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THE COMPETITIVE SECURITIZATION OF FOREIGN POLICY: CONTRASTING IMAGES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN GEORGIA (1991-2012)

Concise running title: *Contrasting Images of the European Union and the Russian Federation in Georgia*

Abstract: *The paper explores competitive securitizations of the Russian Federation vs. the European Union in the Georgian political public sphere through deconstruction of the pro-Western and pro-Russian public political narratives. The dis-information incursion and propaganda of the Russian Federation in the societal landscape of Georgia have become the primary tools of the Kremlin to undermine the soft-power policy the EU and the pro-Western agenda. The study reflects on the rotating political discourses on Russia vs. EU through narrative analysis and deconstructs those metanarratives, that securitize the pro-Western and pro-Russian foreign policy discourses and contribute to fragmentation of the political public sphere. The paper reflects on three interrelated clusters – politics, media and civil society – influenced by the pro-Russian strategic narratives tailored across ‘communities of grievances’ to counteract the Western liberal and normative-based agenda. Alternatively, the pro-Western narrative evolves around liberal conceptions, that tries to transform the post-Soviet Georgian society through ‘mental revolution.’ The political discourse analysis – understanding and interpreting meanings – refers to the public speeches of elites and policy documents for*

deconstruction of narrative structures, as their causal explanations provide insights into the ambiguous and contradictory representations of Russia and the West/EU in the securitized political public sphere in Georgia.

Keywords: *Georgia; European Union; Russian Federation; Securitization; Competitive Narratives; Public Sphere;*

1. Introduction

The paper reflects on the process of securitization of the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation (Russia) in the post-Soviet politics of Georgia through deconstruction of the Georgian political public sphere. The Georgian public political narratives on the EU and Russia selectively build on various political and cultural markers – normative aspects, customs and tradition, religion and historical records – to frame collective identity of the Georgian nation for the legitimization or de-legitimization of the pro- and anti-Russian and pro- and anti-European domestic and foreign discourses in the modern Georgia. The rotating discourses on Russia and on the EU create their dual imaginaries through contradictory and competitive securitizations in the political-cultural setting: the long-established image, *Russia as the saviour*, builds on religious commonality and on the fact of redemption of Georgia from the Muslim yoke in the 19th century, thus Georgia preserving the main feature of its national identity – the Orthodox religion – with the help of Russia. On this backdrop, the pro-Russian groups concentrate on religious commonality with Russia, seeing Russia as the sole direction of Georgia's alliance and friendship and are in favour of the balanced politics between Russia and the West for restoration of country's territorial integrity. The Georgian and European cultural features, primarily religious differences and numerous everyday practices and cultural norms, are represented as mutually inconsistent and rapprochement to the West is considered as a precondition of the demise of the traditional Georgian culture and the Georgian nation. The anti-Russian/pro-Western actors promote the image of *Russia as an eternal enemy of Georgia*, highlighting the negative past experience of Georgia's annexation during the Tsarist and Soviet Russia, which led to the loss of statehood and nationhood in the 19th century, and the 200 years-long Russian colonization, characterized with the Russification attempts and Soviet-era purges of country's

political and cultural elites. The anti-Russian rhetoric is based on the Russian occupation of the Georgian territories (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) after the August War of 2008 and promotes the narrative based on the shared cultural values with Europe and mythology of Georgians as an ancient European nation, disseminated through symbolisms of *mental revolution* and *re-joining the European family of nations*. These narratives claim that without alternative to the Northern vector, which is the pro-Western/pro-European drive of Georgia, the restoration of territorial integrity and provision of national security will not be ensured.

