'privileged partnership with neighbours,' the EU made quite clear that it did not consider them 'members of the club'" (Borzel, 2015, 23).

This context should be taken into consideration when discussing our empirical data. Our research findings confirm that the leading mechanism of Europeanization in Georgia is conditionality and not socialization or Europe-

anization without the EU. Although the Association Agreement is considered a “modernization plan” for the country, and its implementation is believed to bring many desired changes in terms of both domestic and international politics, it is also believed that EU regulations are implemented because the Association Agreement enforces them to do so, and very seldom because policy makers see the necessity of their implementation. The respondents argue that although the importance of many regulations and standards is acknowledged, their implementation started only because they were set forth by the Association Agreement.

“Implementation of these standards is necessary for the development of certain fields and it is necessary because the EU requires it. We could have started this process two to three years later, but as we have made these commitments under the Association Agreement, we are launching this process now” (N.D., State Agency).

There is an opposite view that what Georgia needs to progress and what is set forth by the Association Agreement do coincide. The Georgian side undertakes changes not because it is obliged to do so, but because they are beneficial. The respondents also emphasize that even the DCFTA document does not set forth all possible standards. However, because the government is aware of the need for various reforms, it has launched particular activities. Some areas might not need approximation with EU standards, but the ongoing changes imply such approximation anyway.

“It is almost the same. EU integration is valuable because it coincides with our development priorities. Therefore, reforms are carried out not because they are required by the EU, but because they are necessary for our country’s modernization” (B.S., State Agency).

“There are some issues in food safety that are not included in the EU Approximation Plan, but which our government acknowledges should be carried out as well. Those implemented reforms – developed normative acts – should certainly be in compliance with the EU. I am not saying that they should coincide perfectly, but they should be similar to European norms. It is not that we surpass our obligations, but it happens due to the objective reality and our needs” (Z.L., Expert, NGO).

Apparently, we encounter the idea of Europeanization without the EU. However, while doing an in-depth analysis of politicians and experts’ narra-

tives, it becomes obvious that the main motivation for undertaking reforms is conditionality, which might even transform into self-conditionality, so that the state is able to persuade the EU of its willingness and readiness to integrate. Two sub-discourses can be identified here. According to the first one, the changes to be carried out are beneficial for the country as they bring it closer to Europe, and ultimately the country can expect to be rewarded:

“It is not about pleasing someone. We do not try to please [the EU], but we benefit from it. Any standard, in anything that we do we aim at receiving something in return. What we get is, firstly, an improved capacity for free trade with the EU, which means increased exports. Secondly, we get simplified movement of our people within the EU; and thirdly, more assistance from the EU – financial, technical, and political support, which is necessary for us, and enhances our prospects for integration with the EU. This is what we should get from it” (L.D., Expert, State Agency).

According to the second discourse, which represents the position of the parliamentary minority, the regulations set forth by the Association Agreement are implemented based on political considerations. Recent amendments to the Law on Broadcasting serve as the most vivid example. Some respondents argue that these amendments have targeted one of the most popular opposition TV channels, “Rustavi 2,” which is associated with the UNM. They perceive this decision as an attempt by the ruling coalition to inflict a political, as well as financial, blow to the TV channel and, indirectly, the most popular opposition party.

“The current government once announced that they did not want to introduce the technical inspection of vehicles. They received such reaction from people that they easily put this issue aside. On the other hand, they adopted the Law on Broadcasting in a hurry in order to harm ‘Rustavi 2.’ It is clear that political expediency lies behind these regulations” (I.C., Expert, Representative of Former Government).

It is noteworthy that the abovementioned amendments are viewed by the expert representing the former government as part of the current government’s political game, while the same amendments are perceived by a politically neutral expert as an attempt to make a desirable impression on the EU.

“We had 5 years to amend the Law on Advertising and the fact that we

are immediately changing it is a kind of showing off” (T.E., Expert, NGO).

As a rule, the representatives of former and current governments have different views on the implementation of EU standards. While the GD representatives assess it as their contribution to the country’s progress, a UNM official thinks that the current government *“tailors EU standards to its own political agenda instead of the actual needs”* (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority). Thus, this politician portrays the GD coalition as a pragmatic but ineffective player that cannot deal with the country’s socioeconomic challenges.

“As for adjusting to the legislation, the government lacks such improvisational skills. Our government used to adjust these regulations so that any harm to our economic growth was avoided, but this government cannot do it” (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

One interviewed expert even brings a concrete example to illustrate that the current and former governments have used different approaches towards implementing EU standards. Particularly, he talks about the conversion of the Competition Agency into an independent unit, which, based on the expert’s assessment, underwent only superficial changes under the former government. In contrast, the current government has overstretched working on the respective legislation. In the respondent’s opinion, the problem is that the former government’s performance was *“staged for Europe,”* whereas the current government’s actions are not consequent.

“It seems to me that the process is extremely prolonged. In the period of the former government these changes were staged for Europe; now it seems they are way too much prolonged by the current government... I think there is a desire to improve and do something, though I do not see any orderly and subsequent steps towards it” (P.M. Expert, NGO).

In this context, the question is raised again whether EU standards are implemented because the former or current government considers them desirable and exemplary. The interviewed politicians try to distance themselves from the discourse of the EU’s assignments and stress that all that is done is meant for the citizens’ wellbeing. It can be assumed that the respondents try to neutralize the existing utilitarian approach to the goods provided by the Association Agreement by highlighting the role of socialization. Thus, on the one hand, they distance themselves from the idea that conditionality is

a decisive factor in Europeanization, while on the other, their narratives illustrate the role of conditionality by acknowledging that the EU's assignments are the "driving force" in the process of Georgia's Europeanization.

"We should focus on our country, our citizens. Georgia should be an attractive state for its own citizens and we should not try to please someone else" (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

"I do not like talking about 'homework.' It is not done for someone somewhere else, but first of all, for our citizens and their own wellbeing. If this 'homework' is a driving force for integration, no doubt, it is positive" (Z.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Concerning the interviewed experts, they openly admit that the Association Agreement requirements are a decisive motivation for implementing new standards. They doubt that without strict regulations the Georgian side would undertake these changes on its own.

"Even without this obligation, we should have a desire to move towards this model. However, I am not aware of any steps taken by officials that are not directly motivated by these commitments. Therefore, the Association Agreement commitments are essential for the country to not slow down its pace towards development" (M.I., Expert, NGO).

It is in this context that the experts emphasize that although it is important to undertake changes without any commitments, the "pressure" of them is necessary as it is "a factor that pushes Georgia's modernization" (Z.T., Expert, NGO). Thus, the implementation of the Association Agreement is considered an "enforcing" mechanism that the country "voluntarily" adopts to ensure its progress. It is noteworthy that in this context the "enforcing" and "voluntary" mechanisms are considered logically interrelated rather than contradictory.

The only example of "Europeanization without the EU" recalled by the experts relates to the case of a particular energy company that, assisted by the EU, modified its unit for design and implemented the EU's standards before the Association Agreement was even signed.

"In terms of design, we have switched to European and American standards. Nobody has demanded it, but we are happy we have done so. When we announce a tender now, the Turkish, English, German and other compa-

nies are able to participate. Ukraine and the countries that still follow old standards cannot participate. Nobody has required it, but it resulted in the development of a highly intellectual potential of our design unit and we are proud of it. Without anyone's directives, we applied the INOGATE program, which is the EU program, and we asked the EU for assistance. We asked them to translate the documents or provide instructions, and we used this assistance" (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

As noted, such a case is an exception and it is obvious that in Georgia the main mechanism of Europeanization is conditionality based on the "logic of consequences," which implies the calculation of costs and benefits. It seems it is more important for political actors to know that non-compliance with the EU's requirements will result in sanctions or refusal of rewards than it is to admit that the process is oriented towards long-term benefits. It is the focus on short-term benefits that evokes inadequate expectations in society. Such expectations have a negative impact on the perception of Europeanization. This is exemplified by the Riga Summit (22.05.2015), which was preceded by the governing elite's statements that a positive decision would be made regarding Georgia's visa liberalization. Despite the fact that both local and international expert analysis before the summit confirmed that Georgia would not be rewarded visa liberalization, the Georgian political elite encouraged the dissemination of inadequate expectations that, presumably, not only had a negative impact on citizens' trust in the current government, but also caused the increase of Eurosceptic attitudes in society.

Europeanization: Assessing Costs and Benefits

According to the scholarly literature, Europeanization creates a new reality, which implies a fundamental reconfiguration of the social, political, economic, and cultural space (Trenz, 2011, 213). Our respondents also discuss a "new reality" that results from the multiple impacts of Europeanization, focusing on the possible costs and benefits of this process. Based on their narratives, we can talk about three types of benefits: political, economic, and cultural.

In terms of political and economic benefits, Europeanization can be defined as the EU's normative and market enlargement, which is perceived as a process of modernization. This is because economically less developed coun-

tries get the EU's financial assistance in order to adopt member states' social and political standards (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Vachodova, 2005; Grabbe, 2006; Curzio and Fortiz, 2008). In terms of cultural benefits, Europeanization can be defined as "increasing transnationalism, that is, the diffusion of cultural norms, ideas, identities, and patterns of behaviour on a cross-national basis within Europe" (Featherstone, 2003, 7). Europeanization implies a process that reshapes identities in contemporary Europe and is expressed through the changes of everyday practices, customs, and ideas.

Our research participants think that the main political benefit of Europeanization is the development of democratic institutions and citizen-oriented policies, which will occur through the harmonization of the local legislative framework with the European one. As expected, the question of reinforcing Georgia's security has been repeatedly emphasized. Concerning the political threats accompanying this process, the respondents talk about declining state sovereignty in terms of making independent political decisions. However, they believe this risk is counterbalanced by the fact that implementation of the Association Agreement ensures the country's political stability, because the country cannot challenge international threats alone, especially those stemming from Russian expansionism.

"Europeanization is definitely one of the main guarantees for our country's political stability. Implementation of the Association Agreement ensures a politically stable situation in the country" (T.L., Expert, Representative of the Previous Government).

"Georgia is not able to cope with global challenges independently. This is why it is of immense importance for the country to be incorporated into a big union like the EU (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

In terms of economic benefits, according to the dominant discourse, Europeanization provides Georgia with an opportunity for economic modernization, which can be achieved by implementing EU standards at the local level and minimizing monopoly in the domestic market. Such changes are considered necessary for the country's economic welfare, especially because they provide a chance to export local products to one of the largest markets in the world. At the same time, the respondents discuss challenges related to Georgia's economic modernization. They do not typically call them "costs," but rather "difficulties" (for instance, fighting corruption), or "painful reforms" (for instance, the increase of production prices). Ac-

cording to respondents, these are inflicted while awaiting benefits in quality production or development of the country's export capacity resulting in GDP increase.

‘The cost for all these reforms, and especially for sensitive ones implied by the Association Agreement, is quite high, as they do not bring immediate results and contain certain threats. For instance, any regulatory changes might facilitate corruption; the law on food safety might increase product prices. Obviously, the quality will improve, but the prices will also increase and it will be painful’ (T.L., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

“From a short-term perspective, there might be some difficulties as we have to implement a number of reforms and some of them are quite sensitive. Some people, like entrepreneurs for example, might incur certain losses. However, ultimately, from a long-term perspective, the country will advance and see the benefits” (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Concerning the main cultural benefit gained from Europeanization, the respondents stress a real opportunity to preserve the national identity, especially given the threat of Russian expansionism. They argue that multiculturalism within the EU is a guarantee for maintaining the Georgian identity and cultural peculiarities, and should not be perceived as threatening Georgian values.

“I believe that EU integration gives an opportunity to reinforce our national characteristics as the EU represents a union of 28 countries that are ethnically, culturally and politically very diverse. They feel safe together. The EU's slogan is ‘Unity in Diversity’” (V.D., Expert, NGO).

The interviewed experts and politicians consider the EU as an important agent for Georgia's re-socialization, which is evidenced by their assessment of EU integration as a process of “mental modernization.” They perceive the latter as a precondition for the rational and successful implementation of institutional reforms in the country. Human rights defense and rule of law, as well as the development of social responsibility are considered the indicators of such mental modernization. The respondents argue that in this process, the cultivation of European values is as important as the transformation of local structures according to EU standards. They emphasize that “mental modernization” is necessary for Europeanization to foster a real transformation of the society, that is, to transfer from the formal and discurs-

sive levels to the behavioral one (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005, 8).

“Europeanization has two dimensions: one is Europeanization of public consciousness and mentality, public attitudes to environment, individuals, society, etc. Another dimension has to do with institutional changes and reforms, those transformations that make a country compatible with the EU” (L.D., State Agency).

“This is a unique opportunity for our country and our citizens to experience mental modernization, which will in turn speed-up the implementation of domestic reforms. Without these reforms, both Europeanization and the Association Agreement will be empty words” (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

Successful and Unsuccessful Cases of Implementing the Association Agreement

Research illustrates that the more aspirant states’ political, economic, and cultural characteristics differ from those of EU member states, the more pressure they experience to harmonize their national standards with the EU’s (Grabbe, 2003; Sedelmeier, 2011; Schimmelfennig, 2012). Because of this, there are asymmetrical relations between the EU and candidate/aspirant states, which are pushed by the asymmetry of attraction (Tsuladze, forthcoming). They agree to implement costly reforms because the EU is much more attractive to them than they are to the EU. This very asymmetry enables the EU to develop all rules of the game in the process of Europeanization and use the conditionality mechanism (Grabbe, 2006, 37).

It is important that conditionality is clear, that is, that candidate/applicant states know what they are supposed to do in order to comply with EU standards. At the same time, conditionality should be reliable, that is, candidate/applicant states should be confident that they will be rewarded after complying with all requirements (Grabbe 2003). In this context, scholars discuss various types of uncertainty that applicants experience. One is related to the EU’s agenda and caused by the ambiguity of particular standards. Another is related to the hierarchy of the EU’s tasks as their number is quite large and it is hard to define priorities. A third type is related to the terms of implementing a given agenda (ibid, 319-320).

Our research findings reveal these uncertainties. It turns out that for the research participants, the duties, sequence, and terms of implementing the Association Agreement are quite important and even sensitive issues. They stress that in order for the Association Agreement to be successfully implemented, it is crucial to rationally distribute the tasks over time because *“this ambitious plan is oriented towards mid-term perspectives and if we try to accelerate the speed, we might ultimately fail”* (N.D., State Agency).

The respondents pay attention to the terms of executing particular requirements set forth by the Association Agreement. They mentioned the duration of terms (from 3 to 10 years), and the number of regulations (more than 300 legislative initiatives), which should be reflected in the national legislation, for several times. Regarding the Action Plan, they emphasized the importance of a rational and responsible approach to the process of EU integration noting that *“even if we are asked to implement the Association Agreement within 3 years and we know that successful implementation will result in EU membership, every responsible politician and party will refuse to attempt this implementation because it will definitely result in failure”* (V.D., Expert, NGO).

Despite the research participants’ belief that it is realistic to gradually implement all regulations set forth by the Association Agreement, they still list a number of reforms that are hard to implement. They think that *vehicle inspection* is one of the most painful reforms. One of the respondents even noted that he would not wish anyone to represent the government in 2018 precisely because this regulation should be put into practice. Some of them emphasized that the EU did not support postponing the implementation of vehicle inspection to 2018 due to ecological considerations, but ultimately a compromise was achieved.

Food safety is also mentioned as one of the most difficult reforms. The respondents stress that, on the one hand, there is a lack of respective infrastructure in Georgia, while on the other hand, agriculture and not industry dominates the food production sphere. For that reason, the implementation of EU standards that imply strict control over production will be painfully reflected on the population. Therefore, food safety reform needs to be enacted gradually.

“In my opinion, food safety reform will be the most painful as it will affect the largest segment of the population. The majority of Georgia’s population is employed in agriculture and they will feel the effects. That is why we have

tried to be careful and implement these regulations gradually. If we immediately start controlling how a cow owner milks a cow and preserves the milk, this product might not end up in the market at all. This control might bring very negative outcomes; therefore, it should be implemented gradually and scheduled carefully” (N.D., State Agency).

However, in contrast to the government’s position that caution is never redundant, the experts express rather critical views regarding the establishment of quality control and certification units. They think that the government does not take care of allocating funds that hinders food safety reform, impeding the export of Georgian products to the European market. As food safety regulations are adopted but not enacted in practice through market control, one of the experts states that it is merely a declaration of enacting directives, despite the fact that they were supposed to be implemented immediately after signing the document.

Regarding the issue of declaration, the abovementioned two stages (transposition of standards and their implementation or enforcement) of enacting the EU acquis should be taken into consideration. At the first, transportation stage, the “management approach” is dominant, which aims at facilitating and strengthening administrative capacities. It implies incorporation of the EU acquis into the national action plan and creation of special governmental and non-governmental units to monitor the process. At the second stage, the “enforcement approach” is dominant, but deliberate non-enactment or selective enactment might take place, hence the EU acquis might retain a formal function (Maniokas, 2009). As the interviews reveal, the experts express their discontent with the government’s use of the “enforcement approach” to the EU acquis, which results in a declarative enactment of EU directives.

“We have definitely moved forward in terms of technical regulations regarding food safety, but only on paper that is not important to Europe. [...] They have adopted these directives hastily; it was just declared that the products in market should be safe, while the directive does not require this but rather assurance that products entering market are checked. Georgia has been left without market control for quite a while; however, it should have been introduced after adopting this directive. Market control is a long-term process, but according to the Association Agreement, this directive should have been enacted immediately after signing the document” (P.M., Expert, NGO).

In addition to the abovementioned issue, some respondents emphasize that the reemergence of regulatory units might foment corruption as well as trigger price increases.

“The introduction of regulatory units, abolished in Georgia for years, is problematic because, first of all, it might cause corruption and, second, it might cause price increases” (T.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

The same respondent points to the fact that the government might misuse the timeframe defined for implementation of the Association Agreement in order to satisfy personal interests or pay off political opponents.

“Let’s take the amendments to the Law on Broadcasting, which regulate the question of advertising. They had time until 2017, but adopted them hurriedly, probably to cause Rustavi 2’s financial problems. There was a special article on advertising in the agreement that noted this process should have lasted longer. This problem has affected everyone, but especially Rustavi 2 as it is the largest company. The law regulated the duration of advertising within an hour, as well as during primetime, so they had to shorten that period and, of course, it had a negative effect on their income” (T.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

It is noteworthy that representatives of the parliamentary majority, parliamentary minority, and independent experts provide diverse perceptions regarding the success of harmonization of the local legislation with the European one. The list of success stories from experts and parliamentary minority representatives is quite short and mostly limited to the anti-discrimination law that “challenges the Soviet heritage” (N.S., Expert, Higher Education Institution). On the other hand, the list of successfully implemented regulations from the parliamentary majority is much longer and offers various items starting from the progress in governance capacity and ending with the legislative reforms related to juvenile delinquency and the rights of persons with disabilities.

“I think we have introduced many legislative changes. Procedural Criminal Law, for instance, has undergone fundamental changes. The rules of Covert Listening have changed. It was vital to carry out a reform for persons with disabilities. We are now changing the Juvenile Code, which sets forth absolutely different rules in the case of juvenile delinquency. We also work on procuration and policy reforms. We have changed the visa policy again and improved the one we had before” (I.L., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

Europeanization as a New Experience of Doing Politics

The scholars studying Europeanization focus on three main contexts: historical, cultural, and political. The latter comprises political institutions and implies doing politics based on EU standards, which has a significant impact on the domestic political processes that stimulate various transformations. Radaelli (2003) lists four areas, within which the abovementioned transformations can be empirically measured: interaction, robustness, equilibration, and discourse.

Interaction is a dimension of political experience and focuses on the relations between executive bodies and other actors. Here the transformation is measured by assessing whether or not institutions have strengthened in terms of interacting with other institutions. While political experience measures the interaction between an institution and its surroundings, **robustness** measures the internal state of institutions, which can be strengthened through improved political technologies and bureaucratic apparatus. The need for **equilibration** emerges when institutions encounter a crisis that does not fit a standard repertoire of action. As a result, their rules and norms are transformed. Finally, **discourse** plays a decisive role in shaping new rules, values, and practices as well as in making them legitimate (Radaelli, 2003, 39-40). Discourse is paid a special attention while studying the process of Europeanization because, according to Radaelli, it can have a transformative effect on all aspects of politics. It may alter the interpretation of a political dilemma, change the perception of a real cause of political contradiction, transform the political interests upon which negotiations are based, and make a crucial impact on the legitimation of particular choices related to EU policy (ibid, 36).

Despite the EU's transformative effect on various aspects of domestic politics, this effect differs among countries. Scholars argue that where the local systems and institutions do not considerably differ from those of EU members, there is a better chance for incorporation of EU requirements (Börzel and Risse, 2003). Norm entrepreneurs and co-operative informal institutions are actively involved in this process. The role of norm entrepreneurs is especially noteworthy since they act as "agents of change," lobbying new ideas, regulations, and procedures (ibid, 67).

While using the abovementioned authors' approach to analyze the situation in Georgia, where domestic political institutions differ from those of EU

member states, it can be argued that the incorporation of EU requirements is not an easy process. However, it should be noted that in recent years, local institutions have been actively implementing reforms. Moreover, we can state that special departments of EU integration at the Ministries and various agencies responsible for implementation of Association Agreement requirements represent the “agents of change.” If we add to this list the NGO sector lobbying pro-European ideas (for instance, EU-Georgia Civil Society Platform), it can be said that this process gradually progresses in Georgia.

To focus on the impact of Europeanization on domestic political processes and discuss the first category identified by Radaelli (interaction or political experience), EU integration fosters collaboration among political parties, but only among those parties whose foreign policy visions are similar.

“If there is an assent of political parties that have declared the country’s future should be related to the EU, this sets them on equal cooperation” (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

“Probably it facilitates the consolidation of groups that have a similar vision, while it deepens confrontation with groups that have a different vision. It depends on which side you represent and which position you take” (N.D., State Agency).

According to this view, collaboration among parties depends on their preference for Europe or Russia. The respondents emphasize that EU integration encourages collaboration only among those parties who agree that Georgia’s foreign policy priority should be integration into EU structures, while their collaboration with pro-Russian parties is impossible.

The respondents view interaction between various political or social institutions in the same light and stress that EU integration does not necessarily strengthen their collaboration. They cite the example of the Georgian Orthodox Church being against the adoption of an anti-discrimination law. However, thanks to EU requirements, legislative bodies did not take the Church’s arguments into consideration and adopted the anti-discrimination law. Looking at this from a party perspective, it is perceived as a contradictory case because the parliamentary opposition considered it necessary to adopt the law, even in an incomplete form, while the majority of those from the ruling party, in the respondents’ words, were against adopting this law but were forced to do so because of pressure exerted by the EU.

“It means these people – I mean the majority of the parliamentary majority – experience an internal contradiction with European values. However, under strong pressure they are forced to make the decisions they make” (N.O., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

It is notable that while discussing such issues, interviewed politicians try to present them from their own party perspectives. For instance, a representative of a pro-Western opposition party emphasizes the “paradoxical” situation that the government is less critical of pro-Russian political actors (Nino Burjanadze and the “Alliance of Patriots,” for example) and more critical of pro-Western political parties (UNM and the “Free Democrats,” for example), while integration into Euro-Atlantic structures is declared as the current ruling party’s foreign policy priority. As this issue is predominantly viewed from a narrow party perspective, the respondent presumably aims at positioning his/her own team as pro-Western in contrast to the “latently pro-Russian” ruling party.

“The current government declares that its priority is the EU, but, despite this, it often fails to agree and cooperate with other parties adhering to the same principle” (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

The experts and members of parliamentary minority also stress that there are certain groups within the ruling coalition that do not avoid openly expressing their pro-Russian, and hence anti-Western views. Based on one position, this is problematic, while according to another, it does not constitute a problem. This is because it is a political platform of one specific party, which the electorate is aware of, though has still voted for the coalition whose declared foreign policy priority is EU integration.

“If this is a coalition, it must be a coalition united around the same principles. When one part of the coalition talks about different principles, then it’s not a coalition any more. Either one side is lying or another. There are also certain individuals – political figures and members of parliament within the coalition – who declare that the EU and European values are not important to them” (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

In this context, the representatives of the parliamentary minority compare the former and current governments, and say that the former government’s advantage was its unanimous vision and coordinated activity, which today is lacking. If any progress is visible, it is ascribed not to the current

government's political will or use of resources, but rather to the obligations taken by the country through the Association Agreement.

"Whether it is a statement or resolution by the European Parliament or the European Commission, it has a weight and significance in the political discourse. So it helps us to suspend Georgia's regression... Coordination used to be at a very high level. Politicians admitted that teamwork and coordination among various ministries were among our assets" (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

It is these obligations that are considered an impetus for the collaboration of the executive body, state agencies, and NGOs. Although the process of gaining experience from the EU is perceived as continuous, the assessment of how successfully this new experience is internalized is considered quite hard.

"New experience is gained because they [the government] have contact with EU representatives. What the EU requires from government officials is a new experience for them. It is still hard for me to evaluate how well it is internalized" (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

The research participants note that this experience is most clearly reflected in the robustness or the internal capacity of institutions, which is strengthened in the course of Europeanization. A number of activities that serve this purpose are listed, such as trainings for state officials, the establishment of EU integration units at the ministries, and professional visits to EU member states to share best practices.

"Gaining experience is a constant accompanying process. State officials are constantly trained and educated. We have special programs that imply expert assistance for legislative approximation in these fields. Staff trainings take place locally and abroad. We are not reinventing the bicycle" (N.D., State Agency).

"All public agencies are involved in the implementation of the Association Agreement. Public agencies communicate with NGOs because there are consulting groups providing consultations regarding the implementation of reforms. Certainly, new experience is gained. For example, a group of teachers is visiting Latvia in May to find out the role of teachers in the process of Latvia's European integration and learn about what problems they have

encountered, what experience they have gained in terms of introducing European values at schools, etc. We also have a program for farmers and representatives of the agricultural sector. Visits are planned to Estonia, the Netherlands, and the UK to share best practices” (V.D., Expert, NGO).

Despite positive changes in terms of both developing institutional collaboration and strengthening the internal capacity of institutions, the respondents believe that more pressure from Brussels would give a greater impetus to this process. Thus, in their opinion, more conditionality from the EU would have a positive impact on the transformation of political experience.

“This process directly influences their work because, as we know, it has its own stages of approximation, enactment, and reporting. Following all of these stages and moving to a new stage definitely influences their activities because their success and failure can be identified. Accordingly, if there is a more active and consistent approach from the EU, stricter requirements for these institutions may encourage them to be even more active in their work” (M.I., Expert, NGO).

Special attention should be paid to the position, according to which nothing has changed in terms of doing politics in Georgia though it is expected that Europeanization will support the development of political culture in the future. Thus, referring to the empirical categories offered by Radaelli, changes toward the improvement of political experience, robustness, and equilibration are still quite insignificant, though it is necessary to undertake these changes for the purpose of EU integration. If the Europeanization process has not yet resulted in a new style of collaboration and the local political actors are still quite polarized, the respondents believe that it will encourage positive changes and foster the development of a new, Western way of doing politics in the near future.

“This is a mechanism through which the government units that do their work by inertia, or cannot do it, will be forced to become activate, learn, and do more” (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

“It provides a good framework for relations to be normal like in a democratic country and be different from what we have, in particular I mean relations between the government and the opposition” (T.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

At this stage, Europeanization is perceived as a part of the political image created by Georgian politicians for a domestic audience, which is considered crucial for utilitarian reasons (socially desirable self-presentation, “hooking” the electorate, etc.) and has little to do with the political actors’ value system. The ruling party ascribes such a performance to the oppositional parties, the oppositional parties to the ruling one, while experts ascribe it to both the former and the latter.

“This is mainly used by politicians to present themselves as progressive. They have a utilitarian approach to Europe and Europeanness, rather than a value- or identity-driven approach, or one like social constructivists. This is a utilitarian approach that aims to gain personal benefits” (N.Sh., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

However, even this utilitarian approach should be positively assessed, as it indicates that while constructing one’s political image, it is important to adequately react to the demands of EU integration supporters, especially since they represent the largest segment of the population. Political discourse plays a critical role here because, as Radaelli notes, discourse might have a key impact on the legitimization of choices related to the EU.

Europeanization and the Issue of Human Resources

As noted above, at the first transposition stage of implementing the EU acquis, the management approach (which is oriented towards the mobilization of respective resources and the development of administrative capacities) is decisive (Maniokas 2009). In this context, the issue of human professional resources gains a special importance, which is also illustrated by our research. The respondents view Georgia’s Europeanization and especially the implementation of the Association Agreement as intertwined with the question of involving a qualified staff with respective expertise in this process. The need for such staff is differently perceived by the Parliamentary Majority, Parliamentary Minority, NGO representatives, and independent experts.

The respondents associated with the GD either neglect a lack of qualified staff in the government or try to ascribe a lack of professionalism to various independent reasons. For instance, respondents gave a positive assessment

to the systematic work of state institutions and the civil sector in order to satisfy the Association Agreement requirements. It was stressed that on the one hand, there is a civil sector supporting EU integration, which *“dictates to the government what should be done”* (E.T., State Agency), but on the other hand, there are qualified officials in the government participating in the Association Agreement negotiations and responsible for its successful implementation.

“I think we do not lack resources. We have started the negotiations taking into consideration these resources. While developing timetables in various areas, we calculated these very resources and made decisions based on the domestic reality. This is how the legislative approximation programs have been developed. Certainly, I am far from the idea that our government sector does not need further improvement and professional development, but it will happen gradually, especially with the EU’s support” (N.D., State Agency).

In this context, the respondents emphasize that Georgia does not lack intellectual resources because higher education and professional development was a priority for the society even during the Soviet period. However, they note that this resource is scattered outside Georgia and it is hard to mobilize it within the country. Therefore, it is not currently available to overcome the challenges encountered by the country.

“The country has never suffered from a lack of intellectual resources. Now we need to mobilize all the resources we have and invest them in Georgia. Lots of professionals are working outside the country, because these resources have not been utilized here. It will be a real achievement if the state manages to mobilize them” (B.S., State Agency).

In contrast to the above position, some respondents state that the closed totalitarian space did not give Georgians the chance for proper professional development, resulting in a lack of professionals in various fields and representing a real challenge for the country. However, a respondent from the Parliamentary Majority notes that this issue is acknowledged by the government, and it is taking appropriate measures to accumulate the necessary knowledge and experience. The EU supports this initiative by providing different trainings and ensuring collaboration with international experts. In his words, Europeans see that we have *“a genuine aspiration for a better future and they are ready to help us achieve this aim”* (I.L., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

“We should not be ashamed if there is something we don’t know yet. What is shameful is when one does not know and has no desire to know” (I.L., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

“The process is not entirely inert. Periodically, EU delegations come to Georgia. They check the country’s readiness and investigate to what extent a particular parameter matches their criteria. They give us recommendations, which are followed, and we reached the point where the DCFTA became a part of the Association Agreement. So, progress was made, resulting in the signing of the Association Agreement” (P.M., Expert, NGO).

While talking about the issue of qualified human resources, emphasizing the long-term process of implementing the Association Agreement and simultaneously noting that *“not even a year has passed since we signed the document”* (V.D., Expert, NGO) gives the impression of attempting to justify the lack of resources. Although the respondents admit that there are certain gaps in the process of implementing the Association Agreement, they are ascribed not to a lack of professionalism, but to various structural problems. They also stress that the government possesses the necessary resources to solve these issues.

“A lot of actors are involved, including the Parliament, which makes legislative changes, and the regions representing independent bodies in terms of decentralization policy. [...] The government and regulatory agencies are working hard to overcome these difficulties while monitoring the process. In other words, the Georgian government has all the necessary mechanisms to plan, coordinate, and implement this process” (V.D., Expert, NGO).

The respondents also note that certain sectorial reforms like those related to the development of transport and communications do not require special competences. However, the same is not true for the anti-discrimination law, the adoption of which took lots of time and resources in order to *“adequately explain and present it to the public”* (Z.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority). Although the respondent talks about public dissatisfaction with the adoption of this law, he simultaneously emphasizes the tolerance characteristic to Georgians and cannot recall any case of *“insulting, beating, or expressing a discriminatory attitude towards someone.”* He calls the rumor accompanying the adoption of this law a minor complication, and argues *“it*

is a common case. It is not characteristic only of Georgians, but of everyone else. So, we should keep calm and work hard” (Z.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Regarding the lack of human resources, the UNM and NGO representatives give more critical assessments than other research participants. They state that those who are responsible for implementation of the Association Agreement are not sufficiently qualified, and that it is questionable how effectively the resources provided by the EU are applied. Although the process is ongoing, *“it is led by an autopilot, and no one knows when this autopilot will fail to operate” (Z.T., Expert, NGO).*

“Everybody complains about the lack of resources, but the EU helps us to implement these reforms. Georgia is not alone in this process. For one thing, we can say there are not enough resources, but at the same time it is also questionable how effectively they are utilized” (Z.L., Expert, NGO).

Both the parliamentary minority and experts fear that there is a risk related to the implementation of certain regulations that require administrative potential, which is lacking. Therefore, they believe that an attempt to implement them might bring more negative consequences, such as financial loss or increased corruption.

“Our government’s approach was the following: if a regulation cannot be administered, then it is better not to have it at all. Otherwise, results can be worse: those who are exposed to such regulations suffer from financial loss and corruption rises. In Shevardnadze’s period, there were millions of regulations but everything was arranged through bribes. For example, in the phytosanitary area there was massive corruption. EU standards were set forth but only on paper. Our government abolished these structures” (D.L, Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

While talking about the lack of human resources, special attention was paid to the higher educational system in Georgia and its key role in the Europeanization process. It was emphasized that classical knowledge accumulated in the country and possessed by Georgian professors was not sufficient to respond to the demands of contemporary life. At the same time, the Georgian higher educational system is not able to respond to challenges emerging in various areas. Therefore, the respondents believe that an updated educational system and qualified specialists represent the real solution to

the abovementioned problems, especially taking into account an increased focus on teaching the natural and agricultural sciences. Besides, they state that contemporary Georgian youth is much more open to innovation, as well as to Western values.

“I put a lot of hope in the next generation. I truly believe each new generation is better, learns faster, is more open to Western values, and is not afraid of change” (M.I., Expert, NGO).

“Decision-makers and executives should be part of the new generation, which is free of stereotypes, fears, and obligations towards Russia. It is not a surprise that the majority of Georgian MPs, whose average age is above 40, still hold Soviet approaches to a number of issues, including procedural democracy” (K.U., Expert, NGO).

The respondents emphasize that in order for the implementation of the Association Agreement to be successful, it is necessary to work at the micro level, which currently does not happen. Even those officials who possess the necessary competences and can objectively assess situations and identify relevant issues do not reveal information driven by political conjuncture and attempt to avoid public pressure.

“The problem we face is twofold; certain Georgian public officers are not competent in the field. At the same time, there are individuals who are professionals but exposed to political conjuncture and do not speak up in a timely fashion. If problems were exposed on time, we would impose pressure on policymakers. We have a bad system, so if something is wrong, officials try to hide it thinking that if information is exposed, it will cause rumors. Public information from which the society can benefit should be disclosed. When this information is conserved, outcomes are usually negative” (M.G., Expert, NGO).

The interviewed experts argue that we encounter inconsequential actions in the process of implementing the Association Agreement that hinder Georgia’s Europeanization. As a way out of the situation, they suggest undertaking structural changes, which should ensure the mobilization and effective enactment of all possible resources. In their words, only such structural changes can provide a guarantee for the future success of the Europeanization process in Georgia.

Social Institutions and Actors Interested in EU Integration and Europeanization

The population

All interviewed experts and politicians (from current government and opposition parties) think that the population of Georgia represents the actor most interested in EU integration and the accompanying Europeanization process.

Scholars argue that public attitudes to EU integration and Europeanization should be studied in the context of the discourses (political, media, etc.) that have an impact on their formation (Toshkov et al., 2014, 3). While explaining public attitudes to Europeanization, scholars emphasize the importance of focusing on both utilitarian interests (such as visa free movement or the prospects of economic development) and identifying factors (such as the reinforcement of Georgians' "European identity," or the fear of losing one's identity and traditions). Furthermore, a potential impact of media framing and the signals coming from politicians should also be taken into consideration. In this context, it is interesting to find out what the research participants consider the main factors influencing the Georgian population's attitude to the EU.

It is the utilitarian factor that the respondents stress while talking about benefits of the Europeanization process. These benefits comprise economic and democratic development, the enhancement of security, improvement of human rights, etc. As EU integration is associated with the common welfare, it is believed that the population will mainly feel the positive outcomes of this process. It should be stressed that according to the research participants, this welfare is achieved through the successful implementation of EU standards in the process of EU integration and not simply through being granted EU membership.

"Membership does not really matter, the main thing is the success of the EU approximation process as Georgia will become as successful as the member states are" (B.S., State Agency).

In experts' and politicians' opinion, the citizens' highly pro-European attitudes represent an obvious indicator that the Europeanization process is in their interest and, most importantly, they are aware of it. According to

the respondents, the population's positive attitude is reflected in nationwide studies. The findings of regular representative surveys (CRRC, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015) suggest that Europeanization is not only a top-down but also a bottom-up process in Georgia. This is well demonstrated by the public's strong reaction to possible deviations from the European course, which are approached carefully by politicians and even used for political manipulation and ratings. The bottom-up component of Europeanization in Georgia is best exemplified by the events of November 2014, in particular by the confrontation between then-Minister of Defense Irakli Alasania and then-Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, which resulted in the "Free Democrats" leaving the GD coalition and declaring that Georgia's pro-European course was threatened by the current government. In response, the Prime Minister had to immediately proclaim that Georgia's pro-European course was the citizens' choice, and hence it was the government's priority as well, and any deviation from it was unacceptable. Our research participants also stress that there is a high rate of support for EU integration, which causes the government (as the executive of public will) to set EU integration as the country's main foreign policy priority.

"As their real interest is to get votes, if the electorate demands they take the European course, it becomes a driving force" (Z.T., Expert, NGO).

Despite the above narrative, a different view is also expressed, which looks with suspicion at the bottom-up direction of Europeanization. This view highlights the population's lack of awareness about the Europeanization process. According to this discourse, the public does not possess sufficient information about the EU in general and Georgia's EU integration process in particular. Thus, it is not aware of what to expect from approximation with the EU. Although citizens believe that EU integration will have a positive impact on their lives, they do not know in what respect, how, and when. One of the experts called this phenomenon "Euro-romanticism," and expressed fears that it might lead to future public disappointment and possibly the encouragement of anti-EU sentiments.

Although the population was considered one of the main actors interested in the success of the Europeanization process, according to the findings of a May 2015 public opinion poll, alongside a high rate (61%) of citizens supporting EU integration, there is also a considerable rate (31%) of citizens wishing to integrate into the EACU (NDI, CRRC, 2015). This finding once again

raises the issue of timely and adequately providing the population with relevant information. At the same time, as the Balkan case illustrates, where the public is characterized by higher pro-European attitudes, the EU achieves its goals more easily (Pickering, 2011). Therefore, attempts toward raising public awareness are decisive in the successful implementation of EU practices, as well as in the development of a civic culture and the improvement of democracy in the country.

The government

The government is considered another actor interested in Georgia's EU integration and Europeanization. Studies conducted in various countries pointing to the rising discrepancy between elite and public views on EU integration are noteworthy; particularly, those that illustrate the predominant role of a utilitarian vision at the public level and identity factors at the elite level (Toshkov et al., 2014, 3). In this context, it is interesting to find out what interests the Georgian political and intellectual elites have in relation to the EU.

As noted above, there is a dominant view in the scholarly literature that EU integration is an elite-driven process. Authors state that the issue of promoting a common European identity within the EU reinforces the argument that Europeanization is a top-down process (Medrano, 2011, 46). Some of our respondents' views resonate with this opinion: they think the Georgian political elite makes a more thoughtful choice than the population because they correctly see the superiority of Europe among all the possible alternatives.

"The government realizes that it [Europeanization] is necessary for the country's development. The course of development that the country chooses should be compatible with its final goals. The fact that we have chosen the course of EU integration confirms that EU standards and requirements are acceptable for us" (E.T. Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

To contextualize these findings in the scholarly literature, they should be connected to three levels of Europeanization: *macro* (the level of social systems), *micro* (everyday practices and attitudes), and *mezzo* (connecting the macro and micro levels). Accordingly, we should focus on studying Europeanization both from above and from below. Although political science is based on the first approach, sociology acknowledges the significance of

the latter approach as well (Trenz, 2011, 213). This very context explains why research participants ascribe a decisive role to public preferences and interests in the course of EU integration. Politicians, however, are considered the key agents in raising public awareness, especially because of the “Euro-romanticism” characteristic to the population. The respondents argue that politicians should use mass media and various means of communication in order to inform the population and legitimize the process of EU integration.

If we consider the cases of Macedonia and Bosnia in this respect, we can clearly see that the EU’s conditionality has had different outcomes in these two countries, which was caused by the fact that the local political elite had diverse views on the EU’s terms. On one hand, the Macedonian political elite considered them beneficial, while on the other, the Bosnian elite did not (Vasilev, 2011). As in these countries, the role of government in Georgia is very important in fostering the desire to implement the reforms that should bring the country socioeconomic welfare through approximation with the EU.

The business sector

The respondents identified business sector among the actors particularly interested in EU integration. they state that the EU is first and foremost an economic union, so one of the main benefits of signing the Association Agreement is the development of a free trade area. Therefore, the business sector should be genuinely interested in Georgia’s integration into European structures. As one government representative noted, even those companies that will not be able to adapt to EU standards in a timely way will still find themselves in better conditions as the overall economic situation in Georgia improves.

In order for the business sector to benefit from the EU integration process, it is important to adequately plan the reforms. This question is especially relevant in the case of developing minimal standards and regulations, which, at the initial stage, will cause an increase in production costs, but will later bring more benefits.

“Doing business will be more advantageous in the case of EU integration. It is very important to implement reforms such that they will not put businesses into shock; As long as that is done, they will be beneficial in the long-run” (Z.L., Expert, NGO).

The EU

The EU is also considered one of the parties interested in Georgia's Europeanization. Although it is a widespread opinion that an aspirant country is more eager to integrate with the EU than the other way around, the fact that the EU's position is not uniform should also be taken into consideration. The EU has an image of a promoter of democracy and peace in the region, and it is interested in maintaining political and economic stability in its neighborhood. This should be reflected in its international image as well as in the economic development of its population (Haukkala, 2008).

Some interviewed experts focused on the West's interests in relation to Georgia's Europeanization. In their words, Europe has several interconnected interests. First of all, Georgia's Europeanization is perceived as a way to neutralize Russian aggression. It is also perceived as a way of disseminating European values in the "satellite countries," and many believe that doing so will improve the overall democratic situation and create an alternative to other political entities (such as the Eurasian Customs Union) in the foreign policy course of countries like Georgia. The participants also note that one reason for the EU's interest in Georgia is the perception that Georgia can be an energy corridor through which the EU can diversify its energy imports.

"Not only does Georgia need Europe, but Europe needs Georgia. If not for us, Europe would not receive Azerbaijani oil and gas, as it could only otherwise go through Russia or Iran. They would receive it, but not with the same conditions and in the same quantity as they do by transporting it through Georgia [...] It means our country has given Europe an opportunity to diversify its market [...] Thus, our role as a player in the energy market is very important. That is why Europe has a dialogue with us and declares its support to us as a transit country" (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

Social Institutions and Actors Opposing EU Integration and Europeanization

Aside from the social institutions and actors supporting Georgia's EU integration and Europeanization, the research participants identified several actors who oppose this process. The majority consider the most dangerous

actor to be Russia, along with the pro-Russian political parties and media outlets operating in Georgia. The representatives of the parliamentary minority add the GD coalition to this list, as was discussed in the earlier chapter on politicians' awareness about EU integration. Furthermore, there was a careful mention of the Georgian Orthodox Church as an obstacle in the process of EU integration, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Russia and pro-Russian forces

As the EU attempts to disseminate its “normative hegemony,” Russia does not want to lose hegemony in its neighborhood. For this reason, Russia applies multiple strategies to maintain its regional hegemony, the most notable of which is anti-Western propaganda. For example, a representative of the ruling party mentions “horrible propaganda” coming from Russia and the NGOs and political parties funded by it several times. The respondent emphasizes that Russia uses active propaganda because it fears the existence of a pro-European country in its near neighborhood. This is because attraction to European values and democratic principles contradicts Russia's authoritarian vision. In addition, Russia does not want to allow a country historically belonging to the Soviet Union to escape from its sphere of influence.

“Georgia's integration into the EU and NATO is not desirable to it [Russia], as it ruins its philosophy to regain the influence on the so called post-Soviet space, which includes Georgia as well. For Russia, even Georgia's state sovereignty is not acceptable, not to mention its integration into the EU. Because of this, it does everything to hinder our aspiration to join Europe” (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

“The main message of Russian propaganda is power; not that they are good, but that they are powerful. The message is that Europe is weak, while Russia is strong, and do you want to get what Ukraine did? In this discourse, any hesitation from the side of our government is very negative” (T.L., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

It seems that Russian propaganda mostly targets the sensitive area of Georgian identity, disseminating a discourse about the EU as a threat to it. The research participants note that this propaganda might strengthen alongside Georgia's progress on the way to EU integration. In addition, they stress that

pro-Russian propaganda is based on the “dissemination of gossip.” Therefore, they consider vital to raise public awareness in Georgia, in order to neutralize the impact of pro-Russian propaganda and debunk EU related myths.

“The closer we get to Europe, the more this [Russian propaganda] becomes an issue. Lately, negative coverage of the EU in the media and the dissemination of gossip that scares part of the population have become more prevalent. A good example is the groundless idea that EU regulations ban killing piglets under the age of one on Christmas Eve, as well as other unbelievable stories” (Z.L., Expert, NGO).

The experts note that Russian propaganda becomes especially active in critical moments, whether it is during discussion of Georgia’s visa liberalization or during a pre-election period, when it is crucial for the population to favor pro-European political parties. Furthermore, pro-Russian propaganda is considered a real threat in the regions populated by ethnic minorities, where knowledge of Georgian language is quite limited and the population gets the news predominantly in Russian language. Experts stress the necessity of raising public awareness in such regions, especially since recent studies have revealed that the rate of support for EU integration is much lower among ethnic minorities than the Georgian population (CRRC, 2013, 2015).

Impact of Europeanization on Georgia’s International Image

The research participants unanimously agree that Europeanization has a positive impact on Georgia’s international image. This is ascribed to positive steps taken towards the country’s development as well as to the positive image of the EU itself. The respondents stress that, alongside implementing various reforms in the course of approximation with the EU, both the level of democratization and the socioeconomic situation are improving in the country. As a result, the international image of Georgia as a politically and socioeconomically stable country that is attractive for investors encourages further economic growth.

One of the discourses related to the image of Georgia as a reliable country focuses on political stability and its accompanying security. This directly resonates with the paradigms presented in the European Security Strategy document, which explains experts’ perception of the EU as an institution interested in Georgia’s Europeanization. According to the European Security

Strategy, security is the number one issue, meaning that it is a precondition for any progress. The term “security” itself has different meanings depending on whether it is discussed in the context of “hard” or “soft” power. “Hard power” implies looking at security in the context of conflict/war, while “soft power” focuses on the spillover effects of failed democracy reflected in the rate of organized crime or refugees (Hughes, 2009). The EU’s approach to both types of security is based on the Democratic (Liberal) Peace Theory developed in the 1990s, after the end of Cold War and the collapse of communist states. According to this theory, democratic states do not fight with one another. In 2003, the EU declared that the best means of ensuring one’s security is the existence of democratic states (European Council, 2003). Thus, the EU’s approach is based on the concept of shared values, which is to say that it follows a “soft” approach. Accordingly, the security of Georgia as a neighboring country is a question that causes the EU’s interest in the country’s Europeanization process. If Georgia’s approximation with the EU is a continuous process, it will perform on the international stage as a secure and stable country. This will represent Georgia as a democratic country driven by European values because this is the image of the EU itself.

Indeed, authors view the EU as a normative role model. As noted above, the EU is even called a regional normative hegemon (Haukkala, 2008), which attempts to ensure its own security through enlargement, but also through the neighborhood policy (Europe cannot feel secure without a secure neighborhood). Through the application of conditionality, the EU establishes its own normative hegemony in the neighborhood, sharing the position that democratic countries do not fight with one another. At the same time, the EU monopolizes the concept of “Europeanness” (ibid, 1606). No doubt, the EU’s desirable image has a positive impact on the international image of any country that is associated with the EU. That is why it is argued that alongside the enactment of the EU’s conditionality in the course of implementing the Association Agreement, aspirant countries try to implement EU practices regardless of their presence in the Association Agreement action plan (Schimmelfennig, 2010). Such a strategy is considered one of the crucial mechanisms of Europeanization, where aspirant countries refer to the “normative emulation” of the EU in order to join the “European Family” (Borzal, 2015, 24).

Based on our research findings, Georgia applies such a strategy as well. The spillover effect of the EU’s prestigious image on Georgia as a non-member state is realized through two main channels. First, through the discourse

of “European choice,” in which the Georgian government and the public engage, and second, through a growing self-association with the EU. One example of this self-association is the fact that Georgia officially shares the EU’s position on various international issues.

“It is one of the ways to manifest and confirm that you are part of this big family and you claim your position. Despite the fact that you are not a full member and cannot influence the text itself, this is still very prestigious” (I.C., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

As the abovementioned quote illustrates, association with the EU does not mean that a country is eligible to influence the Association Agreement. It is still prestigious though, because it provides a feeling of belonging to the “European Family.” As research reveals, not only do non-member states have limited access to such mechanisms, but member states’ power of voice also varies. For instance, Germany has a special power as its economic contribution to the EU is the largest and it represents the main trade partner for both members and potential members. France, Italy, and the UK are important actors as well (Copeland, 2014, 471). As noted above, the status of new member states within the EU can be described as that of junior partners, despite the declared parity of EU members (ibid). The status depends to a great extent on a particular country’s economic and political experience. Despite such a differentiation that pushes new exclusions within the EU (Trenz, 2011, 213), non-member states (which do not even hold the status of junior partner) still attempt to associate with the EU through “normative emulation” while awaiting a positive assessment. For a small country like Georgia, trying to obtain a desirable political image after the collapse of the Soviet Union, such “normative emulation” is the main strategy for declaring its international position and occupying its place on the international stage.

Discourse of Returning to the “European Family”

On May 1, 2004, countries previously living behind the “iron curtain” (to use Winston Churchill’s words), united with the EU. Sentiments related to this fact are often denoted by the phrase “return to the European family.” This process indicated not only an attempt to recover from the post-war injustice caused by the political, economic, and social division of Europe, but also the belief that it

was necessary to integrate the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which was possible only through full membership in the EU. The phrase “return to the European family” became a political symbol (Butler, 2014).

The idea of “returning to the European family” has become one of the main grand-narratives for pro-European political forces in Georgia as well. Despite some respondents’ opinion that it is simply a myth that has nothing to do with reality, this discourse plays a significant role in the country’s Europeanization. It should be emphasized that in the Georgian reality, inventing the tradition (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983) of “returning to the European family” was the main strategy to intentionally set the nation on European foundations. Therefore, it does not matter whether the “return to the European family” is a myth or reality; in either case it fosters Georgia’s Europeanization process. Research participants share this idea of “returning to the European family” and bring various arguments to justify it.

One of the dominant discourses depicts Georgia as historically European. According to this discourse, Georgia is a country with a Christian culture and value set, and this Christian worldview makes it part of Europe. Some respondents even refer to the period of Georgia’s independence in 1918-21 and argue that the country was undoubtedly a part of the European space, as illustrated by the political, public, and media discourses of that time. However, in their words, it was forcibly torn away from Europe, and therefore, its aspiration to return back to Europe is natural (this discourse is often reiterated by Georgian politicians, as in, for example, a recent announcement by Defense Minister Tina Khidasheli, Rustavi 2, 05.04.2016). In this context, a demarcation line is set between Europe and Russia. Making a choice in favor of Europe is considered “natural,” while choosing in favor of Russia is “artificial.”

“The Georgian people are ready to return to the ‘European family.’ It is not the first time we have had relations with Europe; it is just the way our history has developed. We had relations, constant exchanges with Greece and the rest of Europe, and our return will not be difficult... We have more in common with Europe than with Russia. Therefore, we should make an informed decision. And this will be the moment when we can see what is natural for our people and what is artificial. Quite often persistent reforms are needed to show the public what is good” (T.N., Expert, NGO).

“Our people’s choice was to be part of Europe, which was well evidenced by the press, Parliament and public discourse of those times [1918-21]. That

choice was forcibly terminated, and hence we should return as the Baltic States did. This should be our national narrative” (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

One argument for Georgia’s Europeanness is that the country used to follow ideals characteristic to Europeans, i.e., multiculturalism, tolerance, democracy, respect for women, and related values. In the opinion of respondents, all of these are indicators of “internal Europeanness.”

“In 1918 Georgia became independent from the Russian Empire. It adopted one of the first most democratic constitutions and held one of the first elections in which women voted. France allowed this only in 1946, and Great Britain in 1942. In this respect, we had one of the first Social-Democratic governments” (T.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

“I know this history. Not all of these are legends, right? I have a fantastic example from Abanotubani, where the churches of various religions are located next to each other. I have never seen this anywhere else. Thus, I think that what is internal and essential for us is tolerance and forgiveness, and these are European values” (N.O., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

Such a narrative is common among Georgian political elites. For instance, the Head of Parliament Davit Usupashvili declares that *“Georgia used to be Europe even before Europe knew it was Europe”* (Pirveli Radio, 05.06.2015). He stresses that European civilization, whose logical continuation is contemporary Europe and the EU, originates from the time when Georgia was its integral part. It is not the question of whether we are Europeans that should be asked but the question of how to fill the gap resulted from a 200-year absence of state sovereignty, Russian domination, and everything related. In Usupashvili’s words, *“we need Europe not to ensure politicians and elites’ wellbeing, but to ensure the urban and rural population’s wellbeing, sense of security, and feeling that the state takes care of them”* (Pirveli Radio, 05.06.2015).

Here a non-dominant, but still quite interesting view should be noted. Some respondents make a distinction between the routine and value aspects of life. According to their view, at the routine level Georgia is an Asian country, while at the value level it is a European country. It is the goal of EU integration to transfer this value system to the population’s routine culture.

“I am convinced that in terms of routine culture we are part of Middle East; there is no difference between us and Palestinian Arabs. As for our

value system, though, we are part of Europe, due to our Christian values. Georgian identity is created at once through the routine representing a Middle Eastern culture, and at the same time through the Christian worldview, which makes us part of Europe. European integration implies that this ideological part should be translated into the routine culture” (N.T., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

It should be emphasized, however, that not all respondents share positive views of Georgia’s Europeanness. Some of them are quite sceptical about Georgians’ tolerance and devotion to European values. Furthermore, they think that not even all EU member states can be considered tolerant. Despite this, it is still noted that even with the lack of tolerance, there are certain fundamentals in Georgia that provide grounds for optimism.

“There are not so tolerant societies even within the EU. Saying that today we [Georgians] are a tolerant society is a myth, but we do possess the foundations for such a society. This is well exemplified by mosques, synagogues, etc. in various regions of Georgia” (T.N., Expert, NGO).

According to another important discourse, the idea of “returning to the European family” is simply a myth that politicians and celebrities circulate within the society. The respondents offering this narrative believe that this myth is “political marketing,” which has been well sold to the Georgian electorate.

“No one knows where this legend comes from, or rather we know, but we also know it is groundless. The society links it with Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, however, if we look at the history, we did not have any direct links to Europe, but a couple of exceptions. The current decision makers have invented this myth of our historical choice. The President, Prime Minister, celebrities and other authorities spread this myth, which is a lie” (K.U., Expert, NGO).

According to the above narrative, representing Europe as Georgia’s historical choice is just a myth created by political elites, and based on this myth the tradition of Georgians’ Europeanness was invented. The idea itself is considered so significant though, that the respondents stress the necessity of its constant actualization and circulation among the public.

To summarize the abovementioned positions, the research participants approach Georgia’s Europeanization from several different perspectives, which resonate with the discourse presented in the scholarly literature. Ac-

According to the first perspective, Georgia is part of Europe and has a natural aspiration to return to the environment from which it was artificially torn away. Thus, Europeanization is believed to be a value-driven process. According to the second perspective, the driving force of Georgia's Europeanization is its concern for national interests and security in particular that represents their pragmatic view. In contrast, there is the position that Georgia's aspiration to integrate with Europe is an identity-driven process and is less motivated by the pragmatic interest of ensuring security. However, it should be noted that the reality is more complex and Georgia's attempt to present itself as a European rather than post-Soviet country is closely intertwined with its national and security interests, and is raised in the country's foreign policy due to identity considerations (German, 2015, 611).

Similarities and Differences Between Georgian and European Values

As noted above, cultural values and identity are the main factors fostering Europeanization in Georgia (Topic, 2012). Moreover, European identification is based on national identification, and in order to make sense of the processes related to Europeanization, it is necessary to make an in-depth analysis of transformations in the national identity (Duchesne, 2011). That is why, while talking about the "return to the European family," our research participants focus on the similarities between European and Georgian values, which they mainly explain in terms of a shared Christian worldview. In this way, they emphasize the closeness of Georgian identity to European identities. Despite this emphasis, their narratives reveal three different discourses on the compatibility between Georgian and European values. First, Georgians and Europeans possess similar values. Second, Georgian and European values differ, but their foundations are similar. And third, Georgian and European values differ, and the latter are superior to the former.

According to one discourse, Georgian values are in essence European values. As one of the participants notes, "What is Georgian is also European." The respondents believe that this is best represented by tolerance which they perceive as a historical feature of Georgians. Under tolerance they imply acceptance of ethnic and religious minorities, respect for women that is perceived as an indicator of gender equality, etc. They view Georgians' as-

pirations towards civic participation and the establishment of a democratic society as an example of pursuing “democratic and European principles.” Thus, they perceive “European” and “democratic” as equivalent concepts and consider Georgians’ attempt to build a democratic state an indicator of their Europeaness.

“Georgia has historically been a tolerant country. Human rights have traditionally been respected here. There was no hostility towards national minorities and those who were not part of the local culture. I think joining the EU will help the country to further recognize and implement these values” (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

“I think Georgian values are European values and whatever contradicts European values is not Georgian at all. Protection of human rights, respect for women, religious diversity, and tolerance of minorities are also Georgian values, because we always say that we are very tolerant. These are European values as well. The protection of religious and ethnic minorities, language, and cultural identity, the aspiration towards freedom and independence, respect for one’s nation, the desire to have a democratic state and freedom of speech – these are all democratic and European principles. I see no contradiction here – what is Georgian is also European” (V.D., Expert, NGO).

Here we should refer to the argument that views Georgians’ Europeaness in the context of “banal Europeanism” (Cram, 2009). “Banal Europeanism” is based on the concept of “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995), and suggests that identification with both one’s nation and Europe are reinforced by everyday, routine practices and symbols that they are often unaware of. For instance, having a common currency such as the Euro, possessing a European driver’s licence, reading the news on European politics in newspapers, etc. Although these symbols cannot be considered indicators of Georgians’ “banal Europeanism,” one can ascribe a similar function to such symbols as the European flag decorating the facades of all state buildings in Georgia, or a common “routine culture” discussed in the narrative to follow.

“Most Georgians who live in Europe or have ever lived there would say that living in Europe is not hard for them. I am not speaking about financial issues; I mean that they did not find it hard to interact with people and make friends even in those societies that are considered quite close in terms of social interactions. For instance, the UK and the Netherlands are relatively

less open societies. Even there Georgians manage to interact successfully and make friends with the locals. This demonstrates their European culture; I mean that routine European culture and the rules of everyday interaction are acceptable for Georgians” (L.D., Expert, State Agency).

In contrast to the above argument, there is also the view that democratic values are not European-specific but rather universal, and that everyone, including Georgians, share them. If respect for human rights and tolerance are considered European values, they are also universal, and hence Georgian values.

“I do not think that rule of law, respect for one’s political opponents, or civilized discussion contradict any Georgian values. The values that are often presented as Georgian are simply customs. Respect for family or parents is a European value as well” (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

“I’m pretty sure that if we conduct a simple survey among Georgian citizens, everyone would say that the state should be there for the people; that the individual should hold the highest value and everything else should revolve around this. And these are European values as well” (I.L, Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

According to an alternative discourse, Georgian and European values differ, but their foundations are similar. This position emphasizes that there is no notable contradiction between Georgian and European values. Differences in values are vivid in specific cases of EU member states, but the EU’s motto is “United in Diversity,” and in this way nations of various cultural characteristics are united, and these differences have never been considered obstacles on the way to EU integration.

“There are no fundamental distinctions, but some people perceive European values and cultures differently. From my perspective, there are no fundamental differences; quite the contrary, I think there are more similarities [between Georgian and European values] if we consider both history and culture. Of course, there are certain differences even among EU countries, and if we look at it from this perspective, we may see a gap. However, if we generalize, the similarities certainly outnumber the differences” (Z.L. Expert, NGO).

In some respects, though, the respondents notice a discrepancy be-

tween Georgian and European perspectives, which they explain based on two different arguments. According to the first, what are considered traditional Georgian values, for example, favoritism, resistance to “snitching on” someone, etc., in fact, cannot be considered values at all but rather Soviet remnants and “distorted attitudes.”

“[In Georgia] snitching on somebody is considered unacceptable. Let’s say a man kills another man. You should not snitch on him, that is, you should give him an opportunity to kill again. Many people think that it is a Georgian value. In fact, it is not a Georgian value, but rather a distorted attitude towards social responsibility” (L.D., Expert, State Agency).

According to the second position, Georgia used to possess European values, though Georgian values today do not really resemble European ones. One of the participants mentions the example of Georgia in 1918-1921, when it gained its independence from Russia and moved towards democracy. In another narrative, Georgians are less tolerant today, but history has preserved evidence of such tolerance, particularly in the example of various religious temples built next to one another.

Soviet influence is often considered the reason why European values have been lost in Georgia. One of the respondents argues that it is the predominant attitude towards minorities which distinguishes Soviet from European values. European individualism takes into account each individual, while Soviet collectivism ignored individuals. The research participants believe that this trait was imposed upon Georgians by the Soviet regime.

“European values – as those of the civilized world – are based on the individual. They are based on recognition of his or her rights, and the view that the state should protect this individual, the state should take care of this individual, and the freedom of this individual ends where another person’s freedom begins. So, there is a whole theory of human rights that serves as the foundation. The Soviet mentality is contrary to this; it completely ignores the individual and absolutely rejects the differences among individuals” (N.O. Expert, Higher Education Institution).

Russia is closely associated with the Soviet Union and is often represented in the participants’ narratives as a negative “other;” a “bad” alternative as opposed to “good” Europe. Russia is viewed as a threat to Georgian national identity, while Europe as a means of preserving this identity. Therefore, the

representation of Georgian and European values as clashing is ascribed to Russian propaganda, which is spread by pro-Russian forces operating both within and outside Georgia.

Such a position resembles that of Central and Eastern European elites when they were in the process of EU integration and the discourse of returning to the “European family” became dominant (Kuus, 2007). It was fostered by the perception of the EU as a safeguard against Russian aggression (Mole, 2007). On the one hand, in these countries identity discourse is greatly dependent on security issues, while Russia as Europe’s “other” (Neumann, 1996), perceived as a threat to European identity (Ilonski, 2009), encourages a joint mobilization of European and national identities (Kuus, 2007, 17-18, 116-117). While on the other hand, Western Europe orientalizes the Eastern European countries (Todorova, 1997), mainly on the grounds of their communist experience, treating them as part of the Soviet “oriental” mentality (Kuus, 2007, 22-23).

According to another discourse, Georgian and European values differ and the latter are superior to the former. The list of European values provided by the representatives of this position is quite long, including industriousness, acceptance of diversity, value of time, respect for the environment, critical thinking which includes making political decisions based on party programs. They believe that Georgians lack all points on this list. Therefore, approximation with European values is considered a means of development and progress, and not a threat to Georgian identity.

“The benefit is in approximation with European values that are somewhat different from our traditional culture, but also much preferable. I think adopting the way they look at human relations (which is traditionally perceived differently in our culture) will bring only positive outcomes. I think our traditions and values are not threatened if we take care and preserve them” (N.D., State Agency).

“Critical thinking is a European value for me. One should not look upon anybody, regardless of whether it is a president or a prime minister. Their names should not mean anything to me, whether they are my friend’s relative or husband. I should get familiar with their political platform, I should evaluate what they offer and what they have done before, and I should go and vote based on these considerations. That is a European value for me” (N.O. Expert, Higher Education Institution).