The study explores the anti- and pro-Russian and anti- and pro-European metanarratives respectively, that create the controversial image of Russia and the EU in the Georgian [political] public sphere through their securitization. The imaginary of Russia and the EU through these public political narratives, i.e. grounding securitization as a discourse, “represents a discursive process, through which individuals, communities and nations make choices, construct identity and inspire action” (Ganz, 2016, p. 1). The competitive public political narratives were born on the backdrop of changing social and political reality and formed and re-created over time as political actors’ temporally and spatially defined narratives; as public narratives they “refer to the individual and the way in which narratives of institutions and organizations define and locate social actors’ understandings within a wider socio-political context” (Bacon, 2012, p. 770). The Georgian political and cultural elites manipulate national political discourses through public political narratives for their political gains, diverging or converging either with the anti-Russian or pro-Russian or with the anti-Western or pro-Western (i.e. European) courses. The controversial imaginations of Russia and the EU contribute to the appearance of the new socio-cultural cleavages and fragmentation of the political public sphere, where “public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of state” (Habermas et al, 1974, p. 49). The division of a [political] public sphere through creation and dissemination of exclusive metanarratives fragments the ‘marketplace of ideas’ and destabilizes socio-political setting of Georgia as the “national mythmaking is [and actually it has been in Georgia – D.M.] the attempt to use dubious arguments to mobilize support for nationalist doctrines or to discredit opponents” and “the product of deliberate elite efforts to mobilize latent solidarities behind a particular political program” (Snyder & Ballentine, 1996, p. 66). In the Georgian political public sphere creators of the exclusive metanarratives successfully mobilize segment(s) of society around their political discourse(s) through securitization of either West or Russia.

The research refers to the narrative analyses, which differentiates the elements of the stories told about Russia and the EUrope through deconstructing *relationality of parts*, *causal emplotment* (which provides a normative interpretation, ostensibly explaining why events turned out the way the narrative suggests they turned out), *selective appropriation* of events and elements of a narrative, omitting those occurrences which do not fit the aims of the authors, and *narrative accrual* – a process of repeated exposure to a narrative or set of narratives leading to the shaping of a culture, tradition or history, that form the foundations for the [political] public sphere in Georgia. The narrative analysis approach helps to uncover the securitization discourses; the ruling regime repeatedly re-tells and adds various elements to the narrative, since narratives are developmental and dynamic by nature. The critical approach of narrative analysis insists on a nuanced stance between the simple acceptance or rejection of a narrative: a narrative accrual leads to ‘the imposition of the narrative monologue of power;’ such a focus leads to analysis of the validity of content as truth whilst not ignoring the notion of validity, temporality, contingency, agency and the normative, which create context for different images of Russia and the EU in Georgia. The methodological motivation comes from a commitment to “talking seriously what political actors say about themselves and their projects as a key source of insight into both worldview and policy direction, as comprehension of self-conceptualization informs our understanding of motivations and actions” (Bacon, 2012, p. 771).

Since declaration of its independence on April 9, 1991, the Georgian political landscape has turned into the battle ground between the pro-Western and pro-Russian political forces. The Russian funded or proxy media outlets, NGOs/CSOs spread disinformation, manipulate public opinion, discredit the pro-Western political forces and undermine the pro-Western discourse through their rhetoric. The soft-power policy of the EU (hence normative trigger of democratization process) becomes gradually undermined through collision of historical-religious (Russian Orthodoxy) and cultural-value (liberal conception of the West) driven agendas. Georgia is particularly vulnerable to this tendency as the population is bifurcated across the identity and value axis and even split between the *liberal-democratic model* (West) and the *Orthodox-Christianity* (Russia), that leaves ample avenues for the emergence and activation of the populist and illiberal forces of different kinds. The EU, challenged internally with the populist backlash from the left and the right of political spectrum, is weakly present in Georgia with its counter-

measures and counter-narratives to contain further fragmentation of the Georgian [political] public sphere in favor of the Russian forces and against the pro-Western drive.

Theoretically, the paper refers to securitization theory, which claims that any country's policy line in general is shaped and driven in or through securitizing discourse (Buzan, 1998, p. 24) created by elites with particular foreign and domestic purposes. The discourse is created through a speech act, which enables formulation of a particular topic in a way, that it draws attention of a nation. Stressing particular threats, posed to a state and a nation, is already an act of securitization (Erikson & Noreen, 2002, p. 10); whereas securitizing actors are mainly political elites - leaders, lobbyists, governmental agencies (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 40), which mobilize masses through the act of securitization and make them supportive to their judgments and policy aims, thus legitimize their desired policy line (Erikson & Noreen, 2002, p. 10). In Georgia, political actors, either pro-Western and pro-Russian, present some issues – the Western enlargement in post-Soviet space and actions of the Orthodox Russia – as a “threat to existence” of Georgia and point to the need either of neutrality of the country or necessity of making choice in favor of the lesser evil (pro-Russian camp) or argue for a firm adherence to the Euro-Atlantic aspiration (pro-Western camp). This leads to legitimization attempts of particular foreign and domestic policy lines in the modern Georgia. Thus, securitization explains preconditions and mode of behavior of various political elites of Georgia, choosing either West or Russia as their preferred ally for the future development of the country.