“On the other hand, we need to realize that on a value scale we cannot become Europe unless we learn tolerance and appreciate the existence of different individuals next to us, and welcome their participation in political, economic and social life together with ours. In this sense, the issue is not whether we become a member state of the EU, but whether we are similar to the Slovenian, Irish, Portuguese, and other societies based on our values. We can never become such a society unless we internalize these two things: hard work and tolerance of differences” (I.C., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

It is noteworthy that tolerance, which is considered a European value, is perceived differently by respondents with diverse positions. Some think that Georgia resembles Europe in that it is tolerant, while others think that Georgia is distinct from Europe in that it is not tolerant. In this context, we should take into account respondents’ references to different indicators of tolerance. If some link tolerance to Georgia’s ethnic diversity and the existence of various religious temples, others measure tolerance based on Georgians’ current discriminatory attitudes towards any minority that hinders their participation in the country’s social, political, and economic life.

However, even those who see rather obvious discrepancies between Georgian and European values still anticipate positive changes towards the successive approximation with European values, believing that this process will not cause the loss of Georgian values, but rather will result in a kind of synthesis or bricolage, which is known by the term “Eurolocalization” (Morawska, 2003, 182).

“Certain hybrids will be formed. We come across such things on a daily basis. For instance, what was unacceptable and alien when I was a student is rather common now... Life goes on, cultures mix, something is lost and something is acquired. This is an ordinary thing and it is better to acquire something new from Europe than to keep what we acquired from the Soviet Union” (T.E., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

An argument focusing on the cultural threats of Europeanization is also worth mentioning. According to this argument, Georgian society might adopt European values in a distorted way or develop a negative attitude towards them. One of the most painful and difficult issues is related to LGBT rights. Several respondents mentioned it even before the interviewer touched upon this issue. Some stated that the defense of LGBT rights did

not contradict Georgian values, as it was only about protecting this community from violence and discrimination and not legalizing non-traditional marriages, while it was only their marriage and adoption of children that the public opposed to. They stressed that anti-Western forces successfully manipulated the public using this topic and tried to spread negative attitudes towards the EU by using the Georgian Orthodox Church. Alongside the above argument, they also noted that the topic of LGBT rights was quite controversial even in European countries, while the issue of legalizing their marriage was dependent on the public will.

“There are stereotypes according to which EU integration means the recognition of gay marriages. Those who oppose EU integration spread this stereotype throughout society. I think the dissemination of these stereotypes is very intentional (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

“Talking about gay marriages might be problematic in Europe as well. For instance, in Poland, which is the country of purest family values, you can even get killed for mentioning it. So nobody tells them to legalize it. On the other hand, if Belgium wants it, they can have it. This is the main difference between the USSR and Europe – everybody can do whatever they want. Belgium wants it, the Netherlands wants it and they have built the countries they want to have, but it will never be an issue in Spain” (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

In one of the respondents' words, the fact that not all EU countries legalize homosexual marriages is not a persuasive argument, as there is still a tendency toward their legalization. This research participant assesses the situation of Georgia in the light of possible costs and benefits, and concludes that the cost might imply homosexual marriages, but the benefit derived from safeguarding the country's security and national interests obviously outweighs it.

Taking into consideration all of the previously mentioned arguments, it is interesting to find out the research participants' reflections on the impact of signing the Association Agreement on Georgians' "European identity." It is well known that one of the main characteristics of identity is its dynamic change. It is created and re-created in the process of social interaction, and represents a social actor's self-perception and self-recognition (Delanty, 2003). Therefore, it is important to know how Georgian identity and its self-perception are altered by one of the most significant events influencing their

political course and vision, that is, the signing of the Association Agreement.

According to one position, signing the Association Agreement reinforces Georgians' European identity, as it is an important step towards EU integration. Those holding this view emphasize that this process results in Georgia's inclusion in various EU programs such as Creative Europe, which fosters both the popularization of Georgian culture and its further integration into European culture.

In contrast, other respondents state that signing the Association Agreement is a positive, though symbolic act. Georgians' European identity will be reinforced only after those living in the regions will see the positive outcomes of EU integration themselves. Furthermore, identity can be reinforced not through signing the document, but through the process of integration itself. The population might initially choose Europe for instrumental reasons, but a carefully planned policy might redirect them towards certain values. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to undertake relevant activities at the popular level and facilitate the development of European values among the population. In this way, we may transfer Europeanization from the formal level to the behavioral one (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005, 8).

"It does not seem that there is a conscious awareness today. The population might support it only because they want to visit Europe and find jobs, not because of adherence to European values. However, that will gradually happen as well. It depends on the government and its policy; how adequately it informs the population. This process should evoke the feeling that Europe is not only a visa and jobs in European countries, but rather devotion to those values" (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Georgian Nationalism and European Post-Nationalism

Scholars argue that the EU is based on the post-nationalist idea, while the national model is the normative basis of self-identification for its population. That is why the EU's intellectual elites have developed the "European identity" project to bind the people living in various EU countries through "social glue" (Nanz, 2010, 285-289). Although the European identity project was initiated by elites, it does not imply a unidirectional, top-down process, as the public transforms the offered repertoires in their own way. According to this model, the European identity is formed as a result of confrontation

between sociocultural and national “voices” that spur ambivalent identities. Alongside encouraging post-national and international identities, EU integration might also evoke a defensive “localism,” implying that the opening of borders is perceived as a threat to one’s cultural and national identity (ibid, 281). In the case of Georgia, the ambivalent identity is exemplified by the fact that Georgians’ strong aspiration towards EU integration is combined with their perception of Europeanization as a threat to the national identity (Tsuladze, forthcoming).

Despite the fact that the EU attempts to weaken nationalism, it might unintentionally reinforce it. Based on the example of Central and Eastern European countries, scholars discuss the emergence of “backdoor nationalism” through three main channels. First, political parties divert their attention from left-right politics to national politics. Second, local nationalists use European institutions and discourses to evoke similar nationalist sentiments in kindred nations. And third, radical nationalists emerge and become active outside political institutions (Fox and Vermeersch, 2010, 326). It is remarkable that the neonationalist discourses against the EU and immigrants use the same terminology as the EU bureaucrats while promoting the idea of European identity. Consequently, the culturally defined concept of homeland can be used both in favor of and against the EU (Kuus, 2007, 119).

Based on the example of Central and Eastern European intellectual and political elites, scholars discuss these elites’ strategies while interacting with the EU. As a rule, the discourses meant for international audiences do not reflect ongoing domestic debates, but rather represent a means of marketing. Furthermore, these intellectuals give more legitimacy to certain topics and marginalize others, in order to send the EU the message it wants (Kuus, 97-101, 106-109). As in the case of Central and Eastern European elites, in order to offer the EU a socially desirable self-presentation, Georgian elites also do their best to declare their Europeanness and convince EU representatives that they do not envisage any threat of nationalism.

The intellectual and political elites participating in our research emphasize that the European post-nationalist idea does not contradict the Georgian national idea. They provide several arguments to support this view.

According to the first argument, the EU itself is based on the model of nation-states. Decisions are made by national governments. Thus, in contrast to the view widespread among Georgians that the EU weakens its member

states' sovereignty, experts state that after a country joins the EU its independence and sovereignty is even reinforced, as the EU takes on the responsibility of safeguarding its security and distinctiveness.

"The EU does not impose any reform on any country. National governments decide on every reform and course. [...] When it comes to nationalism and independence, it should be mentioned that there are 28 states in the EU and none of them think that their independence or sovereignty are limited. On the contrary, these are independent countries and upon becoming EU members they became even stronger, better protected, and more democratic" (V.D., Expert, NGO).

Concerning those countries where national sentiments are quite strong, Georgia is not considered a special case. According to one respondent, not only in Georgia but also in the EU there are various parties that support anti-migration policy on the grounds of nationalism.

"What kind of post-nationalism are we talking about when parties are formed in Europe on the grounds that they do not want migrants?" (N.S., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

Based on the second argument, nationalism should not be viewed only from a negative perspective. The respondents identify certain types of nationalism, which they view in a positive light and believe that they do not contradict the idea of the EU. In particular, they stress the role of civic nationalism (as opposed to ethnic nationalism) as the "only means of Georgia's survival."

"According to the modernist view, nationalism is the only thing that gives various ethnic groups the opportunity to be integrated and included in the idea of the state. It is the only way for Georgia to survive. When it comes to ethnic nationalism, it is a death recipe for us. Those who position themselves using this kind of patriotism and ethnic nationalism are in fact the enemies of Georgia" (D.L., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

Alongside civic nationalism, the respondents also positively assess cultural nationalism, stressing the importance of being proud of one's culture, representing it on the international stage through cultural and sports events, etc., as a necessary condition for maintaining the vitality of one's nation.

"What do we mean by national striving? It depends on how you express

it. It is acceptable if you express it through traditional dances, like the Irish, who prefer their Riverdance to other European dances. It is also acceptable when it comes to sport; everyone tries to get more medals at the Olympics than their neighbors” (Z. Ts. Expert, NGO).

It is notable here that despite studies revealing that the higher the level of national pride, the more EU integration is perceived as a threat to one’s national identity (Carey, 2002), the evidence from Georgia illustrates the coexistence of a high rate of national pride and a highly positive attitude towards EU integration (ISSP 2013, National identity, Georgia).

According to one more argument, the EU itself is culturally and ethnically diverse, and therefore, it does not threaten Georgian identity. The idea that the EU is an inevitable means of preserving the Georgian identity, in contrast to Russia and its Eurasian Customs Union, which threaten cultural heritage and identity, belongs to the same category.

“I do not see a problem. I know that the EU encourages cultural diversity. This is not suppressed on the level of the EU, hence there is no reason to fear” (O.L. Expert, NGO).

“The interaction with the major player of the Eurasian Customs Union, that is, Russia, has illustrated that it does not care about our cultural heritage. We remember many whitened churches that were built centuries ago and lost the status of Georgian cultural heritage. On the other hand, when it comes to the EU, together with UNESCO, it is one of the parties most interested in maintaining our cultural heritage. For this purpose, it has implemented a number of projects in the last 25 years” (M.N., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

Despite the fact that national identity and sovereignty are considered more protected within the EU, the respondents still note that there might be a risk of emerging radical nationalism. Such a risk is attributed to the impact of anti-Western and pro-Russian propaganda. According to one of the positions, the radical nationalist parties have gained support even within the EU and it has happened because of economic factors, where Russia also plays a role. Despite the rise of nationalist attitudes within the EU, the respondents believe that they are much more manifested in Russia. In this way, they stress the EU’s indisputable superiority over Russia once again.

In contrast to the above opinion, some argue that there is no threat of

emerging nationalism in Georgia, which they explain by Georgians' "non-chauvinistic character."

"Probably there were some minor tendencies after Georgia gained its independence and also in the following period, though they were not massive. We are not a chauvinistic, nationalist nation by character" (Z.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

In addition, there is an argument that Georgia has already overcome the stage of ethnic nationalism and its reemergence should not be anticipated.

"I think we are through it. We understand that we will be a strong nation only if all the nationalities are equally protected in Georgia. I think this view already exists in Georgia and it serves as one of the foundations of our strength" (B.S., State Agency).

In order to avoid the risk of backdoor nationalism, respondents consider the state's efforts to raise public awareness as crucial.

Georgian Orthodox Church: The Prospects of Harmonizing Georgian and European Approaches

The Georgian Orthodox Church represents a significant actor and has a strong impact on the population. During the last 25 years, its role has especially increased in public and political decisions. This is because of the Church's key role in shaping the discourse of national identity after Georgia gained its independence in the 1990s ("Georgian means an Orthodox Christian"). It is also because the Church has been used as a means of legitimizing power by rather weak political authorities. It should be noted that the Church and its head, Patriarch Ilia II, enjoy the highest public trust (CRRC, Caucasus Barometer, 2009-2015). For this reason, the political elite tries to associate itself with the Church and avoids criticizing it.

It is noteworthy that not only Georgian politicians but also EU officials take into account this fact and often visit the Patriarch in the course of their official visits, as they know that he can influence the formation of public opinion and persuade the population of the importance of EU integration. The EU officials' approach is well evidenced by the visits of European commissioners Fule and Hahn to the Patriarch in March 2014 (Tabula, 04.03.2014) and January 2015 (Civil.ge, 16.01.2015).

“If you look at their interaction with the Church, all high-ranking officials come and meet the representatives of the Patriarchate. They realize that this [the Church] is an authority you cannot ignore; they know that they should have a dialogue with it. This is a power that can mobilize half of Georgia with one whistle, and it cannot be ignored” (Z.T., Expert, NGO).

No doubt, the role of the Church and especially its leader plays a decisive role in the shaping of public attitudes in countries where religious involvement is high. For instance, in the case of Poland, one of the main sources of the dissemination of pro-European attitudes was Pope John Paul II (Surwillo et al., 2010, 1511). Although no statistically significant correlation has been revealed between religious involvement and pro-European attitudes in Poland, the Pope’s pro-European speeches reduced the frequency of anti-European announcements by representatives of the Catholic Church and greatly influenced anti-European TV channels. This can be explained by the high public trust in Pope John Paul II, which is not dissimilar from the Georgian public’s trust in the Patriarch of Georgia.

“The role of the Church is huge and important. I am very glad that the Church stands by us through the process of EU integration, which is confirmed by the Patriarch’s speeches, as well as those of other members of the Church” (B.Sh. State Agency).

The role of the Church as a political actor has been demonstrated in the case of Greece as well. The Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church used to change his language according to his target audience. When speaking to domestic audiences, Patriarch Christodoulos presented the EU as a promoter of moral degradation, while in official speeches meant for an international audience he was rather cautious and avoided criticizing the EU (Sakellariou, 2012). The role of the Georgian Orthodox Church as a political actor is reflected similarly. In meetings with EU officials, the Patriarch of Georgia supports the country’s integration with the EU. At the same time, however, there are a growing number of anti-European announcements by representatives of the Georgian Church in the media, and their main argument likewise revolves around the EU as a source of moral degradation.

Interviews with representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church reveal that despite the declared boundary between state and church, the latter considered its duty to have a strict position regarding moral issues. In this context, special attention is paid to the anti-discrimination law and the LGBT

community, which the Church considers unacceptable. Respondents might simultaneously view the Georgian Orthodox Church as a supporter of EU integration and state that European values are based on Christian foundations (M.S., Priest, Personal Interview).

Because the Georgian Orthodox Church has a significant impact on the population, both political and intellectual elites' approach to it is rather cautious. Despite the fact that the majority of experts are quite critical of the Orthodox Church's role in Georgia's EU integration, such a critique often bears signs of self-censorship. They even try to find an excuse for the Church's language by stating that it is a conservative institution everywhere. They do highlight, however, that this does not mean chasing people with chairs, as happened on May 17, 2013, at the International Day Against Homophobia in Tbilisi.

"The Church is a conservative institution everywhere. In the course of Europeanization, lots of conservative ideas are endangered. If the Church aims to protect many conservative ideas, then certainly its position must be anti-European, and it has easily trapped itself in this" (T.L., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

"This is also a problem for Catholic Europe. However, it does not mean that they are chasing people with chairs like the Georgian Orthodox Christians do" (M.N., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

According to one of the discourses, the Georgian Orthodox Church is a rather problematic institution in the process of EU integration. A cautious sub-discourse revealed within the abovementioned discourse argues that only certain people or groups with anti-European and pro-Russian attitudes who are under the influence of Russian propaganda are problematic. Therefore, the Georgian Church cannot be considered "strictly anti-European." Moreover, quite often pro-Russian priests' orientation is attributed to their Russian education, and not to their motivation to integrate with Russia.

"As far as we know, three or four informal groups can be distinguished in the Church. Only one of them is pro-European, but it is the weakest and poorest. Others are pro-Russian not because they want integration with Russia, but because they have obtained Russian education and have closer ties with Russian clergy than with Eastern European clergy. This is therefore a difficult

issue, but it still does not mean that the Church is strictly anti-European” (T.L, Expert, Higher Education Institution).

According to the second sub-discourse, the whole Church is problematic and needs a fundamental reformation. Because the Soviet predecessor of the current Georgian Church was controlled by the KGB, older current clergy members worked with Soviet intelligence officials and lack credibility. As in the previous case, it is also worth noting here that the Church is under the influence of Russian propaganda. And alongside its pro-Russian orientation, a lack of relevant education is considered another acute issue encountered by the Church.

“This is Russian propaganda that was embraced by pseudo-clergymen. I cannot say it about everyone, but it was embraced by uneducated Georgians who now wave it as a flag” (I.D., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

“What is the real problem with the Church? There is a lack of intelligence and education. Why was the Church the most respected and educated institution for centuries? Because the first education centers and universities were established there. Nowadays, it has lost this function, and it has no value. Even after gaining independence, the Church was still a satellite of the KGB – part of the security office. Now there is a need for transformation, new people with relevant education and knowledge of theology. However, these people cannot emerge that easily. So, who fills the gap? Again, those, who maintain those old links to the security structures and are busy with propaganda” (C.M., Expert, NGO).

Some foresee that the Georgian Orthodox Church, facing a lack of education and having experienced the influence of Russian propaganda, can be easily manipulated by Russia. However, in this regard a very interesting narrative is offered by one of the respondents. He argues that the Georgian Church represents an independent political actor like a political party that uses Russia for its own purposes.

“The church plays its own game. Russia is a good card for it. I cannot say that the Church does not directly act according to Russian interests. However, it also uses Russia for its own interests and plays with both opponents. In this sense, it is a serious political actor. The Church acts as a political party. We [the organization is named] get approximately the same amount of money, but we are obliged to report to the state about every penny we have

spent – and that is right. Nobody knows where money granted to the Church goes though” (N.S. Expert, Higher Education Institution).

As the Church is considered quite politicized and even called “a serious political actor,” nobody doubts its involvement in Georgian foreign policy and the ongoing Europeanization process. The participants think it is dangerous because the Church and the Patriarch’s rather contradictory statements are apparent. Officially, the Patriarch (on behalf of the Church) supports EU integration, but the epistles and the clergy’s actions do not coincide with the official rhetoric.

“Nobody knows how sincere the Patriarch’s official pro-European statements are. In reality, what we see is a priest with a Lamborghini and a huge cross who may not even obey traffic rules” (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

“The role of the Church in all of this is awful. Let’s say its role is contradictory [...] Occasionally, we hear pro-European statements from high-ranking clergy members and the Patriarch. For example, the statement he made after meeting Fule. There are plenty of official statements like this. On the other hand, there are certain actions that have no link to either European values or the requirements we have to follow. We also have more moderate statements reflected in the epistles, which are not really related to what Europe asks us to do. In short, the rhetoric is contradictory” (T.L., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

In addition, the interviewed experts note that the Georgian public lacks relevant education and is easily manipulated by the Church. This is further reinforced by the fact that the state itself lacks sufficient authority, and for this reason the population has more trust in the Church, which fills the niche – even an information vacuum – which the state is supposed to fill.

“It is not a secret that the EU integration process has many covert opponents in the Church. When most people consider themselves believers and the source of their information is often a priest, it is clear that there is a lack of education. I think we have to defeat this” (T.E., Expert, Higher Education Institution).

“The state cannot afford to offer the population many development alternatives, a good education, a better life, and better economic conditions.

Consequently, society often pursues those propagandistic waves, especially since the Church enjoys past glory” (C.M., Expert, NGO).

Regarding the question of how it is possible to harmonize Georgian and European approaches, the research participants stress the necessity of undertaking three types of activities. Some respondents think that more work needs to be done in order to modernize the Church. The list of necessary activities includes taking Georgian priests to the Orthodox countries of Europe, so that they are convinced that the Orthodox religion is not threatened within the EU, and providing more information to the clergy about questions of EU integration, so that they will adequately communicate it to their parish.

“We come across a lack of information here as well. We should not forget that Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria are EU member countries and none of them encounter any problems regarding the Orthodox religion. The more we take our priests to those European countries, the more they will understand that there is no threat. In addition, the more we talk about it and the more we involve Church representatives in the discussion, the more acceptable it will become for our society” (V.D., Expert, NGO).

Another discourse stresses the need to educate the population. Those holding this position believe that the more educated the public is, the less vulnerable it will be to the Church’s influence. The respondents pay special attention to the need to provide the public with information on the LGBT community. In this respect, the main role is ascribed to the media.

“Education is the number one issue. Education does not mean merely graduating from university, it is broader than that. One’s mentality is the main thing” (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Majority).

According to yet another discourse, the state should not allow the Church to interfere in its deeds and should perform its functions even if the Church resists. Furthermore, the state should punish anyone who violates human rights, including the clergy in cases of their aggressive actions against minorities.

“We should realize that the church and the state are different and their relations are regulated by the Concordat. We should also take into account that more than 90% of the population trusts the Church. Irrespective of the

Church's criticism though, the state should undertake its function and duties" (E.T., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

"The state has a decisive role here. The state clearly affirms that there are certain basic constitutional rights that no one can violate. And Priest Basil Mkalavishvili ended up in jail. [...] This was, of course, followed by the activities of the Orthodox Parents' Union; they were also arrested but this played a huge role. The state showed its will. The state is obliged to defend the most marginalized and despised groups and safeguard their constitutional rights – that is its duty" (I.Kh., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

In contrast to the majority of the research participants, a few respondents consider the Georgian Orthodox Church – and especially the Patriarch – supporters of EU integration. One of them even noted that he/she could not recall any visible resistance to the anti-discrimination law from the Church. It seems that, taking into consideration the Church's involvement in the political life and its strong influence on the population, our respondents, especially the politicians, provide rather careful and balanced narratives, and avoid being openly critical of the Church.

"In this case, it is important that the Church stands by the government, and as you see, it is so. The Patriarch has clearly stated that Georgia's European integration has no alternative" (V.D., Expert, NGO).

"I think the Church has not opposed the anti-discrimination law very much. I cannot exactly recall comments by Church representatives, but I do not remember any notable hostility" (Z.E., Politician, Parliamentary Minority).

The above narratives illustrate once again that the Georgian Orthodox Church is an influential actor involved in the political processes, and it is impossible to ignore its role in the country's Europeanization, especially, considering its high authority among the population. Therefore, in order for Georgia's Europeanization process to be successful, productive collaboration between the state and the Church is important.

POPULATION OF GEORGIA ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND EUROPEANIZATION

Introduction

Before analyzing the data of research conducted with the population of Georgia, it is important to discuss the EU's "internal" and "external" integration capacities. The latter are considered decisive factors in the process of EU enlargement. So, taking into account Georgia's rather vague perspectives regarding EU integration, they deserve special attention. As the EU's "internal integration capacity" describes the EU's readiness for enlargement (including the attitudes of the citizens of EU member states), our main focus is on its "external integration capacity" that implies both institutional changes in non-member states (such as democratic consolidation, improvement of economic and government capacities and normative approximation with the EU) and the population's support to the EU (Schimmelfennig, 2014, 9). However, because the assessment of both capacities enables us to discuss the prospects of EU enlargement, it is significant to briefly touch upon the aspects of internal integration as well.

As recent studies reveal, the EU's "internal integration capacity" has considerably reduced which is well evidenced by the decrease in support to the EU's further enlargement not only in the countries where it was quite low already by 2000 (for instance, Germany, France, Austria, etc.), but also those characterized by highly positive attitudes towards EU enlargement (particularly, Eastern and Central Europe). Besides, the latest studies have revealed considerable differences between both the attitudes of the elites and the population and those of new and old member states. The new member states and elites are more supportive of EU enlargement, while the old member states and the population are against it. Here we should emphasize an interesting tendency that, according to the authors, represents traditional stereotypes on the division of Europe: public opinion polls confirm that the citizens of EU member states express more positive attitudes towards the Western (for instance, Norway and Switzerland) than the Eastern non-member states' integration in the EU (in the former case, the level of acceptance exceeds 75%, while in the latter case it is below 50%). Overall, scholars discuss the emergence of "enlargement fatigue" among EU citizens (Schimmelfennig et al., 2015, 11) which results in the aspirant states' lining up in the "waiting room" for an indefinite period.

Concerning the EU's "external integration capacity" and its most significant aspect for research; particularly, the attitudes of non-member states' citizens towards EU integration, scholars assess it on the basis of a few important factors such as rational-utilitarian, political and identity considerations (Toshkov et al., 2014, 20). The latest studies show that public attitudes towards the EU and its enlargement in non-member states are influenced by socioeconomic factors such as employment status, income and education (positively correlating with pro-European attitudes), identity and value-driven factors such as the perception of threats to cultural and national identity which are usually represented by exclusive identity and national pride, religious intolerance and anti-immigration attitudes (negatively correlating with pro-European attitudes) and sociopolitical factors such as awareness about the EU, political affiliation and the views on possible risks and benefits of Europeanization disseminated by political actors among the public (ibid, 21). Here we should stress both the role of political elites in the formation of public attitudes through "the process of informing and persuading" and the political leaders' embracing of public attitudes and following their clues through "the process of representation" (Steenbergen et al., 2007, 14).

Although quantitative surveys aiming to study public opinion clearly represent general attitudes, it is impossible to do an in-depth analysis of the real motivations beyond such attitudes as well as those significant nuances that enable a detailed interpretation of the state of the arts. Therefore, it is crucial to enrich quantitative data with qualitative research which has been confirmed by recent studies. For instance, in contrast to public opinion polls, the analysis of discourses on EU enlargement illustrates that citizens reveal selective attitudes towards particular countries' integration into the EU. These attitudes are changed in accordance to the identity and security considerations or personal experiences of EU enlargement (Schimmelfennig et al., 2015, 11).

Thus, despite the regular nationwide surveys on citizens' attitudes towards the EU in Georgia (CRRC 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015), we have decided to carry out focus group discussions with the population residing in various regional cities and reveal their discourses on the ongoing Europeanization process in order to analyze the Georgian specifics of the EU's "external integration capacity." Before moving to the analysis of focus group data, we will briefly describe the main tendencies revealed in the recent surveys on the populations' attitudes towards the EU in Georgia (ISSP 2013, CRRC 2015) that are especially relevant to our qualitative data.

Quantitative Analysis of the Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia

As mentioned above, one of the key factors of EU integration is its “external integration capacity” which demonstrates the ability of a non-member state to integrate into the EU (Schimmelfennig, 2014, 9). One of the main indicators of this ability is the society’s favorable attitudes towards the EU. Due to this, we have decided to analyze the data of the latest surveys in Georgia in order to better depict public attitudes towards the EU and EU integration. Our analysis is mainly based on the survey conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in 2015 which aimed at assessing the knowledge and attitudes towards the EU in Georgia. Moreover, in order to gain a better understanding of the role of Europe in the Georgian identity, the results of the National Identity (ISSP) 2013 survey have also been analyzed. Due to the fact that the data presented in this report cover individual attitudes and perceptions, the individual weights have been applied while analyzing the database. Those respondents who replied “do not know” or refused to answer are also included in the analysis as often non-response correlates with various demographic data and hence provides important information.

The subchapters presented below discuss the level of awareness and general attitudes towards the EU, attitudes towards EU integration and the expectations related to its membership, interrelation between the Georgian and European identities, as well as the issue of symmetrical power relations between the EU and Georgia.

Level of Public Awareness

According to the CRRC survey findings, the population’s knowledge regarding the EU is generally quite low: almost every fifth person (19%) finds it difficult to answer what the EU is and 31% of the population have not heard about the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. The level of awareness is the highest among those aged 18-25 and living in the capital, and is the lowest among ethnic minorities of whom 64% state that they have not heard of the Association Agreement.

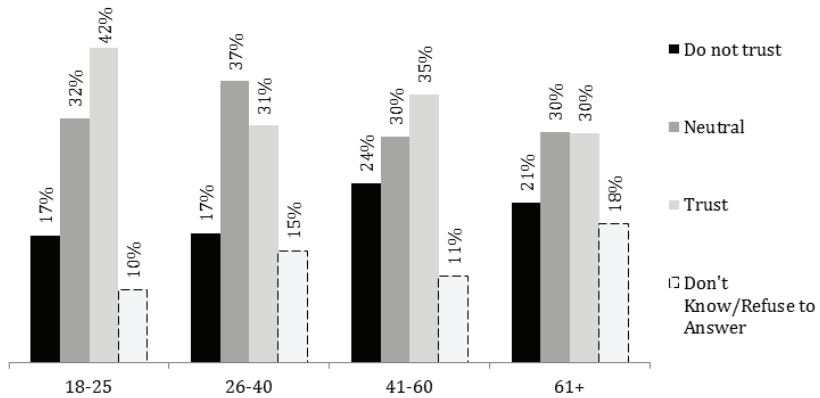
Furthermore, 12% of the Georgian population does not know whether Georgia is currently a EU member state. The differences by ethnicity should be highlighted here: compared to the Georgian population, ethnic minori-

ties are characterized by lower level of awareness about the EU. It can be explained by various factors, especially their lack of Georgian language skills, as well as by the fact that media and other sources of information are available predominantly in Georgian.

General Attitudes towards the EU

From the very beginning, the population’s ambivalent attitudes towards the EU should be emphasized: according to the 2015 CRRC data, even though 61% would vote for Georgia’s EU membership in the case of a referendum, only one third (34%) of the population trusts the EU as a social institution. As shown in the diagram below, the level of trust is the highest in the case of the youth (see Diagram 1). The differences are also revealed by the settlement type: 41% of the population living in the capital trust the EU, while the same indicator reaches only 28% in the case of the rural settlements.

Diagram 1 - Trust towards the EU by Age Groups



Expectations Related to EU Integration

The utilitarian factors turn out to be the population’s main motivators for voting for EU membership; namely, there are pragmatic expectations of political security and economic development. Specifically, 57% of the population expect the reinforcement of national security and 51% expect a decrease in poverty levels. The positive expectations towards solving social problems

should also be highlighted: the population expects an increase in pensions (57%), job placements (57%) and income (52%). Together with the utilitarian factors, the role of identity factors as that of expected cultural outcomes of EU integration is also crucial. In this regard, it should be noted that EU integration is primarily associated with the improvement of the quality of education (59%). Thus, it is logical that the willingness to integrate into the EU is highest among the youth whose main priority is to have access to quality education.

The negative expectations of EU membership are also related to the utilitarian and identity factors. In the case of the former, 33% of the surveyed population expect the increase in consumer prices. As for identity threats, there is an expectation that the number of people who want to migrate from Georgia will increase (38%) as well as the respect for Georgian traditions will decrease (28%).

The data presented above demonstrate the Georgian population's ambivalent expectations towards EU membership: the EU is regarded as a democratic union (62%) which is the safeguard of both peace and security in Europe (64%) as well as the supporter of non-member states' economic development (54%). Even though there is an expectation of certain political and economic benefits as an outcome of EU integration, the views on cultural benefits are still two-fold: although the increase in the quality of education is envisaged, the EU is still regarded as a threat to Georgian traditions (45%).

Indeed, the presented data confirm that the main motivation for Georgia's population to integrate with the EU is rational-utilitarian (economic development and security are the main areas where it is believed that Georgia needs the EU's support the most). However, it is extremely interesting to note that three factors encouraging the respondents to support Georgia's EU membership; particularly, economic development, defense from external threats and a better chance to restore the country's territorial integrity, are the same ones that are considered the main motivations for supporting the EACU as well.

As for the attitudes towards cultural factors, the fear of losing Georgian cultural traditions worries those who both support and oppose Georgia's EU membership. It should be noted that while the rational-utilitarian factors are the main motivators for joining the EU, the identity factors are the ones that hinder this aspiration: the majority of the population not supporting Georgia's EU membership expect the EU to threaten Georgian culture and traditions. Moreover, 40% of those who support EU membership still state that the EU threatens Georgian traditions.

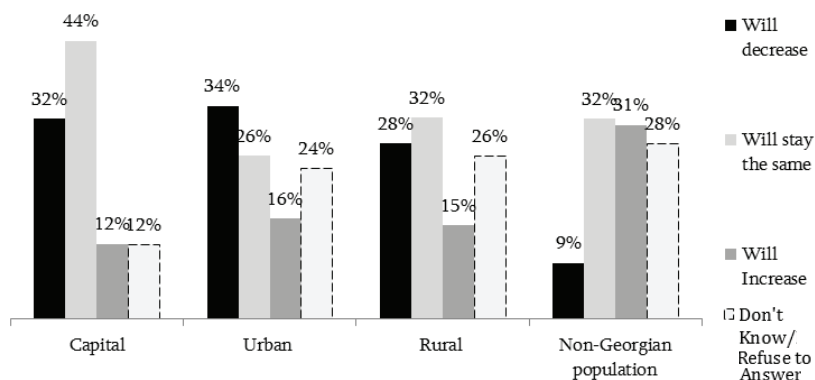
Table 1 – Changes Expected in the Case of Georgia’s Integration with the EU

	Will decrease significantly	Will decrease	Will stay the same	Will increase	Will increase significantly	Don’t know / Refuse to answer
Level of corruption	7%	39%	22%	6%	1%	25%
Pensions	0%	2%	19%	53%	4%	21%
Protection of property rights	0%	2%	22%	44%	4%	27%
Possibility of conducting fair elections	0%	1%	22%	46%	6%	25%
Number of available jobs	1%	3%	18%	52%	5%	22%
Independence of courts	0%	1%	24%	42%	5%	28%
Level of freedom of speech	0%	1%	21%	47%	6%	23%
Level of poverty	6%	45%	21%	5%	2%	22%
Possibility of restoration of territorial integrity	1%	6%	25%	35%	6%	27%
Prices of main products of consumption	2%	18%	20%	29%	4%	28%
Affordability of healthcare	0%	3%	22%	45%	4%	25%
Level of personal income	1%	2%	19%	48%	4%	25%
Level of national security	0%	4%	15%	49%	8%	24%
Number of people who want to emigrate	2%	24%	14%	27%	11%	23%
Quality of education	0%	1%	17%	53%	6%	22%
Level of protection of minorities	0%	1%	19%	43%	8%	29%
Respect for Georgian traditions	3%	25%	34%	14%	2%	22%

As mentioned above, in total 45% of the population believe that the EU

threatens Georgian traditions, while 28% think that the respect for Georgian traditions will diminish as a result of EU membership. The majority of such respondents (64%) represent the 40+ year age category. The difference has been found by settlement type as well; namely, 44% of the population living in the capital think that the respect towards traditions will remain the same, while the same indicator is only 26% in the case of residents of regional cities/towns.

Diagram 2 – Change in Respect of Georgian Traditions in the Case of EU Membership



The results of our qualitative data, particularly, the in-depth interviews with experts and politicians and the focus group discussions with the population (which will be discussed in the following chapter) are in line with the findings of nationwide surveys and confirm that the two main discourses related to the EU are as follows: *in the case of positive attitudes towards the EU, the economic and security factors are the main motivators; while in the case of negative attitudes the fear of losing Georgian traditions is at the forefront*. This trend is evident from the CRRC 2015 data, where the majority of the population supporting Georgia's EU integration thinks that the EU is the source of peace and security in Europe (80%), while this statement is supported by only 37% of those opposing EU integration. Furthermore, 71% of the EU integration supporters state that the EU facilitates economic development in non-member states, while the same statement is supported by only 27% of those people who are against EU integration. As for values and identity, even 40% of the EU integration supporters think that the EU threatens Georgian traditions, while the same indicator stands at 76% for its non-supporters.

Diagram 3 – Do you agree that the EU is a safeguard of peace and security in Europe?

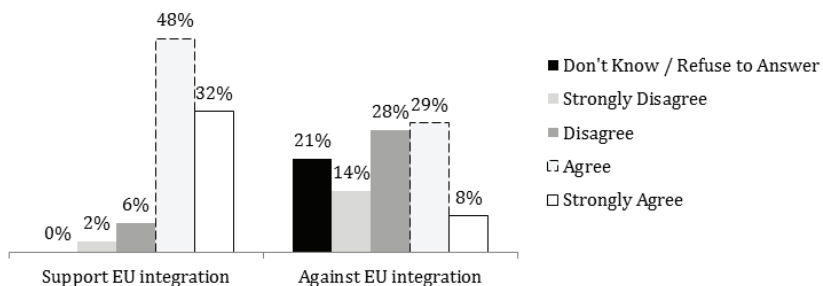


Diagram 4 – Do you agree with the statement that the EU facilitates economic development in non-member states?

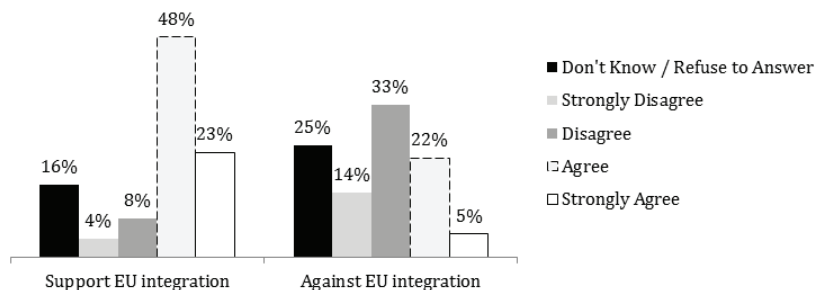
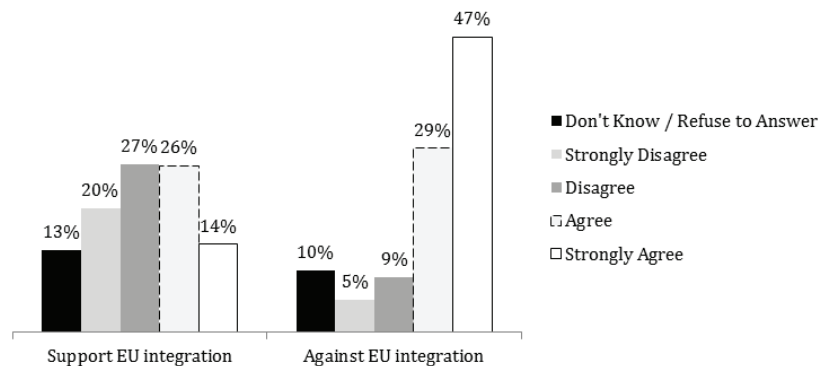


Diagram 5 – Do you agree with the statement that the EU threatens Georgian traditions?



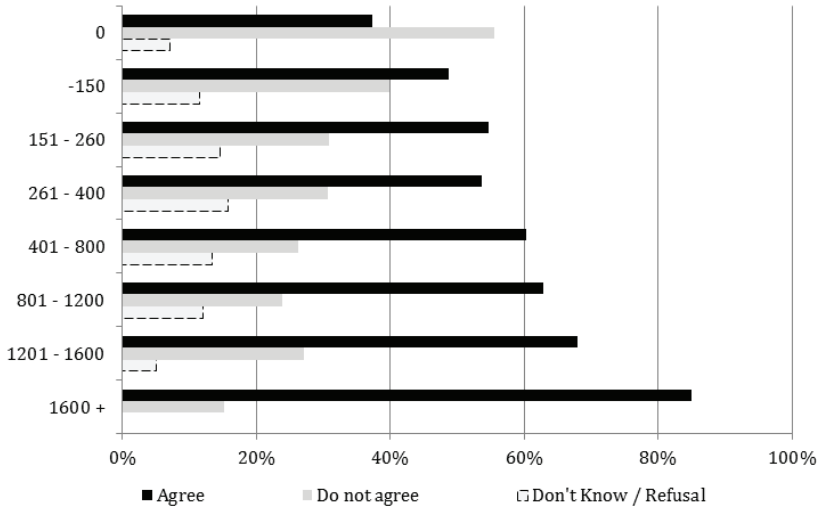
Even though a certain part of the population believes that EU membership will weaken the respect of Georgian traditions, the difference between Georgian and European traditions is not regarded as a barrier towards EU

membership. Specifically, according to the CRRC 2015 data, only 9% of the population think that the difference in traditions and worldviews between Georgians and Europeans can hinder Georgia’s EU integration. Furthermore, 56% of the population agrees with the statement “I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European.” This tendency points to the fact that even though the population might perceive the EU as a threat to Georgian traditions, this threat is not considered that powerful to hinder EU integration. Thus, the above data confirm the prevalence of Georgians’ ambivalent attitudes again; particularly, while the EU might be regarded as a threat to national identity, the willingness to join the “European Family” is still quite strong.

It should be noted that the support of the statement “I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European” is higher in the case of the youth, people with higher education and the middle and high income population. For example, 63% of the population aged 18-25 years agree with this statement, while its support is only 47% in the case of the population aged 60+ years. More than 60% of the population with higher education agrees with the statement, while its support is only 10% in the case of people with primary education.

An interesting tendency has been revealed while analyzing this question by the respondents’ income:

Diagram 6 – Do you agree with the statement “I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European” (by household income of past month)



While assessing the extent to which Georgians feel themselves European, it is important to take into account those factors playing major role in the formation of Georgian identity. As the qualitative research has illustrated, one of the main discourses related to Georgian identity is depicting Georgia as “historically European” in order to stress Georgia’s proximity to Europe. To reveal the role of the “European factor” in the Georgian identity, the following subchapter provides the data of the ISSP nationwide survey on national identity conducted in 2013.

Role of Europe in the Georgian National Identity

The factor analysis of the ISSP national identity study of 2013 showed that national-patriotic feelings are quite strong among Georgia’s population. Georgians feel the closest to their country and the least close to Europe. Two factors have been identified to define their closeness: the first one can be called “*national proximity*” that includes the proximity towards their own city, region or country as a whole. The second one can be called “*proximity to Europe*” that includes only the level to which the respondent feels close to Europe. As the data show, the feelings of national and European belongings are clearly separated and the latter is quite weakly represented.

Table 2 – *How close do you feel...*

	Factor		1 – very close; 5 – not close at all
	1	2	
er_1 Q1a to your city	.860	.043	1.58
er_2 Q1b to your region	.825	-.048	1.78
er_3 Q1c to Georgia	.759	.181	1.46
er_4 Q1d to Europe	.061	.990	3.21

In order to be able to better explain the factor of Europe, 15 independent variables have been analyzed as a result of which 36.9% of the dependent variable (the factor of Europe) has been explained along with 13.6% of the variance of the dependent variable. Below is the summary of a regression analysis:

Five (5) of 15 factors have a major impact on the dependent variable: the factor of “damage” (13.7%) has the largest weight, while the remaining 4

factors have the same weight (10-11%) – solidarity factor, awareness of politics and government, the government’s attitude towards citizens and critical perception. It should be noted that the factor of “damage” has the largest negative effect on the dependent variable (two variables are included in this factor: large international companies harm local business and international organizations are depriving the Georgian government of its power).

The variable of national pride is especially important here: its analysis within the context of attitudes towards the EU once again confirms Georgians’ ambivalent attitudes towards EU integration. According to the ISSP data, 88.8% of Georgians are proud of being Georgian. Based on various research, the higher the level of national pride, the more EU integration is regarded as a threat to national identity (Carey, 2002; Toshkov et al., 2014). This assumption is partly supported by our quantitative data showing that 40% of the respondents who support Georgia’s EU integration still think that this process bears certain threat to the national identity. Despite this expectation, as noted above, 61% of Georgians support Georgia’s joining the EU. Thus, in Georgia, a high level of national pride coexists with the positive attitudes towards EU integration.

Assessing the Perspectives of Georgia’s EU Membership

It is quite difficult for the population to assess the prospects of Georgia’s EU integration: 38% cannot respond to the question when Georgia might become a EU member state. As expected, the 61+ year age group is the least able to answer this question.

Table 3 – *When will Georgia become part of the EU?*

	Don’t Know	In 5 years or less	In 6-10 years	In more than 10 years	Never
18-25	32%	18%	14%	16%	14%
26-40	35%	18%	15%	16%	8%
41-60	38%	19%	12%	17%	10%
61+	47%	14%	12%	10%	13%

Besides the population's attitudes, one of the indicators of the EU's "external integration capacity" is the readiness of local social and political institutions to establish European standards. It is interesting to find out how the population of Georgia assesses the country's readiness for EU membership: 40-50% of the population think that Georgia is not ready for EU membership, while approximately 25-30% cannot even assess the level of its readiness.

Table 4 – Readiness of Various Sectors to be Integrated into the EU

	Is not ready	Rather ready, than not	Is ready	Don't Know / Refuse to answer
Formation of democratic institutions	46%	21%	5%	28%
Rule of law	49%	20%	5%	26%
Protection of human rights	47%	24%	5%	24%
Protection of minority rights	42%	25%	7%	26%
Competitive market economy	52%	17%	3%	27%
Harmonization of Georgian legislation	45%	18%	4%	32%

Besides the EU's "external integration capacity," the "internal integration capacity" should also be emphasized, which on a popular level means the EU citizens' support of its enlargement. It is difficult for the Georgian population to assess the attitudes of EU countries and citizens towards Georgia 32% believe that the EU countries support Georgia's EU integration. The results are similar in the case of EU citizens' support (31%). The respondents' age plays a key role here as well: the population aged over 60 years can hardly make these judgments. The question of EU citizens' attitudes towards Georgia provides further information on the ambiguity of Georgia's perspectives: only 19% of the Georgian population think that EU citizens' attitudes towards Georgia are positive, while majority (37%) finds it difficult to respond to this question.

Diagram 7 – Majority of the EU Countries Would Like Georgia to Join the EU

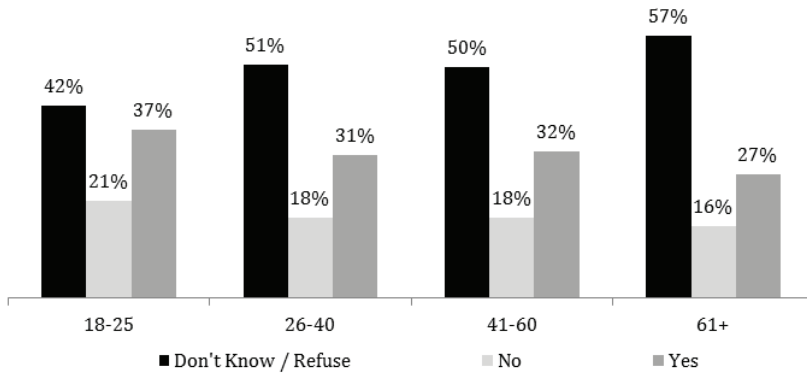
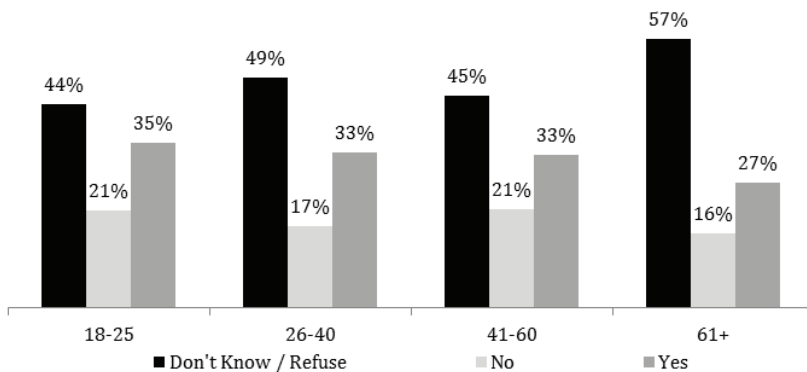


Diagram 8 – Majority of the EU Citizens Would Like Georgia to Join the EU



Issue of Symmetrical Power Relations between the EU and Georgia

Another important factor to be considered while assessing the process of EU integration is the population's attitudes towards favorable types of relations between Georgia and the EU. According to the ISSP 2013 data, when asked how symmetrical the power relations between the EU and its member states' governments should be, a significant portion (36%) responds that the EU should possess the same power as its member states' governments. The majority of respondents in all age groups share this view. However, despite a strong aspiration towards EU integration, more than half of the respon-

dents (53%) do not agree with the statement that Georgia should follow the EU's decisions even if it does not agree with them. It seems Georgians are quite sensitive to the country's role as a sovereign actor in respect to the EU. As illustrated above, the interviewed experts and politicians also consider it vital to have symmetrical power relations with the EU and try to showcase Georgia as the EU's equal partner. A similar tendency is traced in the course of focus group discussions with the population where the discussants regard the EU as a "brotherhood" that will try to help Georgia "advance and catch up" with developed countries. These topics will be discussed in detail in the following chapter; before that, we will analyze the population's associations with the EU and Europeanization.

ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUPS WITH POPULATION

The EU and Europeanization: Major Associations

The focus group participants' associations related to the EU and EU integration process are largely positive, especially among the younger generation. Based on the analysis of their narratives a few discourses have been revealed: 1. The EU as a unified, orderly system; 2. The EU as democratic governance; 3. The EU as a safeguard of security; 4. The EU as a source of economic welfare, and 5. The EU as possessing superior values.

It is noteworthy that quite similar tendencies have been revealed by one of the recent surveys that studied the attitudes towards EU enlargement among the old and new members as well as the candidate states (Dimitrova, Kortenska and Steunenbergh, 2015). According to this research, one of the main discourses of the abovementioned countries' citizens is representing the EU as a system of common (shared) rules. Therefore, to be able to join it, an aspirant country must comply with its political, economic and normative standards. Based on another important discourse, the EU is represented as a supranational model of governance that implies the supremacy of law as well as the national institutions responsible for its execution. The third discourse relates to European values and ideals. According to it, the EU is not merely a union based on economic and legislative norms but a system of shared values where freedom, solidarity, peace, diversity and welfare are the dominant ones. The utilitarian-pragmatic approach to the EU has been revealed in the case of member states that joined the EU in 2004-2007 (Poland, Bulgaria) and candidate states (Serbia, Macedonia). The data collected in these countries illustrate that the population has the expectation that EU membership will solve the issue of unemployment in their countries and young people will have more opportunity to migrate to rather developed countries, as well as there will be an improvement in the quality of education and overall welfare. One more discourse is noteworthy that underlines the global importance of the EU and ascribes it the responsibility of safeguarding peace and stability in the region and the world. This discourse has been revealed in the case of both old and new member states as well as the candidates (ibid).

Our research data confirm that the EU is perceived as a structurally ordered system and each member state contributes to its successful functioning, gaining certain benefits in return. The EU is associated with "one

large family” where each member state attempts to solve the shared issues through their united efforts. That is why being granted EU membership is considered so desirable for Georgia.

“In my opinion, the EU is one big family, a union of the countries located in Europe. This is a big chain of countries and they try to achieve their goals together. The EU does not challenge the problems of a particular country but the ones of the whole Europe. They challenge these problems with their united efforts. The effectiveness of their work is another issue. But for me, the EU is associated with a large family and I will be very happy if we are to become a member of this family” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

“The EU is associated with unity, a single currency, a single customs duty, a common agricultural policy and they try to avoid regression through supporting each other. I hope we will soon become a member of this big family” (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

In addition, the focus group participants state that the EU has highly developed democratic institutions (free media, impartial court, etc.), which means asserting the protection of human rights (property rights, for instance) and freedoms (freedom of speech and expression, freedom of choice) as one’s main priority. Indeed, as the abovementioned quantitative research shows, the majority of Georgia’s population (62%) perceives the EU as a democratic union.

“European values, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of media, equal rights, competitive environment, freedom of choice, etc. In addition to democracy, for me, Europe is associated with a certain culture, a certain science and a certain lifestyle” (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

In this context, the question of European values is logically raised. The respondents aged 18-25 years believe that their generation differs from the older ones in its real aspiration towards European values. Besides, the younger generation puts a special emphasis on the superiority of European culture and the necessity of having access to quality European education.

“Our generation is moving towards Europe; our generation has different values. We want European education, European culture and even European music” (Female, 18-25, Gori).

“For me, Europeanization is associated with development, assertion of

one's place in the modern world, the reinforcement of democratic values and the protection of human rights" (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

Like in the case of the in-depth interviews with politicians and experts, the security discourse, particularly, the perception of the EU as a guarantee of peace and security, is also revealed in the case of focus group participants. It seems this discourse is quite widespread among the Georgian public, which is well evidenced by the abovementioned quantitative data: 63% of population state that the EU is a source of peace and security in the region (CRRC, 2015). In the case of focus group participants, the security issue turned out to be especially important for the younger generation (aged 18-25 years) again. As one of the participants notes, the EU is a "brotherhood" that will help Georgia overcome many problems, the most essential of which is Georgia's territorial integrity.

"I think a lot of things will change. We will not have to deal with a number of problems all alone. The EU as a 'brotherhood' will help us solve these problems. First of all, it is the problem of our country's territorial integrity" (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

"Today, the best guarantee for our country's security is EU membership. If we achieve this, our country will greatly advance and our security issues will be solved" (Female, 41-65, Tbilisi).

Concerning the country's economic development, the focus group participants ascribe the EU a crucial role in it. They believe that if Georgia takes proper care of the implementation of EU standards, the European market will become a new target for its export. At the same time, as a result of new investments from Europe, the labor market will expand and have a positive impact on Georgia's economy.

"For me, Europeanization is primarily associated with economic growth. I think economic development is a central axis and the whole life of the country revolves around it" (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

"There will be free movement, investors will come into the country and the country's economy and agriculture will develop. I know that 10% of Georgian walnuts go to the European market. If the EU gets interested in expanding this field, they have to teach us how to do it" (Male, 41-65, Gori).

Apparently, the respondents realize that Georgia belongs to the develop-

ing countries and is unable to challenge both external threats and internal risks alone. Consequently, the need for support from such unions as the EU and NATO is emphasized. The role of the EU is considered especially important in strengthening rather small and weak countries in terms of both ensuring their security and improving the functioning of their socioeconomic institutions, and hence the respondents hope that EU integration will bring the same advantages to Georgia.

Thus, the above discourses point to the population's (especially the younger generation) tendency to "romanticize" EU-Georgia relations: Georgia is represented as a weak partner that will be "taught" and supported by a strong friend – the EU. It will try to help Georgia *"advance and catch up with developed countries."* This tendency is also reflected in the quantitative data. As noted above, more than half (54%) of the population believes that the EU facilitates non-member states' economic growth, while 61% argues that the EU fosters non-member states' democratic development (CRRC, 2015).

"In my view, the EU is associated with peace. It is also associated with the forces that regulate internal processes within a country, be it economy or culture. It tries to enable weak countries to advance and catch up with the developed ones" (Female, 18-25, Kutaisi).

"Europeans should help us to be safe and get stronger. Only after we get stronger, we will be able to engage in a major political game. Today it is difficult" (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

While discussing the associations related to the EU and Europeanization, the respondents have mentioned the question of visa liberalization several times, not only in a positive context though: some respondents think that visa liberalization bears certain risks as it will encourage the population's migration from Georgia, especially youth migration to Europe in order to improve their quality of life. They fear that for a small country like Georgia, it might mean "losing the youth" (as illustrated above, the quantitative research has revealed the same expectation).

"When it comes to the EU and other international unions, we always have to compare. What is the situation in those post-Soviet countries that are now EU member states like the Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Romania, plus Greece? Based on these cases, we should assess whether it is beneficial for us. As we

know, in these countries the situation is not that good: young people are leaving Estonia. There is a terrible migration from all countries” (Male, 41-65, Tbilisi).

“Now, they are talking about visa liberalization; but if we have visa-free movement, 80% of young people will leave the country as there is more chance abroad for their development and employment. Even now, plenty of them are trying to go abroad and afterwards, this number will increase even more” (Female, 18-25, Zugdidi).

Despite awaiting this threat, it is evident that for the population of Georgia, EU integration and its accompanying Europeanization process are associated with positive changes. They consider EU integration essential for Georgia because of both utilitarian-pragmatic (security, economic development) and normative and value-driven (improving the quality of education, sharing culture and democratic values) considerations.

Georgia as Part of Europe

Although the focus group participants’ associations related to the EU and Europeanization are mostly identical, a highly divisive issue is whether Georgia is a part of Europe. According to the dominant discourse, Georgia has historically been a European country; therefore, it belongs to Europe. To support this position, the research participants propose a historical excursus.

The first thing they recall is “*Darbazi*” (in the XI-XII centuries, the feudals’ deliberative court in Georgia) as a basis of the parliamentary system in the country. They believe this very system positions Georgia, in line with European countries, as a democratic state.

“I think Georgia is part of Europe. As an example, I want to refer to the period of King Tamar’s reign, when the so-called ‘Darbazi’ was set performing the function of the Parliament in those times. If we compare Georgian and European histories, no such things existed in Europe back then. So, I want to say that Georgia had aspirations towards democracy from the very beginning” (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

The discussants also referred to such cultural factors that represent Georgia as a part of the European cultural space: Georgia’s conversion to

Christianity in the IV century, the epic poem, “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin,” written in the 12th century as symbolizing the Renaissance, “Tergdaleulebi” in the XIX century and “Tsisperkantselebi” in the XX century as the disseminators of European ideas – these are the examples based on which the focus group participants try to justify Georgia’s belonging to the “European Family.” Furthermore, as illustrated by the quote above, the politicians’ discourse that Georgia used to be European even before Europe itself has also been revealed among the population.

“We used to be part of Europe. Europe is nothing but a Christian civilization. Christianity was practiced in Georgia much earlier than in Europe. We were on the periphery, on the border, so the neighborhood with the Islamic countries did much harm to us” (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

“Today, when talking about the ideas of humanism, the equality of men and women, Georgian NGOs always refer to Europe as an example; but look at the epic poem, ‘The Knight in the Panther’s Skin.’ The ideas of humanism originate from this poem. If we compare, the European Renaissance started in the 14th century, while the Georgian one started two centuries earlier” (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

It is notable that like in the interviews with politicians and experts, the tendencies of Occidentalism (Todorova, 1997) are also revealed in the focus group discussions, represented by the attempts to emphasize Georgia’s more Europeanness in comparison to its Caucasian neighbors – both North and South Caucasians.

“Considering our geoDiagramic location and compared to neighboring Armenia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus, we have always been true Europeans. We have always had intellectuals, in contrast to these days. I have seen many countries and they cannot be considered superior to us” (Female, 41-65, Tbilisi).

Despite the fact that the respondents provided an extensive discussion of Georgia’s historical and cultural links to Europe, Georgian and European values are still represented as two opposing poles. For instance, the group discussions have revealed that some perceive homosexual relations and marriages as “Europe’s name card,” while Georgian values imply the primacy of the extended family and traditional marriage, respect for elderly people, the maintenance of close ties with relatives and, generally, the preservation

of cultural traditions – the features that are considered less characteristics of contemporary European society. Such views are especially noticeable in the regional cities among the respondents aged 41-65 years.

“Europe lacks family warmth, adult-aged children leave their parents’ homes, the institution of virginity is not appreciated and same-sex marriages are accepted. We are traditional people and have warm family relations with relatives, respect for elderly people and our parents. In Europe, they even do not bother inquiring about their parents after the age of 18” (Female, 41-65, Batumi).

“Let us take European culture and traditions, their attitudes to minorities: same-sex marriage is accepted there, while we find it unacceptable and disgusting. We differ from Europeans in many ways” (Female, 18-25, Batumi).

Thus, if Europe is considered beneficial to Georgia in terms of fostering positive political and economic developments, it is also perceived as bearing certain cultural threats.

“I know that we have to learn their (European) language and rules. Gradually, we are losing our Georgian traditions... Georgians are meant to help and to do good for one another. I cannot give it up, while they require this. They create such an environment that one cannot even hear a salutation of people passing by in the street. This is a result of the chaos around us” (Female, 41-65, Batumi).

“Why does the EU force me to adopt the anti-discrimination law if I do not want it? But, no! It makes me do so anyway” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

It is obvious that the focus group participants do not unquestionably accept the idea of creating the EU’s local analogue (Schimmelfennig, 2010) as they select what should be imported from Europe and what should be denied access based on the ideological principle that reflects a contradiction between material and spiritual cultures (Chattarjee, 1989). They consider acceptable and desirable the achievements of Western material culture such as technological development, the economic system and the current forms of political governance. They believe these characteristics cause the superiority of the West and its asymmetrical power which enables it to “subordinate” the developing countries. Regarding spiritual culture, it is believed to shape one’s national identity and give true power to a non-European (first

of all, in geoDiagramic terms) country to maintain its superiority over Western civilization (ibid). It is believed that such “spiritual superiority” counterbalances “civilizational inferiority” (Morawska, 2003, 172).

The abovementioned ideological principle of selection serves this very function: a non-Western country embracing the Western material culture should simultaneously preserve its national identity. If the country has to fight for it, it needs to be materially strong which should be achieved through Western support. Such a utilitarian approach is also reflected in our focus group participants’ discourses as, on the one hand, they expect to get maximal benefits from the EU, while, on the other hand, they think that the EU has forced Georgia to adopt the anti-discrimination law.

Europe’s Perception of Georgia

The respondents are suspicious of Europe’s perception of Georgia as its own part. Their suspicion is especially reinforced by the fact that the EU delays the granting of tangible benefits to Georgia such as visa liberalization. In this context, the discourse of “façade European integration” and the public dissatisfaction with it is activated. The discussants stress the passivity and caution of the EU to take “decisive steps.” In their words, if Georgia were really valuable to the EU, it would “*accelerate its speed*” and “*shut its eyes to certain problems*,” especially since “*such a huge state (Russia) is suffocating us*.” In addition, it is noted that the EU watches Georgia through a “magnifying glass” that does not point to its motivation to consider the country its potential member. Consequently, the discussion has mainly focused on the factors facilitating and hindering Georgia’s integration into the EU.

“I just doubt the EU’s attitude towards our country. There are so many question marks and each of our steps, absolutely everything we do is observed through a magnifying glass. So, I think the EU lacks the desire, otherwise, it could have shut its eyes to certain problems to let us become its member state” (Female, 26-40, Kutaisi).

“In my opinion, Georgia is less valuable to the EU because some procedures can be undertaken expeditiously. Such a huge state (Russia) is suffocating us but the EU does not make significant moves towards Georgia. If we were really important to the EU, it would offer us something that is

manageable in a short-term perspective and would quickly admit us” (Male, 26-40, Kutaisi).

“Europe should take decisive steps to give the Georgian people certain hope. But the only thing we hear is that the EU is discontent” (Female, 41-65, Gori).

In the participants’ view, the main hindering factor is Russia as it is not in the EU’s interests to spoil its relations with this country. However, it is also argued that the EU aims to establish peace and stability in the region. Because of this, it expressed its support to Georgia in the course of the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008 and the President of France himself got involved in the process of negotiations. Despite this, Russia is considered the powerful player that the EU is not able to ignore.

“I think everyone takes into account the Russian factor. That is why [the process is hindered]. Otherwise, geopolitically Georgia is a very attractive country because of its Black Sea borders, the Eurasian corridor, the Silk Road and everyone needs us but the reason why all refrain is Russia” (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

One more hindering factor is considered the fact that Georgia is not able to satisfy EU standards and it is still at the stage of “doing homework” and “taking exams.” The discussants “hope that there will be a light at the end of the tunnel” (Female, 41-65, Telavi). In other words, the focus group participants talk about the EU’s conditionality. They think that at the moment, Georgia does not deserve even an intermediary reward such as visa liberalization, not to mention “the golden carrot,” that is, EU membership, because Georgia as a European state still needs to be “molded and carved.” Like in the case of the former argument, the EU’s lack of will to appreciate Georgia’s attempts and make a corresponding move is emphasized.

“[Georgia] is like our government. They pass exams successfully but still cannot get desirable jobs” (Female, 41-65, Telavi).

“If Europe had considered us its part, it would have let Georgia join the EU long ago. But we cannot meet the EU’s requirements so the door is still closed for us” (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

“In my opinion, Europe looks at us as a sculptor looks at certain material, interested in what can be made of it. They might think of us - these people can be shaped into something but it still needs to be done, it needs to be molded and carved” (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

When the EU is viewed as a “sculptor” or the one giving assignments, it is also important to take into consideration its “external integration capacity.” As noted above, this capacity is assessed based on the level of democratic consolidation within a country (for instance, supremacy of law, protection of human rights), the governance capacity (for instance, the quality of public services, the level of corruption) and the indicators of economic welfare. The focus group participants acknowledge that Georgia still has a lot of work to do in all the listed areas, and hence it is not ready for joining the EU.

Alongside political and economic dimensions, an essential component of the EU’s “external integration capacity” is public support. It is noteworthy that the EU’s enlargement policy has an impact on the level of public support; particularly, the more intensive the EU’s conditionality, the more the public support to the EU in non-member states declines as the population starts realizing the costs necessary for EU integration (Schimmelfennig, 2014). Taking this fact into account, “external integration capacity” needs the EU’s constant effort to encourage and maintain public support in non-member states. Our research participants’ dissatisfaction with “façade European integration” might to some extent question the effectiveness of EU policy towards its neighborhood countries. In this respect, it should be noted that in comparison to 2013, the portion of the population supporting Georgia’s EU membership declined by 17% in 2015 (CRRC, 2015).