1. Public Political Narratives and Their Application(s)

The narrative analysis approach uses more positivist and empiricist methods to ‘fill in the gaps’ between stages of a narrative explanation by focusing on the mechanisms producing particular political outcomes. The danger is that downplaying the role of narrative as an explanatory tool in the sphere of scientific explanation has an unintended consequence of diminishing the weight given to analysis of narrative content when political actors themselves employ this explanatory tool (Bacon, 2012, p. 769). The techniques of narrative analysis are used at the macro level to explore cultural contestation and instead of applying discourse theory for the understanding and interpreting meanings, it focuses more on how analysis of narrative structures and their causal explanations provide insights into policy enactment and intentions. Identifying

narrative as such and employing the tools of narrative analysis to study it, has an explanatory reach not present elsewhere; in dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative approaches, narrative analysis sits firmly in the latter camp (Bacon, 2012, pp. 769-770). A public political narrative consists of a sequential account given by dominant political actor(s), which connects selected, specific developments to impose a desired order on them. Narrative of a state's political discourse, devised by political elites, seeks to impose order on different events by selecting, connecting and interpreting them within the context of a development story, completed with causal links.

The political and cultural elites are the main creators of the public political narratives, who employ them habitually in communicating with the public. Particular events are placed in a particular context for a particular purpose through orchestration of the narrator(s) (Bacon, 2012, pp. 770-771). A good story can boost popular support for a party, politician or regime, touching the populace in a more elemental and powerful way than detailed, intellectually robust, but dry-as-dust policy proposals (Bacon, 2012, p. 768). The deconstruction of the Georgian case through narrative analysis is focused not on the narrative's external reception, but rather on its essential nature and revelations on its narrators. This leads to a holistic understanding, absent from overly atomized accounts of the regime's policies: on the one hand it uncovers motivations, worldview and inconsistencies of actors, while on the other hand provides explanatory, critical and predictive insights into a polity. The narrative analysis is applied not as use of narrative explanations by political scientists, but as the study of narratives themselves as used by political actors, which is an unexplored realm of the post-Soviet narrative politics and their role in the emergence of the securitization discourse in particular.

Analyses of the public political narratives employed by political actors are rare, and where they do exist, their focus tends to be less on the narrative *per se*, and more on its performance and its impact on an audience. This study does not concentrate on the outward effect of narrative, i.e. the role in mythmaking, collective memory and nation-building, that is its political performance; but rather seeks to uncover in what ways does analysis of a public political narrative(s) illuminate its narrators' norms, priorities, future intentions, concerns, incoherencies, etc., hence whether securitization will be successful or not. Public political narratives provide insights into the worldview of political actors, as the public political narratives represent and provide self-conceptualizations of and for their narrators – public individuals,

parties or regimes – and informs on the motivations and actions of the political actors (Bacon, 2012, pp. 768-770). Strength of narrative lies in the causal emplotment gained from linking events together and enables problematic reinterpretation of isolated elements without undermining narrative as whole (Bacon, 2012, p. 780). Shifts in narrative temporalities indicate changes in self-conceptualization and political priorities through alterations in central motifs, temporalities, symbols, agency, plots and subplots.

1. **Central Motifs** – narrative's central motifs represent the priorities to which other elements take second place. Paradoxically, the national idea has been a central motif and starting point for both, the anti/pro-Russian and anti/pro-European public political narratives, hence successfully securitized in each case. For the anti-Russian public political narrative, the central motif is centered on the degraded past under the Tsarist and the Soviet Russia, which lead to the loss of the Georgian statehood and nationhood; Russia is the enemy, which has been always fighting against the Georgian nation through overt and covert means; the pro-European narrative represents Georgia as an ancient European civilization which should aspire to and be protected by the EU. For the pro-Russian one, the central motif is the image of Russia as the savior of the Georgian identity/nationhood from the Muslim milieu in the 19th century, extended to the idea that the place of Georgia is in the Orthodox world, headed by the Russian Federation; it is supplemented by the anti-European narrative, which represents the West as a decadent civilization threatening Georgia's Orthodox cultural heritage.