Concerning the factors facilitating EU integration, Georgia’s geopolitically advantageous location is stressed again, which is considered a significant resource to strengthen the EU’s position in the Caucasus region. However, this facilitating factor is simultaneously perceived as a threat noting that the EU is driven by utilitarian interests and plans. Some participants believe that the EU is interested in Georgia only because of the military and business considerations. One of the respondents even argues that for the EU, Georgia represents a kind of “booty.”

“The EU can control the Russian and former Soviet Union territories through Georgia. We have the Black Sea so we have the exits. The EU can deploy missile defense systems so I think it has military interests in Georgia” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

“The EU uses Georgia. If it had perceived Georgia as its member, it would have already granted the country its membership. It needs the Georgian territories. Foreigner investors are coming to our country establishing their busi-

nesses and Georgian people are left unemployed as the foreign labor force is taking away their jobs. This is abusive, isn't it?" (Female, 26-40, Gori).

In this case, it is interesting to compare the perceptions of Georgians' utilitarian attitudes towards the EU and the EU's utilitarian attitudes towards Georgia. It seems the focus group participants consider legitimate their demands or expectations to gain benefits from the EU because of its superior position in terms of material culture. We have discussed the tendency of "romanticizing" EU-Georgia relations when the EU is perceived as a "mentor," while Georgia as its "mentee." The idea that the EU helps developing countries to advance and strengthen is part of this discourse. Based on this view, we can assume that our research participants believe that the EU is simply obliged to be sympathetic towards Georgia's pragmatic approach and try to respond to its needs. However, the EU's desire to gain certain benefit from Georgia is perceived as Georgians' "utilization" and puts the respondents in a position of "mentees" disappointed by their "mentor's" behavior.

Georgia's Prospects of Joining the EU

The focus group participants' attitudes towards Georgia's prospects of joining the EU turned out to be quite skeptical. This has also been revealed above while discussing the factors hindering EU integration.

First of all, the discussants emphasize the issues of Georgia's territorial integrity, IDPs, and the so-called frozen conflicts which are closely connected to the political tension between Georgia and Russia. As some respondents state, it is not in the interests of the EU to accept "oppressed" Georgia as its member, especially since *"it is surveilled by such a huge state [Russia] that gradually takes away its lands"* (Female, 18-25, Kutaisi).

"One of the reasons why Georgia is not a EU member state is a large number of IDPs who were forced to leave their lands. While there are problems with Georgia's territorial integrity, I do not think the EU will open its doors to us" (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

The discussants recall the case of Ukraine whose EU integration process was easily hindered by Russia in 2014. They consider this case a vivid example of what threats Russia might bear for Georgia. Taking into account the experience of Ukraine, the Georgian government's attempt to establish

friendly relations with Russia alongside the ongoing EU integration process is considered simply unrealistic.

“Ukraine was going to join the EU, but Russia did not allow it and unleashed the war. The same will happen to Georgia” (Male, 26-40, Kutaisi).

“The Georgian government wants to have friendly relations with both Russia and Europe. But this is very difficult to exercise considering what Russia has recently done to Ukraine” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

Furthermore, Georgia’s immediate neighborhood with Russia and its location in the region being under Russia’s influence, as well as not having direct borders with the EU, is considered one of the main factors hindering EU integration.

“One of the main reasons why the EU does not accept us is our situation and neighborhood with Russia” (Female, 18-25, Gori).

“Here is why Georgia does not have a perspective to join the EU: the EU member states have shared borders, while Georgia has no immediate border with the EU. Even regarding the DCFTA, how can the EU protect itself from smuggling? We border only Turkey, which is not accepted into the EU either. How is that possible that the EU skips Turkey and gives Georgia its membership?!” (Male, 41-65, Tbilisi).

Although some focus group participants think that being Russia’s neighbor is a hindering factor to Georgia’s EU integration, others are sure that Georgia has a geopolitically attractive location for the EU: it is interested in supporting a democratic country in the Caucasus region as Georgia might become an “exemplary” state for its neighbors. Besides, Georgia is a strategically important country for the EU as it represents a “corridor” connecting Europe and the US to the Near East.

“Well, if Georgia becomes a EU member state, there will be a democratic country next to Russia, which might become an example for other countries in the region, say, for Armenia and Azerbaijan. This will be a big blow to Russia and strategically beneficial for Europe” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

“Georgia is a very important transit country for the US and Europe. For the US, Georgia is a corridor to Afghanistan and Iran. The region itself is very important” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

Besides the external factors hindering EU integration, the respondents also discuss the internal challenges, one of which is the discrepancy in perceiving the pro-European course as the country's main priority at the normative and behavioral levels. The younger discussants state that despite the existing foreign policy document, Georgian political actors do not have an agreement on the pro-European course as the only indispensable one for Georgia. It is argued that if it used to be a "dogma" in Saakashvili's period, currently, owing to the pro-Russian propaganda, positive sentiments towards Russia have been increased, which is not accompanied by the government's responsive strategy.

"There is no clear opinion regarding the political course in our country. It used to be a dogma that we moved towards Europe that has been somewhat changed recently. There is no agreement even within the government: Some says our course is European though some are still inclined towards Russia and those old times" (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

"Georgia should have firm criteria, which must be unchangeable and no matter who represents the government, they must follow these criteria. Years ago, the Georgian nation said we should enter the EU and it should remain our main goal" (Male, 26-40, Kutaisi).

The fact that the government does not take proper care of raising the awareness about the EU among the population is considered an inseparable part of the abovementioned issue. It results in the insufficient support to the pro-European course, which on its side creates a certain success for the pro-Russian propaganda as well as the dissemination of negative myths about the EU. In addition, Georgia's voice is not heard on the international stage, especially considering its transitional stage when the country needs international partners' strong support.

"Although we have a strong aspiration towards Europe, there are some barriers that should be overcome. These are details but the Georgian government should decide on the one and only political course and convince people using persuasive arguments and an effective PR" (Female, 26-40, Kutaisi).

"I think that international collaboration is very important for Georgia. We should show the world not only our problems but also our motivation and pro-Western aspirations. We should be clearer that we do not want to be a Soviet left-over state" (Male, 18-25, Gori).

Alongside political issues, the focus group participants talk about Georgia's economic instability that hinders the EU integration process as Georgia might be considered *"an additional problem for the EU"* (Male, Tbilisi, 18-25). The respondents are quite critical of government agencies thinking that the local resources are not sufficiently mastered and backed up by necessary investments to facilitate the development of the country's economy. They also note that such important resources as fertile land and the Black Sea are not adequately estimated in Georgia. The country has real opportunities to develop agriculture but is still dependent on import. According to the discussants, the development of tourism is not paid proper attention either.

"Tourism might be attractive to Europe so the country can develop its potential in this direction. I understand that our EU membership is not dependent on this but it seems crucial to me to offer this potential" (Female, 18-25, Zugdidi).

"Ordinary citizens are not able to change anything. The government has to change everything. They say Georgia is rich in resources but do we use any? Quite contrary, they make us buy imported goods and everything is expensive. If there is any state support, the EU will see it and we might get accepted" (Male, 26-40, Gori).

An urgent issue the respondents discuss is the public responsibility towards improving the overall situation in the country that requires the raising of public awareness. They stress that taking care of future development should not only be the government's duty but citizens should contribute to it as well although they consider Georgians as lacking social responsibility and awaiting immediate benefits without proper efforts. As the focus group discussant young people note: *"Georgians expect to get immediate benefits from everything"* (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi). In addition, one of the Georgians' prominent features is considered the "incapacity to plan for the future" that is believed to be one of the main traits distinguishing them from "disciplined and refined" Europeans.

"[Europeans] are very disciplined and refined people in terms of management and labor productivity. We are not able to plan our work, while they thoroughly plan everything. We have not learnt and nobody has taught us how to do it. If I were asked what is going to happen to my family, society and country tomorrow, I do not really know. But in Europe people know what

their source of income will be at least for another 50 years” (Female, 41-65, Telavi).

The younger participants also emphasize the ideological difference between various generations that has a significant impact on their perception of EU integration: the youth aspires towards Europe and this is their firm choice, while the older generation has not seen a better reality than the Soviet one and has a rather pessimistic attitude towards the future.

“Ideologies are changing over time. The previous generation has different standards, while we see our bright future in Europe. We do not believe that Orthodox Russia is our good brother. We clearly see what happens in our country, and hence we have a different ideology. When the issue of visa liberalization was raised, it gave me more hope that something would change for good. If you do not have hope, nothing will happen” (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

An interesting observation is that the majority of focus group participants see the perspective of Georgia’s EU membership in a longer-term (about 10-15 years) than the interviewed politicians and experts (about 5-10 years). However, both sides agree that before it happens, Georgia’s main concern should be the implementation of EU standards, the satisfaction of EU criteria and the development of civic culture, which is represented by rather simple things such as following traffic rules, queuing up and discarding left-overs into garbage bins.

“I think it [EU membership] is a distant perspective. Georgia is not ready to become part of Europe. This concerns everything including our attitudes and even throwing rubbish on the street. People are not ready to join the EU. We are still too far away” (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

“I do not think anyone can say: ‘I am European.’ We still need lots of time to get to this point, even to learn the basic rules of public behavior including waiting for one’s turn in a queue. Changing all of this requires lots of time” (Female, 41-65, Batumi).

The main reason for the underdeveloped civic culture is believed to be the Soviet heritage; therefore, the role of young people’s motivation and hard work in creating a socioeconomic environment supportive of EU integration is especially emphasized.

“So many years we were together with Russia and Georgian society still

bears the hallmark of the Soviet system. First of all, our society needs to mature. We have not reached the level of development to become EU members yet” (Male, 41-65, Gori).

“The government should not be the only one in charge of the country’s development; people should be motivated as well. I do not want to offend anyone but there are plenty of people who are unwilling to work, including the youth. Our economic situation will not improve if no one wants to move a finger. There should be more motivation among the young people” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

The older respondents are especially disappointed by the “façade European integration.” Based on their discourses, we can infer that the participants think that EU integration is a “façade” because of the following reasons: a) Georgia does not take active steps to ensure that it gets tangible benefits, and b) The EU itself suspends the process of granting Georgia such benefits. In their words, it is exemplified by both the suspension of visa liberalization and the lack of Georgia’s progress in the long experience of its EU integration.

“Unfortunately, the only thing the current and previous governments have done is talking the talk. Europe, Europe... This is what keeps us silent for the last 10-30 years but there are no real moves towards Europe that should be reflected in the improved public life and education that is in a deplorable state” (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

“I think people are disappointed. We are still not granted visa-free travel and MAP; they do not help us. It should make sense to join the EU, should it not? Many people think that it makes no sense anymore” (Female, Tbilisi, 26-40).

In this context it should be noted that a few interviewed political experts have also questioned the EU’s political will to grant Georgia certain “tangible benefits” set forth by the Association Agreement. This dissatisfaction regards the issue of asymmetrical dependence or power hierarchy between the EU and Georgia as well (Grabbe, 2006). This topic also covers the question of Georgia’s sovereignty. The discussants, especially the younger ones, are rather suspicious of Georgia’s political independence and argue that the outside political actors make decisions regarding Georgia without the country’s actual participation in the process: *“We are a small nation that cannot*

make decisions on its own but someone dictates them from above” (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

“For example, at any international meeting our country’s problems are not discussed by Georgians but other countries instead, say, the US, etc. Georgia cannot decide anything. Therefore, our independence is questionable” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

On the other hand, the respondents stress that Georgia does not have the leverage to independently make important decisions which only a few political powers can do; particularly, the US, the EU and Russia. In such conditions, getting closer to Europe is considered the only alternative to being subordinated to Russia. Thus, both the abovementioned utilitarian approach and a rather ambivalent attitude towards the EU are apparent here: despite being viewed as a threat to Georgia’s sovereignty, EU integration is considered the main strategy against Russian expansionism.

“Georgia cannot exist independently, either Russia will interfere or Europe. As I do not want Russia, I hope we will be connected to Europe” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

To summarize, the focus group participants make rather critical comments on Georgia’s sociopolitical and economic situation, exposing the downsides of Georgian society (in their words, underdeveloped civic culture, lack of discipline, idleness, etc.). The respondents are aware that it is necessary for Georgia to adequately implement EU standards in order to deserve the “golden carrot” – EU membership. In this regard, their narratives reflect quite nihilistic attitudes that are encouraged, on the one hand, by the Georgian government’s passivity or incapacity to take effective steps towards EU integration and, on the other hand, by the vagueness of the EU’s plans regarding the prospects of Georgia’s integration. It is noteworthy that while talking about EU integration, the focus group participants do not discuss the advantages of the ENP or the Association Agreement but stress the necessity of joining the EU as an ultimate goal and a real outcome. They believe it is the only means of Georgia’s unconditional development and welfare, while *“the Association Agreement means nothing”* (Male, 41-65, Tbilisi). Such an attitude illustrates that Georgian society is not aware of the complexity of the EU integration process, and hence believes that a fruitful political and economic cooperation with the EU is possible only in the case of its membership.

Georgian Political Elite – Manipulating pro-European Discourses?

Based on the reality described above, it is evident that the population's awareness about the EU and EU integration plays a crucial role in the successful flow of this process. Furthermore, it is important for citizens to have a sense of participation in it. No doubt, political actors are responsible for raising public awareness and involving citizens in political processes. Therefore, they have to be sufficiently informed in order to provide the rest of society with relevant information.

As the in-depth interviews with experts have revealed, they believe that Georgian politicians need to raise their own awareness about the EU and EU integration, especially since there is a lack of uniform vision even within the ruling coalition: despite Georgia's declared foreign policy course, certain political actors do not even restrain from anti-Western discourses. In contrast to the experts, the focus group participants argue that politicians do not provide the public with relevant information on the EU and it happens intentionally. In their words, on the one hand, they maneuver as they like, while, on the other hand, they deliberately use rather obscure language as in this case it is much easier to manipulate the population.

"They (politicians) know and maneuver as they like, talking to ordinary people about these issues in such an obscure language and with such terms that they could hardly understand anything. They complicate it so much that it becomes more difficult for the population to understand what the EU is" (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

According to the same discourse, even when the politicians take concrete steps towards EU integration, it does not happen for the country's better future but because they attempt to create "an illusion of progress" within the population and benefit from this situation themselves.

"They take certain steps and by doing so they want to create an illusion of progress among the population so that they can calmly put money in their pockets" (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

The abovementioned discourses characteristic to the focus group discussants are quite close to the ones of politicians and experts, stating that Georgian politicians are aware of the EU and EU integration although it does not

mean that they are necessarily pro-European. The interviewed experts and politicians argue that certain politicians make anti-European statements not because of their lack of awareness, but because of an intentional campaign, while the interviewed population believes that the motivation of gaining certain material benefit is hidden behind the anti-Western or obscure statements.

An alternative discourse is also revealed stating that the political elite lacks competent human resources; thus, they lack necessary knowledge not only on the EU and Europeanization, but also on other topics important for the country in general. From this perspective, the population sets more demands towards the ruling coalition. It should be noted that the incompetence of the politicians was particularly stressed by the young people aged 18-25.

“The current government and politicians want to integrate with the EU, but the team that would take actual steps towards this aim has not been formed” (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

The discussants argue that the politicians have to make pro-European statements for the sake of desirable self-presentation. According to this discourse, the rate of pro-European attitudes is so high among the population that even if political actors are not pro-European, they have to present the discourses that the population wants to hear; otherwise, they will lose their rating among the electorate.

“Maybe the pro-European views have changed but they cannot say that. Maybe they do not want to join the EU but if they say it, the public will crush them” (Male, 26-40, Batumi).

It is important for the politicians to declare their own Europeanness as all the public opinion polls in Georgia show that the number of EU supporters considerably exceeds the number of its opponents. The nationwide surveys illustrate that although in comparison to 2009-2013 the portion of those supporting EU integration has decreased, it was still supported by 61% of the population in 2015 (Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2015). Based on the data of March 2016, 77% of those inquired state that they support the Georgian government’s declared aspiration to join the EU (NDI, CRRC, 2016). One of the factors encouraging this upward trend might be the expectation of visa liberalization and certain utilitarian considerations related to it. The population links visa liberalization with the gaining of the first tangible bene-

fit, which alongside free movement is also associated with certain economic development.

It should be noted that the population assesses not only the political actors' narratives but also the accompanying actions. In the focus group participants' opinion, Georgian politicians mostly talk the talk and seldom perform real actions. In this respect, the current government is not considered an exception as even the former government, characterized by distinctly pro-European discourses, often performed "non-European" actions. Consequently, the problem is that in the period of both the former and the current governments there is a clash between pro-European statements and anti-European deeds. Thus, in order to gain the votes, it is not sufficient to declare one's Europeanness but it should be accompanied by actual activities.

"I think that politicians are less inclined towards Europe. In their speeches they say that they intend to join the EU although their actions do not express this will. Even the negotiations with Gazprom represent more a road leading to Russia than to the EU" (Female, 26-40, Batumi).

"We hear merely words from the politicians that are not realized in practice. These are empty words. You can never guess whether they really want to do something" (Female, 26-40, Batumi).

In this context, an idea that political actors do not independently make their decisions but *"someone stands behind their back"* is especially noteworthy. Despite the fact that they are aware that it is *"the European course that brings development,"* they still *"follow someone's dictates."* It is not hard to guess that this "someone" implies Russia and pro-Russian forces.

"The politicians know very well what is good and which direction they should take, but as their choice has been dictated to them by someone, who stands behind their back, they act respectively. The politicians know perfectly well that the European course brings development but they follow someone's dictates. The population, on its part, makes a decision for somebody's sake" (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

We encounter a rather complex situation here – Georgian politicians *"follow someone's dictates,"* while the population follows the politicians' dictates that, in the discussants' words, results in the fact that the public is used to all the processes being directed from above and lacks social responsibility. They think that it is a remnant of the Soviet past.

“It is up to us to elect the politicians whom we entrust to govern our country. We do not make a right decision and the reason is that we are used to the fact that somebody always dictated us what to do, appointed the government for us. The same happens today: somebody would come, ask you to vote for their relative and maybe you will vote for them. So we repeat the same mistake all over again. We make a choice not for the future of the country but for the sake of somebody” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

Thus, the respondents not only ascribe the responsibility for a successful flow of the EU integration process to Georgian politicians, but also consider necessary citizens’ development of respective social responsibility and their involvement in the actual process.

Population’s Awareness about Questions Related to EU Integration

As noted above, the success of the Europeanization process is considerably dependent on citizens’ awareness of and sense of participation in it as well as on how legitimate they consider EU integration itself. According to Radaelli, a “communicative discourse” that targets the population and aims at legitimizing Europeanization in their eyes is more important than a “co-ordinative discourse” that implies the legitimation of Europeanization at the level of political elites (2003, 40). The importance of legitimizing the idea of EU integration and ensuring the sense of participation among the population has been emphasized by both the interviewed politicians/experts and the population.

One of the dominant discourses in the new member and candidate states is the perception of the EU as a system of common (shared) rules. Therefore, these countries consider it essential to take care of a proper implementation of EU standards. It should be stressed that this view is also shared by those skeptical citizens who do not entirely exclude the perspective of EU integration. It is especially important for them to be involved in the processes and feel that their opinion is valuable to the elites. It is also significant to create a discussion space so that more and more citizens have an opportunity to get involved in the deliberative process as there is a chance that even less skeptical citizens might “take revenge on” political elites and not support EU integration at a referendum (Dimitrova, Kortenska and Steunenberg, 2015).

After the signing of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement there has been an upward trend towards raising public awareness on the EU in Georgia (Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2015). However, it should be noted that the raising of awareness is not necessarily followed by the increase in the number of EU integration supporters because, as noted above, the population might be concerned by the “costs” needed for EU integration.

The focus group participants believe that the older generation is more concerned about “the side effects” of EU integration than the younger one. Despite the fact that the narratives of various age groups do not show considerable differences, they themselves emphasize the existence of such differences: the younger generation is more supportive of EU integration than the older one that, in their opinion, is caused by the access to information. As young people have better access to the internet, are involved in the information campaigns, take civic education classes and participate in various trainings, they are better aware of the advantages of EU integration. In contrast, older generations, in their words, are characterized by a lack of respective information; as a result, they perceive EU integration as a threat to both Georgians’ national identity and Georgia’s territorial integrity, fearing the expansion of Russian aggression. They also emphasize the “Eurosceptic” older generation’s ideological contradiction to the Western values by representing Russia as a close neighbor with the same religion. Finally, they note that their life under the Soviet regime negatively affected the older generation’s values; therefore, they can hardly adapt to the new reality.

Based on one of the dominant discourses, the government’s passivity and the lack of pro-European rhetoric are the main reasons for public unawareness. The government’s passivity is considered especially dangerous given the expanded Russian propaganda. In this context, the Eurobarometer data analysis is remarkable which has showed that the EU does not directly influence the attitudes towards EU integration. The main factor having an impact on the attitudes towards the EU is the domestic political actors’ activity at the local and European levels. Thus, public attitudes towards the EU are closely intertwined with the government’s successful domestic policy. Consequently, Europeanization cannot be considered an abstract goal that the government sets for the population or the direct outcome of EU representatives’ local activities (Dimitrov, Harlampiev and Stoychev, 2015, 18).

In the respondents’ words, because EU integration is no more actively popularized, while the Russian propaganda is quite active, the number of EU

supporters has decreased and those sympathetic to Russia has increased. This observation is also supported by the outcomes of representative surveys which illustrate that the Georgian public's trust in the EU has decreased from 54% in 2009 to 34% in 2015 (Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2015, 15). These data are to some extent supported by the ones of the NDI, August 2015, showing that according to 44% of the population, recently (since 2012) the Russian influence has increased in Georgia, while only 17% think that the EU's influence has increased (NDI, CRRC, 2015).

"The number of EU supporters has drastically decreased in recent years based on the surveys. Why? Because they used to repeat 24 hours a day in the media that the EU was good and now they do not say this as loudly and as often. This propaganda was active and we had an outcome. Now Russian propaganda is active and this has resulted in the decrease of EU supporters" (Female, 26-40, Zugdidi).

The focus group participants, on the one hand, blame the government for the deviation from the pro-European rhetoric and encouraging public unawareness, while, on the other hand, accuse the media for being passive and partial. These two issues are considered inseparable as they believe that it is the government that tries to control the media.

"At some stage the media do not cover everything adequately. The EU topics should be more actively covered to increase public interest... The media have their own concrete terms but I can say that they are influenced from above and the population of Georgia does not have an opportunity to get in-depth information on the EU due to this" (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

It turns out that the village population is in the hardest situation in terms of awareness. Part of them has very limited or no information about the EU. One of the reasons for this is the often deliberate disinformation (by the Russian "soft power" or pro-Russian political parties) or inadequate interpretation that might even result in aggression against the EU.

"I live in a village and know that they do not have any information on the EU. Sometimes they are even irritated if they hear about the EU as they have already received a lot of misinformation, probably from TV" (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

Based on one of the discourses, despite the fact that various interested parties and organizations hold a number of information campaigns, they

themselves lack respective qualification; as a result, the provided information is obscure and the communication itself is inconsecutive. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the discussants' words, various NGOs try to benefit from raising public awareness and, despite the lack of competence, still organize different trainings that do not really increase the level of awareness. The interviewed experts have also mentioned this problem.

"The level of public awareness is not high. Although there are some events, for example, the subject of civic education is taught at school, there are trainings and various sources of information, still everything needs to be improved. Quite often, the main problem is that those providing the information are not competent enough" (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

"The information is provided in a disorganized manner. I do not want to insult anyone but many people opened their agencies and NGOs and everyone launched certain trainings. I think a person leading the training should have respective qualification and be competent and free from someone's control" (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

The respondents are quite critical about the level of general education in Georgia which they consider one of the main reasons for the low awareness about the EU and EU integration. They believe that it is a low level of education that hinders certain segments of the population to adequately assess the advantages and challenges of the EU integration process; moreover, some can hardly distinguish between the EU and the Eurasian Customs Union. Based on the NDI studies of August 2015, 12% of respondents support joining both the former and the latter. They might desire to get more benefits by joining both unions although it is obvious that they are not aware of the fundamental differences between them. The lack of awareness is also reflected in the fact that although 63% of the population report being aware of the EU, only 28% know that the Association Agreement does not provide a permit for citizens of Georgia to work in EU countries (Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2015, 7).

"You might often hear that the EU is good but what exactly it brings to us is unknown. If you ask the population to make a choice between the EU and the Eurasian Union, they will answer that both are good. The main thing for them is to join a certain union and they do not think about what they are going to gain in each case" (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

Despite the abovementioned critical comments, some respondents offer an alternative view that currently a number of pro-European information campaigns are held and both the state agencies and NGOs have expanded their information campaigns about the EU. The population simply needs some time to comprehend this information.

“I do not think we are in an informative vacuum. There is a lot of information available and if we want to access it, we can access it. However, all of this needs respective time for comprehension. Various events, trainings and meetings are being held though not everyone is engaged in this. It is a matter of time. More and more people will gradually receive the information. It just depends on who is interested or not interested in it” (Female, 26-40, Zugdidi).

“I should say that since the signing of the Association Agreement, I have attended 4-5 trainings during the past 2 months. Before, there were trainings on gender equality; now all trainings are about the EU. I can feel it is a trend. It is intentional and it is good as we have just mentioned the lack of information” (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

Ways of Raising Public Awareness about Questions Related to EU Integration

The focus group participants consider mass media the main tool for raising public awareness about questions related to EU integration. The major source of information in Georgia remains the television and as nationwide representative surveys show, 79% of the respondents want to receive more information about the EU from television, while only 16% want to receive it from social networks (Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2015, 9).

“The media plays a crucial role in terms of providing information. They can have TV shows on the EU, advertise it on social media, distribute flyers, etc.” (Female, 18-25, Gori).

Younger respondents emphasize that the best means for raising public awareness is social media as, in contrast to traditional media that is easily influenced by political actors, and hence is less reliable, social media provides access to various sources and enables selecting impartial ones.

"I think the best source is the internet because you find the information you personally search for. The TV tells you whatever they want to tell you and with the internet, you can more or less choose. I can select objective sources from which I will receive information and trust it. The TV and newspapers are not reliable sources as they provide whatever they want and have a direct impact on the public" (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

The respondents believe that the government is the main agent for raising public awareness as it has respective administrative resources and the competence to disseminate relevant information. Some discussants even sketched out a plan for the government's communication with the population; particularly, they consider crucial the government's coordinated action from the central authority through municipalities to village elders, especially in remote regions of Georgia.

"The state agencies should be providing this; for example, in Svaneti, the municipalities should be doing so. They have their representation, 'gamgebeli,' in villages who should be in charge of providing information to the population" (Male, 26-40, Kutaisi).

In this context, the discussants also note that the government is not consistent in its strategy and follows a double standard as, on the one hand, it declares its aspiration towards the EU, while, on the other hand, it revives the Soviet symbols evidenced by accentuating Stalin's heritage or attempting to lead loyal politics with Russia.

"When Stalin's figure is put forward and simultaneously you are moving to the EU, this is a double standard" (Male, 41-65, Gori).

Generally, the tendency of accusing the government of a pro-Russian orientation or rather loyal attitudes towards Russia is apparent in the case of all focus group discussions. The respondents repeatedly note that the current government is rather passive in terms of popularizing EU integration, in contrast to the former one. Such a perception is partly related to the former government's rhetoric about the exclusivity of its pro-European course which has also been emphasized by the interviewed experts. Within this discourse, some respondents from the opposition even accuse the GD government of an anti-Western course. In this respect it is interesting to mention the research of the Eurasia Partnership Foundation according to which 47% of respondents believe that

the UNM shares pro-European values, while 24% think the GD coalition shares them (2015, 16).

The focus group participants consider the organization of public meetings one of the main means of raising public awareness. They state that such meetings should be systematic so that relevant information is provided step-by-step. They think the role of printed media is also quite important to briefly and clearly summarize information on the EU. One more effective means of disseminating information on the EU is considered to be the governmental and non-governmental organizations' trainings and focus group-type discussions with the population. In addition, the role of the so-called opinion leaders is believed to be crucial, especially in the peripheral rural districts as the residents do trust them. Thus, the discussants believe that all the possible units should be involved in the information campaign, be it the government, mass media, NGOs or even the small rural district authorities.

"The approved methods are, for example, providing information through booklets, video clips, etc. However, this is quite fragmented and does not give a proper effect. In such cases, meetings like this (focus group discussions) are necessary. Even though you cannot mobilize hundreds of people in this case, you can still increase the awareness of dozens of people that is also very important, especially in the case of villages where the so-called elite has the authority in the population and can provide information in respective villages" (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

The focus group participants also note that it is vital to adequately define the target groups as people of different ages and educational and professional backgrounds need different approaches; therefore, the information campaigns should be planned according to their interests and the specifics of their activities. They also stress that it is crucial to provide this information in a clear and simple language. Otherwise, they fear that instead of facilitating awareness raising and pro-European attitudes, it can cause public irritation.

"The target groups should be clearly defined. A farmer should be provided with concrete information on the benefits of European integration along with potential threats. You should talk to farmers and teachers separately. I think teachers represent an important target group as they are in direct contact with the new generation. Those teachers I have listened to do not know, and hence cannot teach anything" (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

"Farmers need to be taught. Our farmers are very hardworking but they need to be adequately provided with this information. I recall the history of Russia: when they introduced potatoes, they did not tell them to eat the root; therefore, they were eating the upper part. The people protested, thinking they were being poisoned. The same will happen here" (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

In terms of raising awareness about the EU, the focus group participants emphasize the importance of raising the level of education within the population. They even express their views on introducing a subject about the EU at public schools. They stress the role of family and school as well as the importance of collaboration between public schools and NGOs as the main agents of disseminating information about the EU and Western values.

"The main thing is to establish this [a subject on the EU] at public schools. They should be interested from the very beginning as you cannot raise someone's interest if he/she is above 40" (Male, 18-25, Gori).

"Probably, the family influences the 17-18 year-old youth who have discussions on whether the EU is better or Russia. Thus, they should have first raised the parents to want EU integration so that the children could also be raised on these ideas. However, fortunately, sometimes certain organizations do this work... My children go to school No 1 and an organization held a competition with incentives for those who knew more about Europe than others. My child was very happy after having won this competition" (Female, 41-65, Kutaisi).

According to one of the narratives, the awareness raising campaign should not only imply the provision of positive information about the EU, but also viewing it from multiple perspectives and adequately assessing its positive and negative aspects. The discussants consider problematic that many Georgians have overly optimistic expectations towards EU integration and do not think of the accompanying responsibilities and challenges; thus, their European choice is less conscious.

"I came across a book entitled 'What is the EU?' We are responsible to explain our future generation what benefits they get if we become members and what they lose if we do not become members. The advertisement and relevant information is lacking. Therefore, the youngsters think that if we enter, the borders will open and they will lie on the beach in Spain. It is not the case. They should know what they get so that they do not curse us after we die" (Female, 41-65, Telavi).

“Both the good and bad sides should be seen, the perspectives should be seen so that a person can think and make a conscious decision whether he/she really wants Europe or not” (Female, 41-65, Telavi).

The focus group participants believe that open borders with Europe and free movement for Georgian citizens within it is the best means of raising public awareness. They think it facilitates the local use of the knowledge and experience acquired in Europe. In this context, the role of Georgian labor migrants, who are directly familiar with European values and lifestyle, is considered essential in terms of sharing their experience with the local population. At the same time, the respondents emphasize the importance of school and university exchange programs as they believe that it is easier to persuade the youth undergoing the process of value formation than adults with fixed values.

“If the people who are currently working in Europe, working on construction or as care-takers, if these people return to Georgia... I know some are in Greece, some in Italy, some in Spain, and they have been there for one, two, five years... They will certainly have an impact on us. This generation will return and our integration will be possible in this sense” (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

“I think exchange programs are very important. Many youngsters have already been to Europe within these programs, have spent some time there and they have brought the knowledge and information gained there to us. These exchange programs can be the best way to get closer to Europe” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

Impact of Europeanization on the Population’s Everyday Life

The focus group participants and experts’ views on how the outcomes of signing the Association Agreement are reflected in the population’s everyday life are almost identical. While the experts stress that “the ice has melted,” which results in a number of legislative initiatives aiming to facilitate approximation with European standards, citizens are more critical and think that the signing of the Association Agreement has not really changed anything in their everyday life. This view is shared by the respondents of both older and younger generations. Such skeptical attitudes might be an outcome of the hopes for gaining instant benefits attached to the associa-

tion process. The interviewed experts have touched upon this issue, talking about the possible disappointment as an outcome of quite unrealistic expectations related to the Association Agreement. However, part of the interviewed population argues that the Association Agreement could not bring immediate outcomes, and hence they have not had particular expectations. The signing of the document is perceived as a formal confirmation of Georgia's aspiration towards EU integration which stays on the rhetorical level and shows that Georgia's Europeanization process has not shifted from the discursive to behavioral stage yet; nevertheless, it is "a crucial step forward."

"My neighbor is still throwing garbage from the window... the talk remains talk unless you do something. This agreement is probably our formal claim of a pro-European position" (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

"Our families have not been affected that much, we neither have prospered nor vanished, but it is a crucial step forward and a precondition for us to become EU members one day" (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

Despite the dominant position that the signing of the document has not changed anything in the population's everyday life, some respondents do identify certain tangible benefits that some segments of society have already gained owing to the Association Agreement. They think these benefits are especially visible in the agricultural and business sectors, although they will gradually touch other spheres and become obvious to each citizen of Georgia.

"Maybe it has been beneficial for someone who is engaged in business in terms of trade, I do not know exactly. The Association Agreement has resulted in the opening up of the trade market. I guess for those people who are engaged in business it is profitable" (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

"It has an impact on agriculture. There are a number of grants from the EU and people apply and get them. If not those grants, we would not have had what we have now in agriculture. I should also mention the pesticides for land, the funds for developing irrigation channels, etc. There are certain points in the Association Agreement that need to be implemented. The main thing is the willingness of the government, its focus on various areas such as agriculture, human rights, etc. But it is a very good opportunity for each of us to personally experience these shifts" (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

Some respondents expect major benefits from the post-association processes. For them, the Association Agreement is the initial step towards EU membership. In this context, they make a sharp distinction between the EU (and the Europe symbolized by the EU) and Russia. The discussants note that in contrast to Russia, the EU's promises do not merely stay on paper. Based on these considerations, they perceive visa liberalization as the first tangible outcome of the Association Agreement.

"No, it will not stay on paper only, Europe and the EU are not one of those powers to put things on paper and then neglect them, as Russia used to do. It seems it needs some time; our country should take certain steps. There might be many destructive factors" (Male, 41-65, Gori).

Alongside this optimistic stance on EU integration, some skeptical views are also expressed; particularly, some participants think that after the signing of the Association Agreement both the country's economic state and the protection of cultural values have deteriorated. The discussants stress, on the one hand, the issue of "façade" Europeanization that measures the progress merely based on the external, formal characteristics, while, on the other hand, the threats encountered by the national identity that they associate with adopting a rather liberal policy towards sexual minorities.

"If you want, you can bake your bread in the toilet, the main thing is to have ceramic tiles there and ... The ISO certificate implies it. My neighbor had to close his bakery as he could not afford furnishing it with ceramic tiles. The second one has a very large space and it is very expensive to put tiles in the whole area so he is also closing down. We could feel this; no good was brought to anyone" (Male, 26-40 Telavi).

"It is the same in politics as it used to be. The difference is that the statements are more liberal now. It is a problematic topic that various sexual groups have emerged... They are more liberal towards them, nothing more. I think such topics are not acceptable. If a person is of a different sexual orientation, let him/her be on his/her own, there is no need to make it public. Their liberal approaches are not acceptable to society" (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

On the Implementation of EU Standards

One of the central issues in the research on Europeanization is the analysis of a country's strategies towards the implementation of EU standards. As Europeanization implies the implementation of the EU's formal and informal rules, norms and modes of "doing things," this model is adopted not only at the level of public policy but also the ones of domestic discourses and identities (Radaelli, 2003, 30). As noted above, the main mechanism for implementing EU standards is conditionality. However, for countries like Georgia, whose foreign policy priority is EU integration, self-conditionality is also essential. It implies that a country that aspires for EU membership behaves as if it were considered under more conditionality via sending the EU certain signals to show that it is ready to be considered a candidate (Schimmelfenning, 2010, 15).

The role of self-conditionality is revealed when focus group participants state that Georgia implements EU standards on its own. Two opposing narratives can be identified within this discourse: according to the first one, EU standards are implemented because the country realizes that it is necessary for its progress. Here we deal with the phenomenon of "Europeanization without the EU" (Irondelle, 2003). As noted above, it implies that the country is not satisfied with the local system of governance, meanwhile considering effective certain EU regulations and trying to adopt them in order to solve domestic issues.

"Nobody forces us to do anything. We need all this and, therefore, we must introduce these standards" (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

Based on the second narrative, the EU introduces its own rules of the game and if a country wants to integrate with it, it should follow these rules. Here we deal with conditionality; that is, the EU's use of the system of rewards and sanctions (Schimmelfenning, 2012, 7). If a country follows EU requirements, Brussels rewards it; otherwise, certain sanctions are set forth. For ENP countries, the reward might be represented by accelerating the process of visa liberalization, while the sanctions by postponing it to an indefinite future.

The focus group discussions illustrate that the population realizes the role of conditionality and the outcomes of adequately or inadequately performing EU tasks. The participants' narratives reveal that they perceive EU

membership as Georgia's main reward, while the refusal to be granted it – its main punishment. Indeed, it is EU membership that ENP countries perceive as their “golden carrot.” Moreover, research shows that the readiness to implement EU norms is rather high in the countries that hope to be granted EU membership at some time in the future (Sedelmeier, 2011; Schimmelfennig, 2012; Borzel, 2015). However, two issues might emerge in this regard: on the one hand, there is no firm guarantee that in the case of implementing EU standards they will be granted EU membership and, on the other hand, Russia's role cannot be neglected as to some extent it is present in all ENP countries. Despite the fact that Georgia does not expect to get the “golden carrot” in the near future (although it does hope to get it in the long-term perspective), like other ENP countries, it needs at least the EU's minor rewards that inspire further significant changes (Borzel and Lebanidze, 2015).

“I think that the introduction of European standards would be useful for our country, too, and we are expecting a certain award, we want Europe to make us a EU member. We introduce EU standards to deserve their favor but it is also useful to our society” (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

“The end justifies the means. If you have a goal, the EU tells you: Do you want to join us? Will you do this? Alright. If you do not implement it, you will get nothing. The EU does not aspire to accept us as much as we aspire to join it; we want it more. If we perform EU requirements, the likelihood of accepting us is higher” (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

Although the participants emphasize the importance of implementing EU standards for the sake of the country's wellbeing, they think that the main problem is that all stays at the declarative level and does not transfer to the behavioral one. To use Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's words, “domestic actors ‘talk the talk,’ pay lip service to the norm or use it strategically in ‘rhetorical action’” (2005, 8).

“We talk the talk, but we do not try at all, we do not do anything except talking” (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

In addition, it is important to focus on the discourse that considers beneficial and necessary the implementation of EU standards although stresses that Georgia is not ready for their enactment yet; therefore, at this stage their implementation can be viewed as enforcement.

"We are not ready for many standards ourselves; i.e., there are so many things to do before we reach those standards" (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

"There are some things that are recognized in the EU, for example, technical inspection. This is good but for us it is an enforcement. A person may be supporting his family with it, but if you inspect his car, it may be subject to write-off" (Male, 26-40, Tbilisi).

Some discussants bring the anti-discrimination law as a case for consideration. Although there is no separate discourse on Georgia being forced to adopt this law, one of the participants notes that in this case the Soviet model has been enacted when the directives coming from the center; that is Moscow, were followed without even questioning them and it was impossible to make any decisions at the domestic level.

"For example, nobody should say that the anti-discrimination law has not been forced. At the time of my youth, instructions were received from the Central Committee and the same happens now. A decree would be received; they would talk a little and then adopt that law. Nobody should say that the people in the Parliament did not know what they signed. They had no other option. But it is also important to know that it is not a compulsion but simply a rule. It tells you that if you do not do this and that, it will prevent you from achieving something. When you were signing this Association Agreement, did not you as the government know what it meant?" (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

Despite the fact that the adoption of the anti-discrimination law is perceived as being imposed by the EU, the focus group participants state that the EU does not use enforcement or menace, in contrast to Russia, which not only threatens but also demonstrates its military power. That is why Georgians are so attracted by EU standards. As noted above, unlike Russia, the EU prefers using its normative power to persuade others of the necessity of implementing its regulations. However, the respondents also note that the population immediately expects results and does not realize that the implementation of EU standards is oriented towards the long-term rather than short-term goals.

"I do not think it is a threat. We already have one threat (Russia) and we should not choose the threat again, shall we? No, we want it and that is why we fulfil their requirements without any menace" (Female, 26-40, Zugdidi).

“Governments change and we want our life to change the following day. We thought the same in the case of the Association Agreement... We thought that as soon as we signed it, the door to the EU countries would open for us and the following day we would be accepted without any problem” (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

Thus, an important detail is revealed that shows the distinction between the Russian and European strategies: although certain pressure was imposed on Georgian political actors to make them adopt the anti-discrimination law, it is not considered an enforcement but the recognition of the rules of the game offered by the EU to the countries aspiring to integrate with it. The enforcement might be related to implementing particular standards within a concrete time span. Otherwise, there is a common agreement on the EU's main principles offered to potential members.

According to the adjacent discourse that is also characteristic to the experts and politicians, the government decides to implement certain standards and immediately starts persuading the population that it is required by the EU. The discussants consider such a tactic quite problematic as the government ascribes a number of unpopular decisions (that might cause the population's dissatisfaction) to the EU and the Association Agreement requirements. As also noted in the expert interviews, many unpopular decisions have nothing to do with the Association Agreement. However, political actors choose a rather simple way and instead of explaining the necessity of particular decisions, they blame everything on the EU. They neglect the fact that this tactic harms the legitimacy of EU integration and raises the number of those with skeptical attitudes. Therefore, the population negatively assesses such a strategy. In order to better understand the ongoing processes, the discussants consider important that Georgian politicians provide citizens with relevant information on EU standards.

“You should explain to farmers that although their product becomes more expensive, they will sell this expensive product in Europe and if they used to earn 5 GEL, now they will earn 10 GEL. Yes, they will incur some expenses to provide high standards for their product, to print labels, etc. However, the road to Europe will open to them. You should explain this, not just say that the product has become more expensive and that is it” (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

Based on another interesting view, the implementation of EU standards encounters many difficulties, but it is absolutely necessary in order for the

public to gradually get used to following respective norms. These difficulties should encourage the development of social responsibility, the importance of which has been repeatedly emphasized by the focus group participants.

“The same should be in our country. There will be a lot of commotion if Europe does not accept the grapes squeezed five times and sends it back. It is OK, as it will make us be better and take certain responsibility” (Female, 41-65, Zugdidi).

As expected, young people express more openness to the implementation of EU standards than the older generation who is rather suspicious of the EU’s “disinterest” and thinks that all of this serves the EU’s interests. Moreover, some respondents even state that Georgia’s implementation of EU standards is beneficial not to Georgia itself but the EU.

Despite the variety of presented narratives, both the politicians and experts and the population’s discourses confirm that “Europeanization without the EU” is not the case in the Georgian reality, but the main strategy for implementing EU standards is conditionality, which might even gain a form of self-conditionality. They stress that the EU does not impose its standards but their implementation is beneficial to Georgia in order to approximate with the EU and ultimately deserve its main reward, that is, EU membership.

Trade Relations with the EU and their Impact on Georgia

One of the main elements of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement is the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) that facilitates trade relations between Georgia and the EU countries. This document is of special interest not only to the representatives of private and agricultural sectors but also other segments of the population. This is clearly illustrated by the nationwide survey of 2015 in which the question of what information they would like to receive about EU-Georgia relations was answered by most of the respondents indicating that their preference was trade relations (CRRC, 2015). That is why in our qualitative research we have focused on EU-Georgia trade relations and the prospects of their development.

The focus group participants of all age categories positively assess the existence of the DCFTA, although they are not really aware of what benefits it might bring to Georgia: some of them think that Georgia is not ready to

satisfy EU standards as a necessary precondition for trade relations with EU countries. The respondents are aware that if they want to export Georgian products to the European market, they have to satisfy various standards in terms of both the production process and adjusting packaging and prices. In their words, it is quite hard to set up production based on such standards as it requires a lot of financial resources.

“We are facing a challenge whether the Georgian market meets European standards or not. We do not have enough resources to compete with any factory in Germany” (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

“For our apples to be exported, the pesticides should be of high quality. We import cheap and low quality pesticides which cannot ensure that a quality apple is exported to Europe” (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

The population thinks that in order to make Georgian products more competitive and get maximal profit from the DCFTA, not only the quality of Georgian products should be increased, but also various international standards and systems of certification such as the ISO should be introduced.

“The European market is so overwhelmed that there is no space to put even a bottle there. We should somehow meet those requirements and get the ISO certificates so that we can also export products there” (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

Some participants are aware of not only various standards but also the specifics of quotas and prices; particularly, what amount of goods is permitted for export to the EU market and what their prices are. Concerning the products to be exported to the EU, the discussants list wine, fruit, Borjomi [spring water], churchkhela, walnuts, manganese and coal.

“We can export wine to the EU though there is a certain quota. If we export more, the anti-dumping law will restrict us based on which we should set the price they have there. So who will buy our wine? The price makes a difference as it will be quite expensive plus no one knows our product. You need a huge advertisement to introduce it. Who needs wine there?” (Male, 26-40 Tbilisi).

Based on the above narrative, a marketing strategy, especially branding, is an additional precondition for increasing the competitiveness of Georgian goods. As the focus group participants note, in order for Georgian products to establish themselves on the European market they should be advertised so that they can compete with the already established brands.

“Advertisement is necessary on the European market - good packaging, good positioning, good management” (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

“It will be very difficult for Georgian products to be established on the EU market as it is a market where certain brands have been sold for centuries. It will be very difficult for a small country to enter this market and export products of the same quality. We have some products – natural spring water, wine and honey. Georgian tangerines are not needed in Europe as their main distributor is Morocco, as far as I know” (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

The discussions reveal that the participants welcome the implementation of EU standards that should facilitate ecologically clean production, while in this process they consider crucial the role of both the government and the population.

“Of course, society should be willing and the government should support biologically and ecologically clean products which will be in high demand and, compared to the Russian market, they will have higher prices” (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

Taking into consideration the fact that such quality and advertising is too expensive for ordinary farmers, the discussants state that the government should be actively engaged in this process encouraging positive changes. Furthermore, the role of the EU, especially of its technical support to Georgia, is also emphasized.

The discussion of trade relations with the EU went along with the evaluation of trade relations with Russia. First and foremost, having trade relations with the EU is perceived as a factor facilitating the increase of production quality, which did not happen in the case of Russia as similar quality standards were lacking.

“Almost everything was exported during the Soviet times and there was no production control, it was directly transported to Russia. No matter whether the products were good or bad, they were always accepted” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

“The quality of products will improve. The products exported to Russia, even wine, were of very low quality. The quality has improved since we started exporting to the EU” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

While comparing the European and Russian markets, alongside the qual-

ity of products, one more distinctive feature is stability. The discussants consider the Russian market less stable than the European one as a result of the instability of Russian-Georgian political relations. One of the examples brought by them is the embargo of 2006.

“If we recall history, we had unstable trade relations with Russia. They would have blocked us if they had wanted, while we will have stable relations with the EU. We will know in advance what to do” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

As the abovementioned narratives show, unlike the European market, the Russian one did not require high quality products; therefore, Georgian farmers developed respective normative expectations during many years of trade relations with Russia. Consequently, when the European market requires the following of various standards and the improving of the quality of products, instead of using this opportunity, certain Georgian farmers find an easy way and prefer a familiar Russian market despite realizing its instability. This explains why a Georgian farmer might consider it easier and more desirable to stay with the Russian market and simultaneously perceive the European market that is unknown to him as unreliable.

“The Russian market is of a higher priority as it is familiar to Georgians, while we still need to find the ways to establish ourselves on the European market” (Male, 26-40, Tbilisi).

“We have been traditionally dependent on the Russian market and this [European market] is really new for us and we do not know whether it is bigger than the Russian market. We do not know how successfully our product will be sold either. Therefore, we should wait to see how this process goes on” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

In the focus group participants' words, it is the familiarity with the Russian market and its territorial closeness and, at the same time, the lack of information about the European market that might be the main reasons for Georgian farmers to prioritize the Russian market.

“The farmers prefer the Russian market as it is closer and cheaper to take products to Russia than to Europe. Also, they cannot do this alone as they do not know the language, there are tons of documents to be prepared, etc.” (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

It is obvious that Georgian farmers making a choice between the European and the Russian markets is based merely on senses and intuition and not on any economic or financial indicators. On the one hand, the public realizes the instability of the Russian market, while, on the other hand, not having relevant information on and experience of trading on the European market, is rather cautious of choosing between the European and the Russian markets. It can be said that the population is in favor of diversifying the Georgian market and expanding trade relations with the EU; however, it does not want to cease trade relations with Russia either. The discussants believe that in the case of proper diplomacy, it will be possible to separate political and economic issues that will enable Georgia, on the one hand, to continue its political and economic alignment with Europe and, on the other hand, to maintain economic and trade relations with Russia established a long time ago. As the respondents expect that Georgia's association with the EU will strain economic relations with Russia, they consider essential the separation of the economic and political aspects and the Georgian government's pursuit of a relevant policy.

"If our government pursues a proper policy, it [Russian market] will not be closed. They should maintain good relations with Russia, too. Does France not have trade relations with Russia? They certainly have some type of trade relations. It depends on our relevant policy whether the Russian market will be closed or not" (Male, 18-25, Gori).

While discussing such diplomacy, the respondents bring an example of the former government which, on the one hand, talked about the ceasing of trade relations with Russia both on the international and domestic stages, while, on the other hand, trade relations were still active in various spheres, including energetics.

"The EU will be on its own; this agreement will not interrupt trade relations with Russia. Politics is one thing and trade is another. Even though the previous government always fought with Russia, the investments were still coming. Telasi was sold to Russians back then, the whole gas and electricity was sold to Russians. So, the conclusion is that the signing of the Association Agreement has nothing to do with this" (Male, 41-65, Gori).

Finally, the focus group participants express their hopes that such diplomatic moves will enable the diversification of the market for Georgian export and state that no matter how profitable the trade relations with the EU are, Russia as an alternative trade partner should be maintained.

“You can export, for example, wine and fruits from Georgia and the farmer will have more motivation. The more is sold, the better the income will be. However, it does not mean to choose only the EU and make Russia hostile towards us. We should balance the relations” (Female, 18-25, Zugdidi).

Social Institutions and Actors Supporting and Opposing EU Integration and Europeanization

Actors Supporting and Opposing EU Integration within the Population

The focus group participants associate Georgia’s EU integration, on the one hand, with the country’s social and economic welfare and, on the other hand, with its democratic and stable development. Consequently, they consider the population of Georgia the social actor most interested in EU integration as the country’s development facilitates the increase of public wellbeing.

“I do not think there is anyone in Georgia who is not interested in EU membership. But it is the ordinary public that is the most interested in this process in order for their socioeconomic conditions to improve” (Female, 18-25, Batumi).

“Those who want their families and their own development, as well as public welfare...” (Male, 18-25, Batumi).

This idea has been revealed in the course of in-depth interviews with experts although the difference is that the experts talk about society in general and do not identify particular segments, while the focus group discussants do identify certain segments of the population most interested in EU integration. These segments are as follows: 1. Youth, 2. Those who have visited EU countries at least once and have seen their advantages themselves, and 3. Those who have experienced certain social injustice, including marginalized groups, especially sexual and religious minorities.

The discussants of older generations emphasize the younger generations' aspiration towards EU integration. They consider the main reason those privileges that accompany visa free movement, enhancing young people's opportunity to receive higher education abroad.

"It is more comfortable, it is advancement, it is a promise of visa free access, they are attracted by this idea of freedom and many of them go to study abroad. Now there are some obstacles, but if we integrate with the EU, they will be overcome" (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

The second group considered most interested in EU integration involves those who have visited EU countries even for quite short periods of time and are well aware of the advantages of EU membership.

"Currently, EU integration is in the interests of those people who know what the EU means, who have seen the EU..." (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

Both the in-depth interviews with experts and the focus groups with the population reveal that visa-free access to the EU countries is one of the best means of raising public awareness. At the same time, the respondents stress the importance of more and more people visiting European countries, whether it is for the purpose of tourism, participating in educational programs or sharing business best practices. In this regard, it is important to overview the situation in Georgia: the nationwide surveys conducted in 2009-2015 illustrate that the frequency of visiting EU countries is rather low in Georgia; particularly, only 3% of the population had an opportunity to live in EU countries at least for three months since 1993 to 2015, while the rate of travelling to EU countries is only 9% for both the respondents and their family members (Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2015, 9). The analysis of variables measuring the level of information shows that such a low level of visiting EU countries is highly correlated with the lack of reliable information about the EU and, therefore, the dissemination of a number of myths. The positive link between visits to EU countries and the level of public awareness is also emphasized in the expert interviews. They think that visiting EU countries contributes to debunking the existing myths and raising pro-European attitudes, which on its side is one of the main factors in the process of Europeanization. As the cases of the Balkans and, generally, Eastern European countries show, the dissemination and maintaining of pro-European attitudes are considered preconditions for the successful

implementation of Europeanization. For instance, the public attitudes in the Western Balkan countries have turned out to be the major factor reinforcing the Europeanization process (Pickering, 2011).

One more social group interested in Europeanization that the participants identify consists of those who perceive EU integration as a means of reviving social justice. The revival of justice implies the provision of equal opportunities to various marginal groups as well as overcoming nepotism and corruption. As some respondents note, the issues of nepotism and the connection with the criminal world (the so called “thieves-in-law”) is still problematic in Georgia and it should be overcome in the process of EU integration as the EU’s basic principles are justice, equality and professionalism.

“Those people who have received education but are unemployed want [EU integration]. But the parents, who do not care whether their children study or not as they will be placed in university anyway, do not want it” (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

“The people who rely on themselves, their hard work and skills, want EU integration; those who know that they will be awarded only based on their professionalism and hard work... Here, a person bearing such features is status-free and does not belong anywhere. Here, you should be a ‘thief,’ and belong to the criminal world...” (Female, 41-65, Telavi).

In this context, the discussants mention different minorities, especially the sexual and religious minorities’ interest in EU integration. They refer to the rights gained by sexual minorities as a result of adopting the anti-discrimination law. In addition, the participants of the older generation from Zugdidi talk about religious minorities, especially Jehovah’s Witnesses, who will no longer be afraid of being persecuted. This issue has been touched upon only in Zugdidi and seems specific to this region.

“They expect that they will gain more rights as a result of EU integration. Even Jehovah’s Witnesses could not walk that freely and now it has changed” (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

The focus group participants identify the features characteristic to those opposing EU integration and Europeanization. They think that the segment of the population having the most negative attitudes towards EU integration is the one that expects the loss of Georgian identity and traditions as an outcome of EU integration. Usually, the discussants attribute anti-EU attitudes to

others distancing themselves from the opponents of EU integration, especially regarding the threats to Georgian traditions. However, a deeper analysis reveals their personal views on the “negative outcomes.”

“They think that we will forget our traditions if we enter the EU and we will totally forget our Georgianness - many people think like this” (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

The cases of such thinking have been exposed when a few participants made a comparison between Europe as a “value loser” and Russia as a “value defender” (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

The representatives of all age groups think that elders and pensioners who have at some point “travelled to Moscow for 35 rubles” (Male, 18-25, Gori) are the main opponents of EU integration. The discussants note that it might be caused by the fact that the elders underwent their socialization process in the Soviet period and their youth sentiments are related to Russia.

“These people are not against Europe because they do not want it. The case is that they spent their youth in those times and cannot free themselves from it” (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

“Pensioners know quite well what is better but they used to live in a different society. They spent their youth in a different environment and the happy days of their youth are connected to it, that is why they are against EU integration” (Female, 41-65, Zugdidi).

The focus group participants name the Georgian Orthodox Church and a certain part of the parish characterized by extremist views as quite influential actors opposing EU integration. As the subchapter on religion shows, according to the discussants’ dominant discourse, although the Georgian Church does not openly oppose EU integration, there are a number of related issues that it criticizes such as new ID cards, the institution of virginity, female labor migration, etc. The respondents think that the Church opposes Europeanization fearing that Georgian values will be lost as a result of this process.

Thus, while discussing the public discourse, the younger generation oriented towards self-development and education is perceived as the main actor supporting Europeanization, while the older generation and those fearing the loss of Georgian culture and traditions as the major opponents of Europeanization.

Other Social Actors Interested in Europeanization

The discussants list other social actors interested in Georgia's Europeanization such as the business sector, the non-governmental sector and the media. It is noteworthy that the interviewed experts also identify the business sector as one of the main actors profiting from Europeanization. Concerning NGOs and the media, such outcomes of Europeanization as the development of democratic structures and practices as well as the freedom of speech have been emphasized which facilitates both actors' activities.

Political Actors Supporting and Opposing EU Integration

The discussants have focused on both public and political attitudes towards Europeanization. Concerning the latter, they usually refer to the state but imply two main political parties – the Georgian Dream (GD) and the United National Movement (UNM). Their views are divided in two poles: within the three age categories, one group of the respondents considers the GD, while another one the UNM, a more pro-European party. It is clearly exemplified by the following two narratives from a focus group discussion with young people aged 18-25 in Telavi.

“Initially, the UNM developed the way to Europe. We used to have aspirations to Europe before but when we speak about the EU and visa-free movement, all of this was initiated during their governance” (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

“Currently, the GD is more eager to join the EU and the UNM does not want it in order to say - we have been way ahead and you could not pursue this course. In this sense, I frankly think the UNM is more an obstacle” (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

As the abovementioned example illustrates, two distinct discourses have been identified based on the focus group discussions: either the UNM's or the GD's pro-Europeanness is stressed. Both discourses are discussed in detail in the following passages.

Those who argue that the UNM is a political actor supporting Europeanization refer to an active pro-European campaign that took place in the period of their governance and that, in the discussants' words, is rather rare now. However, a small group of respondents notes that although Georgia's

movement towards Europe started in the UNM's period, today this party represents the opposition and it is in its interests to hinder the country's progress on the Europeanization scale. This will enable the UNM to lead a successful PR campaign against the GD as it will show the population that the new government is not capable of continuing the initiated course. Such an action is assessed as "not pro-Western."

"The UNM representatives say that they are a pro-Western party but their actions are not pro-Western" (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

Another part of the discussants considers the GD a political actor interested in Europeanization. In their words, as this process is associated with development and prosperity, it will enable the GD as a ruling party to develop a positive image among the population and gain their support. Thus, in the case of both political parties the pro-European foreign policy is considered an inseparable part of the pragmatic strategy to enhance one's political rating.

"It will be a plus for them if the country enters the EU in the period of their governance" (Female, 26-40, Batumi).

However, some participants emphasize that the GD avoids publicly declaring its pro-European course that might be caused by its diplomatic strategy towards Russia. In their words, such a frontstage performance is an attempt to avoid "irritating" Russia.

"I am not saying that they hide it but it is not that declared. Maybe we have the same foreign course [we used to have] but it is not visible in order to maintain neutral relations with Russia. We are not shouting out every minute that we are moving to Europe because we are afraid of aggression" (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

An interesting finding is that the discussants of the middle and older ages tend to consider the GD a less pro-European party. They argue that it is evidenced by the lack of their information campaigns on the EU.

"I think the politicians – the ruling party – do not want it [EU integration]. That is why the population is not provided with necessary information. No doubt, the people get information from the media and the government could raise their awareness by means of the media in just a month if they wanted..." (Female, 26-40, Kutaisi).

Some participants note that one of the indicators of the current govern-

ment's lack of pro-European aspirations is the deficiency of material and human resources necessary for Europeanization. They think that the government does not allocate these resources as it does not consider EU integration a priority, while the lack of resources results in the suspension of implementing the Association Agreement Action Plan that has a direct impact on the speed of Europeanization process.

"Maybe they want to enter the EU but it requires a lot of effort and they do not really bother to compromise many things. In this case, we are the ones who lose" (Female, 26-40, Gori).

The EU as an Actor Interested in Georgia's Europeanization

The focus group participants, especially the younger ones, consider the EU as an international actor interested in Georgia's Europeanization. They believe that the country's Europeanization is strategically beneficial to the EU because it spreads to the region and ensures a stable neighborhood for EU citizens themselves. This argument complies with the recent nationwide survey data showing that the majority of Georgian respondents perceive the EU as a supporter of democracy in the non-member states in order to ensure peace and security in Europe and its neighborhood (CRRC, 2015). This perception is certainly in compliance with the European Security Strategy which views the development of democracy as a guarantee for security, while security itself as a precondition for a country's development (Hughes, 2009). The respondents state that if the EU is unable to ensure a Europeanized, stable neighborhood, not only the countries located on the European periphery but also the member states will hardly believe that the EU is a safeguard of their security.

"Both the peripheries of Europe, like us, and the member states will lose their faith and have a sense of insecurity if Europe cannot guarantee a stable political situation in its neighborhood. Such transitional countries as we are change their course quite quickly" (Male, 16-25, Kutaisi).

The interviewed experts have also perceived the EU as a guarantee of democracy and stability. In their words, the EU tries to ensure its own security through its enlargement and neighborhood policy as Europe will not feel secure without having a secure neighborhood.

Russia as an Actor Opposing Georgia's Europeanization

All the focus group participants, like the interviewed experts, believe that Russia and pro-Russian political agents based in Georgia are the most powerful actors opposing Georgia's Europeanization. It is emphasized that Georgia's approximation with the EU means the strengthening of the country and its liberation from the Russian influences. At the same time, Georgia's getting closer to the EU also indicates its movement towards the Euro-Atlantic Alliance which contradicts Russia's interests in Georgia and the wider region.

"There is a democratic country with close proximity to Russia which can become an example to other countries like Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is fatal for Russia and strategically beneficial to Europe. Thus, the main focus should be on strategic importance, economic ties and cultural unity" (Female, 18-25, Kutaisi).

"Russia is the main obstacle on the way to EU membership. Russia will not let this happen as it is not beneficial to it. If we enter the EU, we will obtain certain freedom and also have closer relations with NATO" (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

EU Integration as Resulting in the Expansion of Russian Aggression

As noted in the previous subchapter, the most important outcome of EU integration is considered to be Georgia's protection from Russian expansionism. Therefore, it is not surprising that Russia is perceived as the main international actor opposing Georgia's EU integration. The fact that the majority of Georgians perceive Russia as a threat is confirmed by the nationwide survey of March 2016 that showed that 47% of respondents think that among different factors Russia represents the main danger for Georgia (NDI, CRRC, 2016).

The focus group participants realize that Russia views the idea of the neighborhood policy as dangerous for its position in the region as the EU enters the space that Moscow has traditionally considered under its sphere of influence (Gower and Timmins, 2009). Although in Trenin's words (2005) both the EU and Russia are supposed to be interested in the region's stabil-

ity, the reality shows that Moscow does not really take measures to ensure such stability (which is exemplified by the August War in Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014). No doubt, EU-Russia relations will be the main factor influencing the development of the countries that are in both Brussels and Moscow's sphere of interest (Trenin, 2005). However, as Haukkala notes, there is less ground for optimism here as Brussels is not able to influence the developments in Russia and all of its attempts to encourage certain changes have failed. The EU has not managed to reach any of its strategic goals in Russia: Russia has not become more democratic, it is not stable and corruption still makes for a serious problem, etc. One of the main obstacles to the successful implementation of EU policy is considered a "value difference" between Brussels and Moscow (Haukkala, 2008).

Based on the abovementioned, there is an expectation among the population of Georgia that the country's further approximation with the EU will result in the increase of Russian aggression towards it. A few significant discourses have been revealed in regard to this vision. According to the first one, the Ukrainian case will not repeat as Georgia has already experienced Russian aggression back in 2008 and it still continues.

"We have already experienced what Ukraine is experiencing now. We have lost what might have been lost. What else can we lose?!" (Male, 26-40, Tbilisi).

"I do not know how stronger the aggression can become after what I saw in 2008. It is impossible to experience more aggression. The country has been torn into two parts" (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

"The aggression is already there. Moscow brings these borders closer and they have nearly moved to the central highway. We are not different from Ukraine at all because this aggression happens here as well" (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

According to an alternative view, the aggression will further grow and bring deplorable outcomes as the EU will never have an open confrontation with Russia because of Georgia.