2. **Temporalities** – the central motifs of anti/pro-Russian and anti/pro-European public political narratives are constructed through the selective appropriation of events and elements: the pro-Russian narrative highlights the fact that Moscow saved the Christianity in Georgia in the 19th century, but abstains to mention the loss of the Georgian statehood at the same time, captured by him through annexation; in contrast, the anti-Russian, pro-European narrative, concentrates on the latter aspect and argues that Russia's support to the Georgian Kingdoms in the early 19th century was not the part of Russia's desire to protect its Christian neighbor, but rather a continuation of the policy of extension of the Romanov Empire in the Transcaucasia (the South Caucasus). In its turn, the anti-European narrative mainly is concentrated on liberal, that is anti-Christian elements of the Europe, coming against the Christian traditions. Thus, "selective appropriation of any story through narrativity requires discerning the meaning of any single event 'only in temporal and social relationship to other events' (Bacon, 2012, p. 775) and

capturing the time, when it is applied in the service of a political project, thus the success of the securitization is guaranteed.

3. **Symbols** – narrative is a ‘constructed configuration,’ where central themes are composed of symbolic practices and framed through a temporal relationship (Bacon, 2012, p. 777). The anti-Russian /pro-Western narrative is concentrated on symbols of the destructive rule of the Tsarist and Soviet Russia in Georgia – abolition of the Georgian Kingdoms and deportation of the members of the Georgian Royal Family and nobility to Russia; abolition of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church and resulted closure of the Georgian churches and change of the language of liturgy; it also refers to the shootings of the intellectual groups of the Georgian society during the Soviet rule in 1937 and relatively recent (1989, 1992-1993, 2008) brutal actions of Russia against Georgia. This line is presented as a deviation from the natural development in a line of the Western nationhood and statehood of Georgia in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Alternatively, the pro-Russian narrative point to the complex nature of the Russian imperial rule in Georgia, which left its religious-cultural imprint on the Georgian society and concentrate on the cultural exchanges during the Tsarist Russia (even “Europeanizing” Georgia at that time) and the Soviet Russia (modernizing the country under socialism) between the two nations which, both, are endangered by the Western civilization. In this narrative, the cultural-historical exchanges, under cover of the shared Orthodox religion, create strong bonds between the two people, thus serve as antithesis of the pro-Western/European drive. On this backdrop, normalization of the political relations through the revitalization of cultural contacts is promoted in the name of public diplomacy. The latter line became particularly apparent after the August War in general (the West did not help Georgia – D.M.), and with the change of the government in 2012 in particular.

4. **Agency** – narrative requires agency, which are mainly political actors – characters, with a place in the plot and a role in the story. In public political narratives the personal agent is less self-evident as the story is of a more impersonal system or regime, but it defines itself as a more personal agent and the regime imposes a temporality which draws attention to the leaders. The political leader – the actor-narrator – provides positive accounts as ‘heroes or victims’ and their opponents as ‘evildoers or fools’ (See: Bacon, 2012, pp. 774-779). This has been the peculiar characteristic of the anti/pro-Russian and anti/pro-European public political narratives in Georgia: the first and third presidents of Georgia – Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Mikheil Saakashvili

– promoted the anti-Russian and pro-Western (Gamsakhurdia less so, Saakashvili overtly embarked on this trajectory) orientations, referring either to their personal or ancestors' experiences, presented them as the victims of the Soviet rule in Georgia – a story shared by a great majority of population. The pro-Russian societal actors, mainly represented by cultural elites and various CSOs – recall their commemorations on the Georgian-Russian cooperative frameworks during the Soviet times through academic and cultural exchanges and produce personal stories how they defended the state interests at various levels of the Soviet policy-making structures (e.g. language clause of 1978, narratives produced through history textbooks, etc.). Different from the two above-mentioned scenarios, the third public political narrative (also re-appears periodically) is promoted as the so called “neutral narrative,” sometimes even termed as “the pro-Georgian” one, that criticizes those who were quite close to the Soviet and post-Soviet regimes of Russia or were waging radical policies against the Kremlin and argues for the necessity of pursuing a ‘balanced politics’ between the EU/West and Russia for normalization of the Georgian-Russian relations and resolution of the problem of Georgia’s territorial integrity.