"The EU will not confront Russia because of us. No powerful state will confront Russia" (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

"Everyone avoids making Russia hostile, especially because of one little Georgia" (Female, 18-25, Gori).

Scholars state that Georgia has to deal with a number of challenges in the context of EU integration among which is the Euro-Atlantic actors' unwillingness to take a risk and get involved when Georgia's relations with Russia become tense. One of the main issues of the national security of Georgia is the asymmetry of power between Georgia and Russia (MacFarlane, 2012). The population viewing Russia as one of the main obstacles on the way to EU integration is aware of this asymmetry. However, part of the public is ready for the confrontation with Russia stating that although it is better to use diplomacy for regulating relations, in the case of necessity the country must be able to resist aggression against it.

"I am ready for this aggression. The fact is that it will increase" (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

The focus group participants also consider problematic the growth of pro-Russian attitudes in Georgia. As noted above, the Georgian government's passivity is believed to be the major reason for it, alongside the intensified Russian propaganda.

"The former government was more active in regard to EU integration. These issues were included in all speeches of Mikheil Saakashvili. It was the state priority. [At present] statements have been made by our Prime Minister that Russia is not our enemy. Society already has doubts whether we are moving towards Europe or Russia. Also, we cannot see active steps. A specific example is Ukraine. We are afraid of aggression and we avoid this topic" (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

Here, an interesting parallel is drawn between Russia and an influential Western state, in this case, the US. Particularly, a discourse is offered that the US is also a hegemon but it is much superior to Russia as the US is "oriented towards people's development, while Russia fully conquers them" (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi). Apparently, the US and Europe should be located in a common Western context: the US and Europe not as conquerors, but as the West having its own interests in Georgia; although not imposing its own rules of the game, but offering them because the country has a pro-Western orientation. Therefore, if the country chooses development, progress and a secure future, the risk-taking is justifiable.

"There is a huge threat from Russia. But what will we gain if we open the door to it? It will dominate us. It conquers us by means of war and how can I voluntarily open the door to it?!" (Female, 18-25, Zugdidi).

Although the focus group participants stress the importance of regulating Russia-Georgia relations, they note that it is a very vague perspective as in the conditions of the current Russian regime it is hard to envisage resolving Tbilisi-Moscow relations.

“You cannot arrange the way to join the EU and simultaneously have good relations with Russia. Putin will not allow you to join the EU and NATO” (Female, 26-40, Batumi).

However, the residents of Gori consider the opening of the border and renewing economic relations with Russia an important step towards their wellbeing. Presumably, the reason for such a vision is their past experience of having trade relations with Russia and the benefits the ordinary citizens gained from the Ergneti market before 2008. No doubt, the residents of Gori are aware of the Russian threats; however, the current economic hardships and even a minimal chance to solve them make the idea of regulating Georgia’s relations with Russia legitimate for the population of this region.

“If the border with Russia is opened, do you know how many people will breathe easy?” (Male, 26-40, Gori).

“When the border with Tskhinvali was open, people worked in Ergneti and earned money, more or less” (Male, 26-40, Gori).

“The people living in villages near the Russian border say that if Russia enters, they will surrender and move to their side. Maybe they wanted to join the EU earlier but now they do not know what to do. This government also failed to keep its promises” (Female, 26-40, Gori).

Although the population is aware of the Russian threats, for those of the middle or older ages, Russia might represent a more acceptable alternative when it comes to cultural values. If the interviewed politicians and experts assess Russia as a “negative other,” the focus group participants’ views are more complex. Some discussants state that the common religion and the history shared with Russia do make difference and that Russia will be able to protect Georgia better than the EU, simultaneously preserving its religion and traditions. In addition, Russia is closer to Georgia, while Georgians are less familiar with Europe and European values.

“If Russia changes its policy, we will give up Europe immediately and turn

to Russia because whether we want it or not, the 200-year and more history has approximated people to a certain extent. There are numerous Russian-Georgian families, people who have gone and carry out their activities there ...” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

“Russia better protects this Christian world from Muslims and this may be our only salvation” (Female, 41-65, Zugdidi).

Although the idea of Russia as an alternative to the EU is not dominant, the discussion of such an alternative still takes place in Gori and Zugdidi, cities bordering the conflict zones of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, respectively. Although these regions have been the targets of Russian aggression, the fact is that they are close to both the non-Georgian population living on the occupied territories and to Russia itself. The focus group participants of both the younger and the older generations stress that society is divided into two: those who were socialized in the Soviet period and feel closer to Russia than Europe, and the youth that in the Russian-European dichotomy identify themselves with Europe based on both political vision and cultural values.

“The youth prefer Europe. Those who lived in the Soviet Union are inclined towards Russia” (Male, 18-25, Gori).

Such an ideological discrepancy between the younger and older generations is characteristic to the population not only bordering the conflict zones but also residing in other regions.

“It is very difficult to say where our vision belongs – to Europe or Russia because the mentality of our older generation is closer to Russia, while a new generation wants Europe. There is some confrontation and I think we are in the transition period” (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

“Ideologies change with time. The older generation is guided by other standards. We see a bright future in Europe. We do not believe that because Russians are Orthodox, Russia will always be a good ‘brother’ for us” (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

“Elderly people prefer to have relations with Russia. The younger generation chooses Europe. Elderly people are afraid of losing traditions. Maybe they are not informed at all but they think so” (Male, 26-40, Batumi).

However, it is noteworthy that despite various interested groups’ at-

tempts to popularize the idea of Russia as a “brother” with the same faith, according to the participants’ main discourse, Russia is an enemy - not only because it is an occupant, but also because hidden behind the façade of the same faith it once even abolished the autocephaly of the Georgian Church. In the discussants’ words, it was the main blow to the Georgian identity that even the Muslim conquerors had not done.

“No matter how indifferent I am towards these unions, the relations with Russia are absolutely unacceptable for me. I am a historian and know how this country behaves. For example, Shah Abbas conquered Kakheti but did not abolish the kingdom, the autocephaly of our Church, while the ‘benevolent brother’ abolished the kingdom and abolished the autocephaly immediately after entry. So, the Russia hidden behind the façade of the same faith is not ‘my brother’ because it did to us what Turk-Seljuks, Persians and Mongols had never done” (Female, 41-65, Zugdidi).

“Both propaganda machines work – Russia and Europe. The stick breaks where it is weak. Those who remade the church into storehouses, painted its walls, fought against our Church. In this case, the Church weakened but the belief of people became stronger and they prayed secretly, having their hands painted in red the next day after Easter. My heart aches more when an Orthodox fights against me because once Georgians made their choice on these grounds” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

“When I was a child, I had private lessons in the Russian language. Now my child is having private lessons in the English language. I want her to look towards Europe and the US and you know why? We are a small country and have to be dependent on somebody. I do not want to be dependent on the occupant so that it knocks me over the head and compels me to say what it wants. I want to say what I want and I think that Europe will not deprive me of this right” (Female, 26-40, Zugdidi).

In addition, the discussants stress that the values related to sexual freedom that Georgians dislike so much have been actually imported from Russia and it is mistaken to attribute them to Europe.

“We call Europe what we see on the TV and do not like certain things. There are very deep traditions in Europe that do not reach us. The traditions we dislike in our country are, in fact, Russian. The focus is on free relations and free sex - this is purely Russian” (Female, 41-65, Gori).

One of the discourses stressing Europe's superiority over Russia is based on the argument that Russia needs Europe itself in terms of culture and economy. According to this view, Russian elites used to go and still go to Europe to get a higher education and Russian oligarchs also invest their capital in Europe.

"Let us look at Russia before and after relating to Europe, say, Russia before Peter the First. Why was Peter the Great? Because he built Petersburg and opened a window to Europe. After that, culture, science and technology develop in Russia. Why did they not have, for example, Tolstoy, Pushkin and Dostoevsky before? Why did they not have painters like Shishkin, did they not have ballet and university? After that, the University of Petersburg and the University of Kazan were built; then Mendeleev, Lomonosov and others came. These developments took place alongside Russia's developing its relations with Europe. If it had not happened, these processes might have been delayed in Russia. It is obvious today that Russia needs Europe – let us see where Putin's daughter lives, where Lavrov's daughter lives, where Berezovsky's children live, where Russian oligarchs live and where they have deposited their money!" (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

The discussants realize that although Georgia is attracted by Europe, this attraction is not reciprocal. Therefore, Europe will avoid any confrontation with Russia because of Georgia and the country will be left alone vis-à-vis Russia again. In this hard situation the respondents consider significant to take into account historical experience and use it in a new context. In their words, history tells Georgians that Georgia always faced a hard choice and things settled only when a clever governor made an optimal decision, which implied maneuvering powerful actors and benefiting from the situation.

"If we review our history, we will discover that there was more or less a normal political situation in our country when we had a clever governor. Geopolitically, we live in a place that is very important but we had only few such governors and call this period the Golden Age. A clever person who will be able to maneuver in this difficult period and somehow regulate this hard situation should be in power. Our kings used to do the same. They acted according to the situation – sometimes they had good relations with Persia, sometimes with Byzantium" (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

The above narrative demonstrates that the pragmatic discourse of se-

curity is dominant among the research participants. Despite their desire to maneuver, they are aware that Russian aggression might be expected at any moment and EU integration is the main means of safeguarding Georgia against this aggression. The discussants also note that the passivity of Brussels, which usually does not make harsh decisions, can be assessed in the Georgian case as an attempt to avoid irritating Russia and soothing its aggression against Georgia. Despite the lack of support from outside, the population is ready to challenge Russian aggression on its own in order to defend its European choice.

“We have experienced and will still experience Russian aggression. We make Europe feel uncomfortable as we are subject to negotiation. Europe avoids this inconvenience and prolongs the process waiting that Russia will compromise and not create any problems for Europe. Therefore, we are the ones to deal with this aggression and defend our choice” (Male, 41-65, Gori).

Georgian Identity and Values in the Context of Europeanization

The population's narratives, like the ones of the experts and politicians, reflect two main discourses on EU integration and Europeanization: the ones of security and identity. The former chapter has illustrated that the pragmatic discourse of security depicts the EU as a safeguard against Russia's imperialistic aspirations. Despite thinking that the EU does its best to avoid confrontation with Russia, and hence it is not ready to support Georgia at critical times, the research participants are still optimistic and believe that the process of EU integration will have a positive impact on the country's security. Concerning the identity discourse, it is rather ambivalent as, despite Georgians' declared Europeanness, EU integration is perceived as threatening Georgian identity to some extent. Although the majority of respondents considers Georgia as historically and culturally European, their views also demonstrate that cultural similarities that are based on a common Christian civilization do not necessarily translate into the similarities between Georgian and European values. They explain it by the fact that Georgia belongs to the Eastern and not Western Christian family. At the same time, the country has historically experienced Asian influences as well.

In terms of value discrepancies, the following two discourses have been revealed: one considers European values superior to Georgian ones, while

another does the other way around. The focus group participants attribute Europeans' superiority to the strength of their civic values such as the rule of law, protection of human rights, etc., while the primacy of cultural (especially collectivist) values is considered Georgians' superiority. It is noteworthy that only the population emphasizes Georgians' cultural superiority, while the discourses on the similarity of Georgian and European values, as well as the superiority of European values, have also been revealed in the in-depth interviews with politicians and experts.

Similarities between Georgian and European Values

One of the central discourses revealed in the course of the focus groups is the perception of Georgia as sharing a common history and Christian values with Europe. The discussants perceive Christianity as a foundation on which the European civilization stands and which ensures Georgians' European identity.

"What we have in common is our Christian civilization in its broad sense and not just an everyday culture. Christianity is a 'locomotive' of our culture. That is why our cultures converge" (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

"Our identity, the Georgian identity, is generally European. In my opinion, if we take the historical aspect into account, it is so. Asian culture is entirely different. The Asian identity is very different from the European one" (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

While talking about Georgia's Europeanness and the convergence of cultures, sometimes Georgia is even depicted as preceding Europe in its Europeanness. As illustrated above, the discourse that Georgia used to be European prior to Europe itself, is common to not only the population but also politicians. It is especially evident from the argument that the oldest human beings, the "first Europeans" – Zezva and Mzia – have been excavated in Dmanisi. The same tendency is revealed in respect to "European characteristics" the discussants attribute to Georgia, arguing that the country had possessed these characteristics (Christian religion, the foundations of democratic governance, etc.) before Europe acquired them.

"We had those values that are now presented as European earlier than many European cultures" (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

"We are ancient Europeans. Take Zezva and Mzia as an example. Many European countries cannot even dream about such a culture" (Male, 26-40, Batumi).

"Take the history of parliamentarianism, for instance. The parliamentary system is associated with Europe. Georgia had its initial forms in the 12th century. From the perspective of history and culture, as well as religion, we are part of Europe" (Female, 18-25, Gori).

The focus group participants often refer to Europeans as cultured, refined and civilized people. Some of them stress the similarities between Europeans and Georgians based on these very features. For instance, as an indicator of being civilized both Europeans and Georgians' reluctance to using force and fighting with others has been mentioned.

"Although we can fight, we are not a warmonger and violent people. Europe is also like that [...] They solve problems through negotiations, in a civilized way, and we are also like that" (Female, 41-65, Gori).

In this context, it is noteworthy that other Caucasian nations (Armenians, Azerbaijanis and North Caucasians) are represented as "less civilized" than Georgians. One of the respondents states that Georgians are more civilized than the abovementioned nations as Georgians always had intelligentsias that is one of the indicators of its Europeaness. Thus, alongside declaring one's Europeaness, Georgians "Orientalize" their neighbors, simultaneously "Occidentalizing" themselves (Todorova, 1997): Georgia, whose Europeaness might be questionable to many, presents itself as a "civilized West" for its Caucasian neighbors.

"Compared to our neighbors – Armenians, Azerbaijanis and North Caucasians – we are truly European and always had the intelligentsias" (Female, 41-65, Tbilisi).

Some discussants even state that the European influence on Georgia was mediated through the Russian Empire as in the 19th century Russia was "partly Europe." Besides, the responsibility for disseminating European values in Georgia is ascribed to those historical figures the participants associate with Europe through the Russian Empire. For instance, Alexander and Nino Chavchavadze, a Georgian poet serving in the Russian Empire's army and his daughter married to Russian writer Alexander Griboyedov, as well as "Tergdaleulebi," Georgian young people educated in Russia in 1860s who were responsible for spreading various innovative ideas in Georgia.

“Indeed, we are part of Europe. We used to have so much influence from Russia and Russia is half-Europe” (Female, 41-65, Gori).

“Has Georgia ever been culturally separated from Europe? I mean the cultural space, not the actual one. Let us take cultural figures in various fields or look at the idea of ‘Tergdaleulebi’ which was a European project in Russia” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

“Let us look at the aspirations of Nino Chavchavadze. She brings European things. Alexander Chavchavadze disseminated European values and technologies in Kakheti. They were proud of European education, weren’t they?” (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

In addition, the population’s narratives also reflect the ideas revealed from the politicians and experts’ discourses that those values that are often considered European (such as the ones related to human rights, social responsibility, etc.) are in fact universal values, and hence characteristic to Georgia, too. In addition, the values related to friendship and in-group relations are universal to the whole world. Therefore, in order to internalize the abovementioned values one does not need to be a European. It should be noted that even those studying the European identity stress that civic values such as the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy are truly universal, and hence they can hardly facilitate the development of a strong European identity among EU citizens (Kaina, Karolewski, 2013).

“Human rights, personal responsibility is common to not only Georgia and Europe but also the entire world” (Female, 18-25, Batumi).

Thus, the focus group participants reveal a rather ambivalent attitude towards Georgians’ Europeanness. On the one hand, they claim that Georgians are undoubtedly Europeans and used to be so even prior to Europeans themselves, while, on the other hand, the performance of one’s Europeanness does not coincide with the respective self-perception. This tendency is also revealed by the nationwide representative surveys: although 56% of the respondents agree with Zurab Zhvania’s statement “I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European” (CRRC, 2013, 2015), it turns out that only 18% of Georgians feel close to Europe and 15% consider themselves both Georgian and European, while 77.3% do not feel close to Europe at all (ISSP, 2013). At the same time, 69% of the respondents identify themselves as merely Georgians (CRRC, 2015). Consequently, the

attitudes to EU integration are also quite ambivalent: it is perceived as desirable and simultaneously as a certain threat to national identity. It might sound paradoxical but at the time when only 12% of the respondents assess negatively the EU and 61% support Georgia's joining the EU, 45% believe that the EU threatens Georgian traditions (CRRC, 2015). This trend should be explained by the fact that EU integration might not facilitate the common European identity but, quite contrary, reinforce the perception of a threat to national and cultural identities, thus encouraging the development of "defensive localism." Besides, it should be stressed that ambivalent identities result from the contradiction between sociocultural and national "voices;" that is, the idea of European identity offered by elites is transformed in the population's everyday life in a specific way (Nanz, 2010). The abovementioned perception of threat and respective ambivalent attitudes are especially obvious when the focus group participants discuss the differences between Georgian and European values.

Differences between Georgian and European Values

Georgians' ambivalent attitudes towards European values are reinforced by the fact that Georgia is perceived as a country currently experiencing European and Asian influences. Part of the discussants state that Georgian and European values differ and these differences are caused by cultural influences. Based on this position, although Georgian art and architecture bear European elements, the traditions and values are more influenced by Asia that ultimately makes Georgians more Asian themselves.

"Our nature and traditions are not European, the Asian influence is stronger" (Female, 18-25, Batumi).

"Maybe we are Europeans when it comes to art and culture, but we are Asians by mentality" (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

"Our culture and traditions are more Asian than European. Our architecture might be European. However, we are striving towards Europe and it does not accept us" (Male, 18-25, Gori).

In this context, an interesting argument is that because the European and Asian influences have always replaced each other in Georgia, the coun-

try is neither “entirely Europe” nor “entirely Asia” but is characterized by a specific hybrid identity resulting from the European-Asian bricolage.

“We are located so that we have been both Europe and Asia. We are neither entirely Europe, not entirely Asia. Probably, the Caucasus is really the Caucasus. By mentality, we are not very European, neither very Asian” (Female, 41-65, Tbilisi).

“In the modern world, we are the nation at the crossroads of civilization” (Male, 41-65, Telavi).

According to one more discourse, even while talking about the common Christian culture of Georgia and Europe, it should be noted that Georgia does not belong to the Catholic or Protestant countries of the West but is part of Eastern Christianity, which has a significant impact on its cultural values. Therefore, the discussants consider the idea of “returning to the European Family” invalid, thinking that Georgia has never been part of this “Family.”

“They talk about returning to the European Family. When were we there? Which Europe did we belong to? Western Europe? Catholic Europe or Protestant Europe? We belong to Eastern Christianity, like Greece. We do not belong to Western Europe. It has been already 300-400 years they differ in terms of religion and their mentality is absolutely different as well. In this case, religion and the values deriving from Eastern Christianity play the key role” (Male, 51-65, Tbilisi).

Two sub-discourses have been revealed while talking about the discrepancies between Georgian and European values: one emphasizes the superiority of European values, while another one the superiority of Georgian values.

European Values are Superior to Georgian Values

Like the in-depth interviews with politicians and experts, the focus groups with the population have also revealed the discourse that Europe is a more civilized actor and its values are superior to the Georgian ones. Those holding this position associate European values with democracy, freedom of speech and choice as well as education and generally “civilization.”

"I associate Europe with certain principles and values. European values include freedom of speech, media freedom, an equal and competitive environment, freedom of choice, etc. Apart from the principles of democracy, I associate Europe with certain culture and science, a certain lifestyle" (Female, 41-65, Kutaisi).

In the discussants' words, European values represent civic values more than the Georgian ones. What makes Europeans truly distinct from Georgians is the rule of law.

"Europeans have internalized the sense of statehood – whether their actions are good or bad for the state. Our nation is more prone to 'Mafia'" (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

"Respect for the law is what I appreciate most in Europe. We do not have it but gradually it also comes to us. Taking an example of Germany, I can say that no matter whether a person holds a high rank or is a common citizen, he/she respects the laws; not because of fear, but because of mentality" (Female, 26-40, Telavi).

Europeans are perceived by the discussants as orderly and industrious people, while Georgians are ascribed opposite features such as lazy and disorderly that is exemplified by the reluctance to queue up, by throwing trash in the streets, by ignoring traffic lights, etc.

"The culture is far more developed in Europe. No driver will cross the red light, even if the road is empty. No one will throw away cigarette butts in the street. We lack the elementary behavior norms in this respect" (Female, 41-65, Batumi).

"I am Georgian and I prefer my nation to the others, but a Georgian is very lazy and arrogant. Why is it that we cannot set the same standards and the same work schedule? We even throw trash right away instead of using trash cans" (Female, 26-40, Gori).

The discussants emphasize that there are well-regulated workplace relations in Europe, while work is not appreciated in Georgia.

"All of the EU countries have their own rules. Georgian people are somewhat different; they will not fully follow these rules. For instance, you work at a station and your working hours are from 9 am until 6 pm. How many times has it happened that you worked until 9 or 10 pm? Many times. They work

from 9 am until 6 pm there. If you work overtime, you are given extra salary per hour. Such a thing can never happen here” (Male, 26-40, Gori).

It is noteworthy that the focus group participants also compare Georgian and European youth based on the amount of their independence. They positively assess European young people’s financial independence from their parents and criticize Georgian young people’s dependence on their parents.

“As soon as they reach adulthood, the politicians and celebrities’ children are no longer financially dependent on their parents [in Europe]. In contrast, they still rely on their dads here; they even get married hoping that parents would support them. People from young age get used to independence there. They are more mature and well-organized” (Female, 26-40, Gori).

Like the interviewed experts and politicians, the focus group participants also ascribe the responsibility for distorting Georgian values and making them incompatible with European ones to the Soviet period. This period is associated with restricted individual freedom and limited responsibility that, in the respondents’ words, have marked Georgians’ development.

“Although at a certain point of history Russia became our bridge to Europe, the Soviet period was a black spot that not only turned us away from European values but also caused the degradation of Georgian values themselves” (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

“European values such as freedom of speech, human rights and freedom of choice were quite restricted in our society because of our past and certain traditions. I mean the Soviet period and the restrictions imposed upon us for many years. This has marked our development” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

In the current situation, Georgians are perceived as the “infants” who should learn the abovementioned values (even such a simple thing as avoiding discarding trash in the street) from Europe in order to approximate with it.

“Our government strives towards Europe; however, society itself has different needs as I am being taught how to throw away the garbage right now” (Female, 18-25, Kutaisi).

“On the way to development, everyone needs someone to learn from. We need others to learn from and also to give away the good we have. It is wrong to think that only ours is the best. It is elementary but we have to learn from Europeans not to discard garbage in the street” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

Such a discourse of social learning is related to one of the mechanisms of Europeanization; that is, socialization, which implies that the EU teaches its partner countries its own norms and values, persuading the “mentees” in their advantages. The socialization mechanism is especially active when a country finds itself in a new and uncertain situation while considering the EU a legitimate actor and doing its best to join it. However, if we take into account the abovementioned ambivalent identities (Nanz, 2010), it is also expected that such social learning might invoke certain irritation; particularly, it might result in overestimating one’s cultural identity and developing defensive reactions against Europeanization. Indeed, as the participants’ narratives reveal, despite their aspiration to learn from Europe, the discussants are simultaneously dissatisfied with the fact that the EU behaves as a mentor and attempts to teach Georgians virtues such as tolerance. Georgians consider themselves quite tolerant and believe that they can teach Europe hospitality and friendship themselves. The involvement in this process of mediators such as the media or NGOs funded by foreign donors invokes the discussants’ particular critique.

“We are characterized by excessive loyalism or tolerance towards others. What a shame that some TV stations teach us, Georgians, how to be tolerant! What a shame to teach hospitality, friendship and benevolence to Georgians! Quite contrary, we can teach and share all of this to cold Europe” (Female, 26-40, Kutaisi).

“I do not like when tolerance is imposed upon me. The Georgian nation has always been tolerant. I do not like the NGOs that impose so many things upon me. But I like many things there and that is why I want to belong to Europe” (Female, 41-65, Telavi).

“Sure, Europe is very good and I think I am European but I should not be taught what friendship, manhood and Georgianness are. It is genetically inserted in me as a Georgian. It does not need dictation from the outside” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

Georgian Values are Superior to European Values

According to the alternative discourse, Georgian values are superior to European values, at least because Georgian culture is older than the European one.

“Our culture is much more ancient than theirs” (Female, 41-65, Gori).

Some discussants emphasize Georgia's cultural advantages over Europe such as a unique Georgian alphabet and "superior" traditions (for instance, hospitality) which invoke Georgians' special pride. As the nationwide representative survey confirms, it is precisely Georgians' pride in their history and culture that is positively correlated with their high national pride (89%) (ISSP, 2013).

"Georgia is a country with the most superior culture, education, ethics and morality. The Georgian nation does not need any teaching in these components. The interference here might have a more negative than positive impact" (Female, 41-65, Telavi).

Thus, Georgians are ascribed features such as morality, friendship and care for their family members, while Europeans are considered colder, more indifferent and less moral people who care less for their own families and parents. Besides, they are "overly free" which implies free sexual relations, homosexuality and, in some respondents' views, even sexual relations with their own relatives.

"Europe is too free and emotionally cold. We are warmer and more modest" (Female, 18-25, Batumi).

"They are Christian but Catholic and there are other customs there. For instance, for them it is normal to have sex with their own cousins. This is unacceptable for our mentality. Maybe I disagree with lot of things here but their customs are not acceptable for most Georgians. People say that Europe disseminates debauchery" (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

"In Europe, if a mother wants to visit her son/daughter's family, she has to warn them in advance. Without warning, they may not even let her in. Also, they send old parents to the shelters. Such things reveal their attitudes pretty well" (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

It should be noted that although some discussants positively assess Georgian young people's aspiration to independence and the decrease in both material and emotional dependence on their parents, others perceive it as an indicator of losing close family ties and consider it a negative outcome of the dissemination of European values.

"As soon as a child reaches maturity, they allow him/her to live separately. I do not think that an 18 year-old person is fully mature to live independently" (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

“There is no family warmth in Europe, a person reaching adulthood leaves the family... We are traditional people and have family warmth... After the age of 18, they do not even care for their parents in Europe” (Female, 41-65, Batumi).

Thus, the discussants stress the superiority of collectivist values characteristic to Georgians over European individualist values. Furthermore, Europeans are considered less patriotic than Georgians. Consequently, the superiority of Georgian nationalism perceived as equivalent to patriotism is acknowledged over European post-nationalism perceived as a deficiency of patriotism. Alongside lacking patriotism, Europeans are also considered rather “programmed,” while Georgians are believed to be more creative. As one of the discussants notes, “Europeans are ‘programmed,’ while we are a nation developed in many respects” (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi). Presumably, the main reason for such a vision is the perception of Europeans as orderly people who follow the rules, while Georgians are considered more manipulative attempting to “creatively” deviate from the rules which makes an essential aspect of Georgians’ “cultural intimacy” (Herzfeld, 2005).

Impact of Europeanization on Georgian Values

Whether Europeanization as a normative process accompanying formal EU integration has an impact on Georgian values causes discrepancies in the focus group participants’ opinions. According to one discourse, such an impact cannot be traced, while according to another one, Georgian values are being changed or might change in the course of Europeanization. However, if the interviewed elites expect a kind of bricolage resulting from the Europeanization process, the population’s attitudes are more judgmental thinking that Europeanization will have either a positive or negative impact on Georgian values. Accordingly, two opposite positions are identified: one emphasizes the positive impact of Europeanization on Georgian values that will make Georgians “better citizens,” while another one sees a negative impact that might cause the loss of Georgian identity.

Positive Impact of Europeanization on Georgian Values

As the EU is associated with civic democratic values and the protection of human rights, the discussants think that the Europeanization process will result in the consolidation of civil society. They expect the reinforcement of democratic values, the following of rules (whether it regards traffic rules or disposal of trash in trash cans), young people's enhanced independence, regulation of workplace relations, protection of human rights, especially those of minorities, gender equality, etc. It is noteworthy that the "idealization" of the EU's civic values and the expectation that Europeanization will result in their immediate enactment are more characteristic to those countries having a shorter experience of relations with the EU, while the old member states pay less attention to such issues. As research shows, joining the EU was perceived as instantly becoming "more European" by young Poles as well (Moes, 2009).

The same trend has been revealed among Georgian respondents, too. They believe that alongside other goods, EU integration will cause the breaking of gender stereotypes and facilitating women's public activities.

"For some reason, Georgians like to create stereotypes of the Georgian man and the Georgian woman. The Georgian man should be tall, a good eater and drinker, with a village and a good job. On the other hand, the Georgian woman should be pretty and a good cook. So, we have these stereotypes and are afraid that in the case we enter Europe, they will be broken – that the woman will leave the kitchen" (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

The discussants believe that alongside Georgia's approximation with the EU the level of tolerance, as well as freedom of speech and expression will grow, and hence the protection of minority rights will improve.

"The closer we get to Europe, the more tolerant we become" (Female, 41-65, Zugdidi).

"That rally (against homophobia) was held in the year of signing the Association Agreement with the EU. It means that these people, this community hoped to stay safe. Before that, they had been afraid that the rally would have been disrupted. Thus, the Association Agreement really brought something positive and it was not just a symbolic act. These people started to feel safer, feel that their non-conformist and marginal ideas have the right to exist" (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

Furthermore, the focus group participants believe that other significant outcomes of EU integration are the reinforcement of democratic institutions and the regulation of workplace relations.

“There is no labor code in Georgia today. There is something but not an appropriate one. [As a result of EU integration] democratic institutions will develop in Georgia and this is extremely important” (Male, 18-25, Telavi).

“The relations between employer and employee, as well as Trade Unions, are quite developed there. I hope the same will happen in my country” (Male, 41-65, Tbilisi).

In addition to contributing to the protection of human rights, the respondents think that Europeanization will facilitate the development of civic consciousness, and hence citizens will be more oriented towards order.

“We are developing and introducing the rules that help us live in a more organized way, say, solving the traffic and garbage-related issues” (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

Negative Impact of Europeanization on Georgian Values

Under the negative impact of Europeanization the discussants imply the substitution of Georgian values and traditions with those Western ones that are considered rather unacceptable. Those holding this position, especially the ones of the older generations who painfully perceive re-socialization in a new environment, express the fear of both losing Georgian traditions and abandoning the Georgian language.

“We get new things and forget what is Georgian and national. We start following European standards” (Female, 18-25, Gori).

“I know that we should learn their language and rules. Our tradition is being gradually abandoned, we are getting lesser and poorer. Why should I forget the Georgian language now when there was so much anxiety about it in 1978? Now they demand us to learn English and the computer. We are not used to it. I want my tradition, my Georgian language, my beautiful wedding and the Georgian toast” (Female, 41-65, Batumi).

The focus group participants emphasize that Georgian traditions and

values represent an area in which the EU should be rather permissive to Georgians.

“Our traditions differ from those of the EU that are rather unacceptable to us. The EU should concede on certain issues and we should also concede in order to merge with them” (Female, 26-40, Kutaisi).

“They gave us so many assignments on everything; however, none of them considers our traditions and takes our mentality into account. That is why I think they want to erase everything in our brains and then we will become Europeans. That is why I think they do not feel any closeness to us” (Female, 41-65, Tbilisi).

It is noteworthy that the perception of one’s identity and traditions as “distinctive” is also characteristic to other countries undergoing the Europeanization process. It is illustrated by the Polish and Romanian political and popular discourses prior to joining the EU that stress the uniqueness of these countries, and hence the necessity of the EU’s special treatment and permissive approach towards them (Tsuladze, 2013).

When it comes to the local values and traditions, most of the discussants are rather sensitive to the issue of the LGBT community. Although some respondents consider the growth of tolerance and protection of minority rights the positive outcomes of Europeanization, they still fear that EU integration will result in the increased number of LGBT people. They talk about the danger of both organizing Pride parades and legalizing gay marriages. Although such marriages are not currently legalized, the discussants fear that future generations will consider acceptable both homosexuals and their marriages. In this respect, the discourses of all three generations reveal a similar tendency to view the anti-discrimination law as being imposed upon Georgia by the EU.

“For instance, they have passed the law about minorities. I do not have detailed information about it. Let Europe accept us as we are” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

“I do not want my 17 year-old child to hear so frequently about sexual minorities. Let it be as it used to be before. Our state has never popularized this topic, neither did we have any regulations. Our Georgianness based on our religion and family traditions has safeguarded us from the vampire-countries. I want it to remain as it is and I do not want the EU to use any sanctions because of it” (Female, 26-40, Kutaisi).

It should be stressed that there are also different arguments on whether the LGBT community represents a threat to Georgian identity. However, the above defensive argument confirms that this issue is quite sensitive. The discussants who do not consider the EU responsible for reinforcing the LGBT community provide the following arguments to support their position: the EU does not enforce Georgia to legalize homosexual marriage as it is not legalized in the majority of EU countries and not supported by its citizens either; homosexuals have become active in Georgia without the EU's interference and the EU's positive influences outweigh its negative ones even if it is somehow related to the growing number of LGBT people. Usually, younger participants provide such arguments and their views are quite close to the ones of the interviewed elites. It seems the politicians and experts also take a defensive position and try to emphasize that it is not in the agenda to legalize non-traditional marriages but to resist violence and discrimination. Furthermore, they refer to the argument that even EU countries are not unanimous about the legalization of homosexual marriages and never make any decisions without public consent.

"There are lots of myths and distorted information about the EU. Some people think that being a EU member also implies the increase in the number of sexual minorities, their propaganda, legitimization of gay marriages, etc. This is not true. The EU just requires human rights to be protected, while everybody is a human being regardless of gender, religion or ethnicity" (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

"Europe is often associated with debauchery. However, same-sex marriage is not legalized in many countries of Europe. Our perceptions are caused by the lack of information. If anyone thinks that Europe will impose gay marriages upon us, they are wrong. Many Georgians think that if we join the EU, same-sex marriage will be legalized here. Why should it happen if it is not legalized elsewhere?" (Female, 18-25, Gori).

The focus group participants think it is the government that should be responsible for raising public awareness, disseminating relevant information on the EU and familiarizing people with European values. Moreover, the government is openly accused for being passive that encourages the dissemination of false perceptions about the EU.

"This happens because of ignorance. The government should do some-

thing to introduce European values to the people. Europe is more than a same-sex marriage. Everybody thinks that as soon as we enter the EU, same-sex marriages will be legalized here” (Male, 18-25, Gori).

The discussants view EU integration not only in terms of reinforcing the LGBT community but also encouraging sexual freedom considered dangerous as well. They fear that gradually pre-marital sexual relations for women will be widely accepted, while introducing sexual education at schools will have a negative effect on children. This is often considered contradictory to Georgians’ religious beliefs.

“When it comes to EU integration, most of all I fear gradually losing our traditions. Neither pre-marital sexual relations nor same-sex marriages are in compliance with our religion. I am afraid it will be lost over time” (Female, 41-65, Gori).

“A new subject is being introduced at schools; that is, sexual education for children. People should not hear about it post-factum. I think the EU is related to this or we just imitate them. If Georgia does not want to lose itself, Europe should compromise on certain things with the Georgian people. They should see that we are standing strong when it comes to sexual education and gay marriage” (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

Some participants state that alongside popularizing free sexual relations, the image that is unacceptable to Georgians is also established in the society; for instance, men with earrings which is indirectly associated with the LGBT community again. In addition, the discussants emphasize that many European subcultural images that are considered esthetic simply do not fit Georgians.

“Georgian man wearing earrings and inappropriate clothes does not fit our perception of masculinity. Does anybody like a man with an earring?” (Male, 26-40, Batumi).

“Traditions will also be threatened. Young people easily imitate negative things. The time will come when a man would be happy just because his son is not marrying a man. For instance, 20 years ago, nobody thought that a Georgian man would wear earrings but now it is common and fashionable” (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

Alongside visual distortion, the discussants also focus on the distorted adop-

tion of European values. A rather ambivalent view is revealed here: on the one hand, in order to maintain Georgian values they consider vital to merge them with European ones, while, on the other hand, such a bricolage is considered the main reason for the distorted adoption of European values (Tsuladze, forthcoming).

“Instead of bad, we should take what is good and adapt it to our values. It does not mean that we should get mixed with them to the verge of losing our own face and identity” (Female, 26-40, Telavi).

“I do not like how the youth interacts with one other. They express protest, even in their outfit... There are things they take from Europe in a wrong way. Our mentalities differ. It looks bad here but not there” (Female, 26-40, Gori).

The focus group participants considering EU integration harmful to the Georgian identity can be divided into two groups: those with more “optimistic” views believe that if Georgians raise future generations based on traditional values, the Georgian identity will not be endangered.

“I teach my child the same things I was taught as a child. If I appreciate my traditions, I will pass on to my child what I think is good and other opinions would not matter. Generations are taught what you have been taught and I do not understand how European integration might influence the upbringing of my child” (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

In contrast, the discussants with “pessimistic” views state that even if Georgian values are preserved today, the future generations will not be able to preserve them and Georgian mentality will gradually change; particularly, the hospitality tradition will be lost, homosexual marriages will be legalized, youngsters’ respect for elders will weaken, etc. It should be noted that not only the representatives of the older generation but also the young people aged 18-25 hold these views. Although the studies reveal that because of the access to information the youth is more pro-European than the older generation (Moes, 2009), nevertheless, even the young people might consider useful the Soviet-time informational vacuum as a safeguard against the Western “debauchery.”

“There are 5-6 generations left by now who know precisely what Georgianness is. Although it is hard to define, at least we have some ideal in our mind. After 10-15 years even this ideal will be lost. My child will tell me: ‘Daddy, our neighbor has a new wife’ and this wife will be a man but he will perceive it as a natural thing. Maybe I do not want my children to find out about certain things

but I will not be able to control it any more. During the Soviet times, the information about the outside world was limited, we could not go anywhere and had a small circle of acquaintances. Now it is possible to see what is happening in 1,000 kilometers, you can have friends everywhere and it will be difficult to persuade one's own child not to fall in love with his/her cousin [...] There will be no hospitality any longer. And you cannot lock up your own child. In case you do so, he/she will sue you for violence" (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

"No, they will not demand us to change our traditions. However, even if we follow our traditions, our children and grandchildren will be forced to forget the past. Future generations will follow other rules" (Female, 18-25, Zugdidi).

As noted above, age differences have not really affected the discussants' discourses; however, they themselves emphasize that the representatives of older generations fear the loss of Georgian traditions more than the ones of the younger generations.

"Old and very old people do not want the EU – they think that people with earrings will appear here, while they follow old traditions themselves. The youth wants to enter the EU and become European. However, I will personally never forget my traditions and will raise my children as I was brought up" (Female, 26-40, Batumi).

It is noteworthy that even the nationwide surveys do not show a significant difference based on the age variable: almost the same number of respondents within each age group supports Georgia's integration with the EU; the same is true about the number of those perceiving the EU as a threat to Georgian traditions (CRRC, 2005).

Europeanization Cannot Influence Georgian Traditions

While the majority of focus group participants think that Europeanization has either a positive or a negative effect on Georgian values, according to the alternative position, such an argument lacks evidence as no influence can be traced. Here the positions are grouped the same way; particularly, whether European values are considered beneficial or harmful to the national identity.

Based on one discourse, Europeanization will not result in the spread of

civic values in Georgia unless Georgians themselves do not attempt to undertake changes such as following traffic rules, discarding trash in trash cans, etc. The discussants consider the increase of the educational level and the development of civic consciousness as necessary preconditions for such changes.

“There is a problem of education. Many young people think that after integrating with Europe they will be able to smoke weed. I have many friends who are too lazy to work. We have to focus on self-development. We should not drop cigarette butts in the street, we should give our seat to the elderly and we should be polite. Everyone should take care of one’s own development and the nation will gradually advance” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

It is noteworthy that although, on the one hand, the discussants perceive the traditional model of socialization as a safeguard against European values and the means of maintaining the national values, on the other hand, they believe that this model does not contradict European values but is a precondition for their acquisition. It is also noted that the EU is oriented towards the protection of human rights and does not demand Georgia to change its values or give up its traditions. Moreover, according to one of the discourses, people preserve their traditions within the EU and encourage Georgians to do the same. Consequently, Europeans will warmly welcome Georgian culture and traditions.

“Do you think Europeans do not think about their own traditions and values? Do you think only we worry about our values? I have recently had a German guest saying that Germans also think about maintaining and recovering their traditions. They also have the traditions that differ according to the regions. It is wrong to think that we are the only ones to worry about our traditions” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

“I have only positive associations [with Europe]. Moreover, I do not think that what Europe considers central – human rights and freedom – makes anyone give up one’s own traditions and identity. I do not think Europe forces us to condemn our own” (Female, 26-40, Zugdidi).

Based on other discussants’ words, the Georgian identity is so strong that it is impossible to take it away. In this context, they make a parallel with the Soviet period thinking that if the Soviet regime did not manage to change Georgians’ national and, especially, religious identity, EU integration will not be able to do so either.

“There is lots of talk that if we join the EU, our traditions will change, the Church will be threatened, the mentality will be endangered, etc. By the 1970s, 80s and even 90s, Georgia was part of the Soviet Union. According to the Communists, there was no God and people were not allowed to go to churches or dye the eggs for Easter. They used to check children’s hands for Easter whether they were red or not. We did not forget our traditions and reject our Church and religion even then, so what could happen now?” (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

“The idea that Georgianness will disappear is nonsense. If you are Georgian with all your heart, soul and family, you will stay Georgian regardless where you are” (Male, 26-40, Batumi).

Some respondents even state that the meaning of tradition itself is vague: it might have several different connotations. In addition, it is impossible to talk about common Georgian traditions. Therefore, it is impossible that Europeanization bears any threat in this respect. This argument takes us to the concept of “invented tradition” that means that even those traditions we believe to be ancient might in fact be invented a century ago. Such an invention is dependent on the needs of a particular time and situation and aims at reinforcing certain norms and values through repeated actions. Such practices are especially frequent at times of rapid social transformations that challenge the established social norms (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983). All of this makes the concept of tradition vague itself which has been recognized by the focus group participants.

“Traditions are understood subjectively. What others imply under tradition and what I do might differ. This is quite individual and I always joke about the expression ‘they take away our Georgianness.’ What does it mean to take away? How is it even possible?” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

Others think that the transformation of Georgian values is not dependent on merely European influences. On the one hand, values change after a certain time and Georgia cannot be isolated from outside processes, while, on the other hand, certain tendencies that are attributed to Europe are not alien to Georgia either. In this respect, the issue of sexual freedom deserves special attention and the tradition of “tsatsloba” is touched upon.

“What does Georgian tradition say about it? In the movie Khevsurian Ballad, they talk about the tradition of ‘tsatsloba.’ A single woman offers it

to a single man, also a married man. This is what 'tsatsloba' means" (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

"This is bad, that is bad. Who are you to dictate only your own rules? They talk about marrying cousins, etc. [...] Let us build a huge wall then and let us stop interacting with anyone. If we do not want Europe, let us go to Mars and live there alone!" (Male, 18-25, Zugdidi).

Thus, the focus group participants' discourses reveal rather ambivalent attitudes towards Europeanization: on the one hand, this process brings sexual freedom that is unacceptable to Georgians, while, on the other hand, sexual freedom is not alien to Georgians; on the one hand, Europeanization facilitates the spread of tolerance within the public, while, on the other hand, Georgian society is quite tolerant itself; on the one hand, Europeanization threatens Georgian traditions and values, while, on the other hand, it encourages their preservation as well as the reinforcement of civic values that is considered highly desirable. It is noteworthy that these findings coincide with the ones of nationwide representative surveys (ISSP 2013, CRRC 2015) and clarify certain controversies revealed in them.

Georgian Orthodox Church's Perception of Europeanization

Undoubtedly, the citizens' perceptions of Europeanization are largely affected by social institutions and actors, which have a high trust and reputation among the public (Lynggaard, 2011). According to the quantitative surveys, the Georgian Orthodox Church is considered the most trustworthy institution among the listed 15 social and political institutions in Georgia and 84% of the respondents report they trust it (CRRC, 2015). Accordingly, its discourse has a considerable impact on the population's perception of EU integration and its accompanying Europeanization process. A similar impact of the Church has been revealed in different countries of Central and Eastern Europe. For instance, John Paul II's discourse had a decisive role in the formation of pro-European public attitudes in Poland (Surwillo, 2010, 1511). However, the Church can also disseminate anti-European sentiments among the population by portraying the Europeanization process as a threat to national identity and values.

The in-depth interviews with the politicians and experts show that the experts are quite outspoken about the role of the Georgian Church in the

country's Europeanization. However, the politicians who depend on the electorate avoid assessing the role of the Church in the process of Georgia's EU integration because of the Georgian Church's high reputation among the population. The strong influence of the Church on both politicians and the population is acknowledged by EU representatives themselves, which is evidenced by the EU officials' visits to the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia II. As noted above, Stefan Fule and Johannes Hahn, the Commissioners for the European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations held official meeting with him. Thus, the role of the Orthodox Church in the Europeanization process is acknowledged not only by the domestic actors (such as local politicians) but also by the EU itself.

Although our research did not aim to study the role of the Church in the process of Europeanization, it should be noted that the Head of the Church, Ilia II, himself offers a pro-European discourse while meeting representatives of the EU:

"The Church will do its best to ensure that Georgia joins the EU" (Ilia II, 5 March, 2014, civil.ge).

Despite the fact that the Church's official discourse on Europeanization is largely positive, its attitude towards "European values" is quite conservative. It is especially the case while dealing with the anti-discrimination law, LGBT rights, artificial insemination, etc. On the one hand, the Church's official discourse is pro-Western when performing it to EU officials, while, on the other hand, it is highly critical of the Western lifestyle and supports the conservative forces within the country (16.05.2016, on.ge). As noted above, a similar discrepancy in the official discourses meant for the local and international audiences is also visible in the case of Greece: in the discourse meant for the domestic audience, Patriarch Christodoulos presented the EU as a promoter of moral degradation, while in the official speeches meant for the international audience he was rather cautious and avoided criticizing the EU (Sakellariou, 2012). A general overview of the Georgian Orthodox Church's discourse is sufficient to trace the similarities between the Greek and Georgian Orthodox Churches: the official discourse meant for the international stage is pro-European, and hence in compliance with the country's foreign policy priority, while the discourse meant for the domestic audience negatively assesses European values and practices.

It is interesting to find out how the population assesses such a fluctuation in the Church's discourse and whether the latter has an impact on their pro-

European attitudes. It turns out that such a shift in discourses does leave its trace on public attitudes. The focus group participants have diverse views on the Georgian Orthodox Church's perception of the EU integration process: if according to one position, the Georgian Church supports EU integration, according to another it is one of the main institutions hindering this process.

Those participants who believe that the Church supports EU integration base their argument on the fact that the Patriarch has held several meetings with EU officials. At the same time, they point to the former Georgian Patriarchs' pro-European attitudes.

"The Patriarch thinks that it [EU integration] is necessary. Our Church believes that joining the EU is crucial for our country" (Female, 18-25, Batumi).

"I think the Church has a positive attitude towards EU integration. The Patriarch has recently met one of the EU representatives and they discussed the fact that the EU is more than same-sex marriages" (Female, 26-40, Tbilisi).

"Ambrosi Khelaia and Kalistrate Tsintsadze [Georgian Patriarchs during the early period of the Soviet regime] were the most respectful people for me. These people received education in Europe, Germany and, in fact, modernized the Church in the Soviet Union" (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

According to the alternative view, the Georgian Church has a rather negative attitude towards Europeanization. Whether agreeing to or distancing themselves from the religious doctrines, the discussants think that those European values that are incompatible to the Orthodox religion, for instance, the ones related to gender equality, cause such negative attitudes. It is also stressed that even the Patriarch's preaching implies ideas incompatible with European values. In the discussants' views, for the majority of Church representatives, EU integration means the reinforcement of the LGBT community, which is the reason why the clergy opposed the adoption of the anti-discrimination law. This issue became obvious at the rally of May 17, 2013 when an "aggressive crowd" led by the clergy attacked those celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia (Radio Tavisupleba, 17.05.2013).

Besides the clash of values, the lack of awareness among the clergy is considered one of the main reasons for their negative attitudes to Europeanization. Such critical views have been predominantly expressed by the young people aged 18-25. It should be noted that the population's views are quite close to the ones of the experts who also discuss the lack of information

among the clergy and a strong impact of Russian propaganda that represents European values as endangering Georgian ones.

“The Patriarch says that women should not work but raise children. This person is very influential and hence 90% of the population thinks that he is right. So, the majority of women might think that it is better to stay home and look after their kids. He does not care about Europe and education” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

“The Patriarchate is worried about legalizing same-sex marriages and some of them maybe even try to prevent EU integration. There is no real threat but they perceive it as a threat” (Female, 18-25, Telavi).

“There were alarms about the passports with the chip; they were considered to be evil. Part of the clergy associates Europe with debauchery. They persuade their parish that this is bad and some of them believe it” (Female, 18-25, Gori).

The focus group participants believe that because the Church has a high authority, it has a strong impact on public attitudes towards the EU and EU integration, especially since it comes to safeguarding Georgian values and traditions.

“The Church does not want European integration. Lots of reasons are revealed in the sermons – Europe is always bad, it threatens our traditions, etc. There are many reasons and I think the Church plays an important role to prevent the public from becoming pro-European. Nowadays, the Church is very influential and it shapes public opinion. It is against Europe, thinking that it safeguards Georgia from debauchery” (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

It is remarkable that the Georgian Orthodox Church is perceived as an authority by a significant part of our discussants as well. These participants believe that the Church “filters” everything coming from Europe to Georgia and leaves only what is acceptable and beneficial for the country, while opposing what is unacceptable such as the LGBT community, the introduction of civic and sexual education at schools, etc. Consequently, the Church is depicted as an actor voicing and defending the interests of society. In contrast, the government is represented as a passive and incapable actor that is unable to confront the Church. Moreover, the participants state that in order to strengthen its position, the government tries to secure support from the

Church. The abovementioned points to the fact that the Church is perceived as not only more reliable but also as a more powerful institution than the government. Therefore, some respondents consider even desirable its involvement in the government's competence.

"When they protested against the anti-discrimination law, they were accused of interfering in governance. What were they thinking of the May 17 rally? LGBT is an ordinary illness. They were paid and encouraged to organize the rally. They wanted this to happen. I think that priests were to go there. The government will not and cannot act against them" (Male, 26-40, Gori).

This very perception encourages certain participants to both positively assess the role of the Church in "sorting out" European values and criticize the government for introducing such subjects (for instance, civic education) at schools that "put European values into a child's head" and "deprive him/her of the spiritual." The discussants stress that instead of "the Orthodox values developed along the centuries," the children are taught "a program invented by some European" in the recent past.

"The Church sorts out the things that come from Europe: takes what is good and abandons what is bad. These are educated, righteous people who are able to sort out well. They have already accepted what is good in Europe. Europe can neither harm nor improve anything" (Female, 41-65, Telavi).

"The government has introduced the subjects and programs at schools that put European values, idea, phrases and expressions into the children's heads from the very beginning. When they grow up, they can never be positive people in terms of faith and religion. They will look forward to growing up and having sexual relationships. Instead of emphasizing something spiritual, they stress this factor as if it is something positive, they teach children the relations between men and women from the very beginning. They have introduced civic education and our Patriarchate opposes it. [...] The religious teaching was abolished and instead of teaching what has been built during the centuries, they teach a program invented by some European 20 years ago that has achieved nothing" (Male, 26-40, Gori).

While part of the discussants welcome the Church's involvement in politics and perceive it as safeguarding the Georgian people, others negatively assess its involvement and think that despite the Georgian Church's cultural and religious significance, it should not interfere in state affairs. In this case,

the Church and the organizations associated with it are considered “a huge ideological machine” that opposes civic values and human freedoms.

“The Church should not interfere in politics, this is a spiritual government and that is a secular government. A secular government is chosen irrespective of whether a voter is Baptist or Orthodox. The main point is not to interfere in my faith” (Female, 18-25, Gori).

“The Church is a huge ideological machine, capable of influencing the public. However, we should never forget that a person is independent and can make a choice. There were revolutions in Europe, in the Catholic Church, just because it demanded full obedience from the people. Then the reformation movements began, involving the whole Catholic Church, resulting in its dissolution. I am not against Christ, but I think the freedom of expression should be superior to any ideology. Yes, the Church is an indivisible part of our history, culture and traditions. How can anyone go against it? But human freedom is superior and more valuable than that” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

“Nothing will improve until fundamental transformations take place in the Patriarchate and the members of Orthodox Parents’ Union agree that their children should be taught citizenship” (Male, 18-25, Tbilisi).

One of the main reasons for such politicization is considered to be the impact of Russian propaganda and Russia’s use of the Georgian Church as a means of political manipulation. Those who share this view believe that the Georgian Church not only lacks pro-European values but also the majority of the clergy is pro-Russian. The main explanation the discussants provide is the Georgian Church’s Soviet heritage, its connection to the Russian Orthodox Church, and also the fact that a considerable part of the Georgian clergy has acquired its education in Russia. That is why they believe that the anti-European group is much stronger within the Church than the pro-European one. The participants state that all of this is reinforced by the fact that Russia performs itself as a safeguard of religion and morality against European “debauchery.” They even talk about a “vertical scheme” through which this Russian narrative mediated by the Georgian Church is disseminated among the population.

“I imagine the Patriarchate has a vertical scheme where the informational channel goes from Russia to us while we think we are independent. If you observe, they also talk as the Soviets that were distant from Europe did...” (Male, 18-25, Kutaisi).

“They tell people that Europe is debauchery that deprives us of our traditions, faith and religion [...] As we have the same religion, we should be with Russia, our big brother that will always protect us, etc. I think these discourses come from the Church” (Female, 18-25, Kutaisi).

“The Church is very influential and the views are divided into two here. A lot is going on in the Church. I have no idea how but Russia has created its image of the Church protector and many people believe it. Do you think they do not know it at our Church? The Church can seriously influence the public, its choice and direction” (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

Thus, the focus group participants’ assessment of the Georgian Orthodox Church’s attitudes towards Europeanization is double-sided: if part rely on the Church’s official narratives on EU integration thinking that it supports this process, others refer to the sermons and anti-European actions by the clergy considering the Church as one of the main obstacles on the way to EU integration. The participants’ views are also divided based on whether they support or oppose the Church’s approach: the supporters consider it a safeguard of the national identity and express more trust towards the Church than the government; while the opponents stress its pro-Russian position and criticize its interference in politics.

Impact of Europeanization on the Georgian Church’s Authority

Based on the abovementioned, the focus group participants’ views on the impact of Europeanization on the Georgian Church deserve special attention. The discourse that is immediately notable is that although Europeans are Christians themselves, in comparison to the Catholics as representatives of Western Christianity, the Orthodox as representatives of Eastern Christianity have less influence and respect in the EU. Thus, the discussants touch upon the issue of religious asymmetry within the EU alongside the political one, as well as the problem of orientalism based on the religious belonging.

“We know a sad example of our brotherly Orthodox Bulgaria and Romania. The Catholics call our priests ‘Orthodox.’ According to them, we are radicals... However, during World War II there were Catholic priests who fought against the Orthodox ones and displayed so much brutality that even the Gestapo was surprised” (Male, 26-40, Kutaisi).

Some discussants state that because Orthodox Christians are considered radicals and perceived as a problem by the EU, the latter tries to weaken Orthodoxy, especially through strengthening various religious sects. The respondents worry that these sects become powerful and try to attract Georgia's population. In addition, other religions also strengthen; for instance, more mosques are built. The discussants think that the Georgian Church is restricted because other religions are legally equalized to the Orthodox one.

"The rules set forth for EU integration are far beyond our customs: daily habits, crossing oneself at the sight of a church, teaching a child how to cross himself/herself and knowing who our saints were. They try to eliminate these things. This is not just my opinion. It is verified through many actions. They directly say it on TV" (Male, 26-40, Gori).

"EU integration threatens both our traditions and our Church. We are a small country and if we give freedom to others... and we are already giving them, for instance, so many mosques and synagogues are being built that we feel suppressed. There are Jehovah's Witnesses everywhere and their sermons threaten our ancient traditions" (Female, 26-40, Zugdidi).

Thus, the participants fear that alongside EU integration, the population will separate from the Church and the authority of the Patriarch and the Church will decline. Declaring Orthodox Christianity as a state religion is considered a certain solution for the situation.

"I see threats when we talk about the Church. The EU's arrival will distance people from the Church. They will have no time for it any more" (Male, 41-65, Zugdidi).

"Getting closer to the 'European Family' will change a lot in terms of religion. The Patriarch's rating will decrease" (Female, 18-25, Tbilisi).

If on the one hand, the EU is perceived as a threat to Orthodox Christianity, according to the alternative view, it has nothing against the Georgian Church: no EU resolution says that Georgians should deny their religion, the only emphasis is on tolerance that is implied by Orthodox Christianity itself. Those holding this position also stress that besides the fact that Europeans are Christians, all religions are safeguarded and enjoy equal rights within the EU. In addition, they think that declaring Orthodoxy as a state religion is unacceptable as it might restrict the freedom of other religions.

"None of the EU resolutions say that we should deny the Orthodox Christianity. There is a note that we should protect the rights of religious minorities. If their rights are protected, then everyone has equal rights. However, if I recognize Christian Orthodoxy as a state religion, then the minority rights are violated and this is the end of human rights, free will, freedom of religion and other freedoms. They tell us to be tolerant towards minorities; our religion also implies tolerance and I see no contradiction" (Male, 26-40, Zugdidi).

In this context, some argue that EU integration cannot have any impact on the Georgian Church because of its power and independence, as well as the resistance to political changes. Here a parallel is made between 70 years of Soviet governance and EU integration. It is noted that if the former was not able to change Georgians' faith, the latter will not be able to do it either as the Georgians' religious identity is quite rigid.

"EU integration will have no effect on the Georgian Church because, regardless of the form of political government, religion will always stay religion... Communists were fighting religion for 70 years but it was still there" (Male, 26-40, Telavi).

"I remember that my grandmother was a member of the Communist party who got arrested while leaving a church. I remember she used to sit in the corner, silently praying and crossing herself. Mom acted the same way, so did I... One hundred Jehovah's Witnesses can come to me but they cannot change my faith as I know what I believe in and why; Europeans cannot affect my mind either" (Female, 26-40, Zugdidi).

There are certain discussants who think that EU integration might have a positive impact on the Georgian Church. Based on one position, as an outcome of this impact the Church will become free from the thief's mentality; while according to another view, the process of Europeanization will enrich Orthodox Christianity through developing more tolerance, as well as in economic terms.

"The closer we got to Greece, the stronger our Orthodox Christianity became. Economic growth makes Orthodoxy even stronger. I think the closer we get to Europe, the stronger Orthodoxy will become" (Male, 41-65, Kutaisi).

Overall, despite the fact that the Georgian Orthodox Church is considered a strong and independent actor, while the Georgians' religious iden-

tity quite rigid, part of the focus group participants still think that the Europeanization process might threaten the authority of the Georgian Church because of both internal changes and external impacts. In the discussants' words, the internal change implies that as an outcome of Europeanization the population becomes more critical and does not blindly trust the narratives offered by the Church, while the external factor implies the possible outcomes of the EU's religious orientalism. Based on the alternative view, the EU as a union of Christian countries and tolerant to all religions does not threaten the Georgian Church, as it encourages the dissemination of tolerant views among the wider society and the Church. While discussing the impact of Europeanization on the Georgian Church, some contradictory opinions have also been revealed: a few narratives that positively assess the EU's tolerance towards religious minorities simultaneously consider dangerous various sects or denominations' activities in Georgia. Thus, the discussants possess rather ambivalent attitudes about the impact of Europeanization on the Georgian Orthodox Church.

CONCLUSION: PERFORMING EUROPEANIZATION THROUGH POLITICAL AND POPULAR DISCOURSES

An analysis of the presented political and popular discourses reveals how elites and population perform Europeanization in Georgia. As noted above, their perceptions of Europeanization are mainly dictated by the utilitarian and identity factors although the respective discourses are quite ambivalent: on the declarative level, the research participants offer socially desirable narratives on the EU and Europeanization process that are in compliance with Georgia's foreign policy course; however, their ambiguous attitudes are revealed behind this façade.

To start from the utilitarian factors, particularly, the security discourse, it is noteworthy that the EU is unanimously considered a safeguard against Russian threats; however, at the same time, the perception of the EU as a threat to the country's sovereignty, especially because of Georgia's asymmetrical dependence on it, can be read between the lines. Although the interviewed politicians do their best to present EU-Georgia relations in terms of the horizontal ones, the experts and population are outspoken about this asymmetry. Despite this, the safeguarding of Georgia's security is considered such a priority that it overshadows the fears of diminishing national sovereignty.

Another important utilitarian factor has to do with the perception of economic benefits. Both the interviewed elites and population consider the EU a supporter of Georgia's economic development and, in contrast to Russia, a reliable and stable trade partner. However, at the same time, the experts emphasize the issue of "façade" Europeanization that measures the country's progress only based on external formal characteristics which does not improve its actual economic performance; while the focus group participant population hopes for the diversification of the market for Georgian export and believes that no matter how beneficial the trade with the EU, Russia as an alternative trade partner should still be maintained.

It is also significant to assess the impact of Europeanization on a new experience of doing politics. On the one hand, the interviewed politicians and experts talk about the positive changes resulting from the Europeanization process in terms of both developing institutional collaboration and strengthening the internal capacity of political institutions and which has encouraged Georgian politicians to switch to the European model of doing

politics. However, on the other hand, Europeanization is perceived at this stage as a part of the political image created by Georgian politicians for a domestic audience, which is considered crucial for utilitarian reasons (socially desirable self-presentation, “hooking” the electorate, etc.) and has little to do with the political actors’ value system. The ruling party ascribes such a performance to the oppositional parties, the oppositional parties to the ruling one, while experts ascribe it to both the former and the latter.

Alongside the utilitarian factors, the identity factor is of utmost importance, especially since it invokes the strongest sentiments among the population and is one of the main reasons of their ambivalence. The discourses on the EU as both a safeguard of and a threat to the Georgian identity coexist side by side: On the one hand, it is noted that the EU facilitates the preservation of the Georgian identity as it is a multinational union governed by the motto “Unity in Diversity.” Besides, it is stressed that certain Georgian-European bricolage is a necessary precondition for enriching and diversifying the Georgian identity. However, on the other hand, Europeanization is perceived as a threat to the Georgian identity as the interviewed population fear that Western values cause the degradation of Georgian traditions. Their ambivalent attitudes are especially visible when they talk about the EU as a disseminator of tolerance in Georgia although simultaneously a certain frustration is expressed because the EU teaches tolerance to Georgia that has always been tolerant; when European post-nationalist civic values are considered exemplary although simultaneously are believed to point to the lack of patriotism; when Georgia’s Europeanness is ascribed to the common Christian worldview although simultaneously it is stressed that Europe disseminates “debauchery” and contradicts Christian values; when European values are considered superior to Georgian ones although simultaneously it is proudly declared that Georgia used to follow European values even prior to Europe itself. Here it is emphasized that Georgia has been forcefully torn away from this context, and hence it should necessarily return to the “European Family” where it belongs. It is noteworthy that in contrast to the other abovementioned discourses of identity, the one that depicts Georgia as being European prior to Europe itself is characteristic to not only the population but also politicians and experts. No doubt, the views that Georgia has preceded Europe in its Europeanness, and hence Europe is not eligible to teach it tolerance, that Europeans lack patriotism and that Europe’s “civilizational superiorities” are counterbalanced by Georgia’s

“spiritual superiorities” are closely intertwined with Georgians’ high level of national pride revealed by the nationwide representative surveys. However, it should also be noted that only the population’s views diverge on the issue of whether European or Georgian values are superior, while the politicians and experts overtly acknowledge the superiority of European values and perceive Europeanization as a necessary precondition for Georgia’s modernization.

The presented ambivalent perceptions confirm again that the policy makers’ respective efforts are required to raise the level of awareness about the EU and Europeanization among the population. However, due attention should be paid to the raising of politicians’ awareness as well, which is noted by the experts and the population participating in the research. One more important actor whose provision with respective information and collaboration with the state is considered significant in order for the Europeanization process to proceed smoothly is the Georgian Orthodox Church, especially because of its authority in Georgian society. The research participants believe that undertaking these changes is vital for Europeanization to transfer from the normative and discursive to the behavioral level and become an inseparable part of everyday practice in Georgia.

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