5. **Plots and Subplots** – anti/pro-Russian and anti/pro-European public political narratives rotate around single coherent stories – central motifs – with subplots, through which narrative retains relevance by being ‘reactive to daily life’ and appealing to different audiences at different times, hence ensuring constant and continuous securitization. A successful public political narrative through interchange of plots and subplots, maintain the developmental flexibility essential to its usefulness and longevity. Subplots ensure flexibility of the narrative’s central motifs, emerging not as alternative stories, told not by those opposed to the regime, but told by the regime itself. Subplots facilitate the development of a dynamic narrative through widening its appeal and keeping potential political pathways open. A critical reading of public political narrative requires an awareness of alternative narratives within a grand public political narrative. Relationship between plots and subplots highlight priorities, policy options and likely policy choices (Bacon, 2012, pp. 779-781), that change according to the context and political interests of elites. In the Georgian case, anti/pro-Russian and anti/pro-European public political narratives “provide a temporally sequential account, setting out a story in sections entitled ‘lessons to learn [from past]’, ‘the modern situation’ and ‘a chance for a worthy future’ (Bacon, 2012, p. 772), which are spatially specific, focusing on Georgia and attributing more negative elements of the

narrative to the West or to Russia respectively; the selective appropriation of the events and facts construes a desired account via rotating subplots.

The present research employs methods of qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources and refers to the discourse-historical approach to reconstruct the changing political tendencies and understanding competitive securitization discourses. The discourse-historical approach is a relevant method as it is a “systemic collection and analysis of that information, which is related to particular past events and enables to explain present developments for prediction of the future” (Connaway & Powell, 2010, p. 79); as “[t]he analyst should not observe threats, but to determine how, by whom, under what circumstances, and with what consequences some issues are classified as existential threats but not others to determine “how threats and appropriate responses [...] how the ‘objects’ of security are constructed and what are the possibilities for transformation of ‘security dilemmas’” (Diskaya, 2013). The deconstruction of public political narratives highlights which issues were securitized and actualized in public domain; whereas the method of process tracing, in its causal inference line (Bennett, 2010, p. 210) is used to reconstruct the changing political tendencies, through referring to the secondary analysis of policy papers and commentaries. This enables to connect the separate forms of approaches into one-another through analysis of language texts, discourse practice and discourse events, such as socio-cultural practice (see: Norman, 1995).

2. Whose Securitization? Active Russia vs. Passive EU/West in Georgia

Since declaration of independence, Georgia witnessed the re-ideologization of politics and assertions in legitimization from the side of new elites, which differently affected the identity of the new state (See: Jones, 2003, pp. 83-110): plots were changed, re-created, producing number of subplots. During the early 1990s, re-ideologization took place under the motto of breaking with the Soviet Russia, and after the Rose Revolution of 2003 under the motto of overcoming the Soviet legacies through “mental revolution.” After the Rose Revolution, the *Realpolitik* of Shevardnadze, promoted through a ‘neutral narrative,’ was gradually transformed into the radical pro-Western narrative of ‘returning back to the European family of nations,’ by Saakashvili driven by cultural-value aspects. New generation of political elites referred to the oldest Europeaness of Georgia and promoted the effective role of its location between the East and

West at a civilizational crossroads for its foreign policy, unlike the geopolitical vision of Shevardnadze. The cultural sources of Georgian identity, not religion, were used to disassociate Georgia from Russia and connect it firmly with Europe. Alternatively, the pro-Russian forces have employed religious features – the Orthodox religion presented as the core of the Georgian identity, to oppose the Western drive and under its cover appeal to the geopolitical aspects (a foreign policy tool of the Russian Federation) arguing that Georgia cannot escape from its geographical location as a neighbour of the Russian Federation, thus relations between Tbilisi and Moscow should be normalized in line of mutual interests.

Active Russia. The Russian funded actors promote ultra-nationalist and extremist policy lines and through coordination of their activities and message-box reinforce the pro-Russian discourse. Their activities are not institutionalized, rather various individuals disseminate the pro-Kremlin narratives (Detector Media, 2017, p. 8). Culturally driven messages create alternative version of historical past and bifurcate the Georgian society between the West and Russia, which promote the image of Moscow as a defender and guard of the old European values: Christianity, family, state, nationalism and sovereignty, factors widely supported and valued by European citizens, but quite often side-lined and downgraded by European leaders in their rhetoric, thus pushed to the backstage of policy-making (Karaganov, 2014, p. 13). These narratives centre on the perception of shared ‘cultural-religious’ aspects between Russia and Georgia which successfully undermine the normative power of the West, hence foundations of the liberal democracy, in the country. The Russian Federation’s *operational narratives*, or a comprehensive narrative strategy, is a complete package of both offensive and defensive messages coordinated to both degrade adversarial audiences and to build resilience within friendly audiences (Cobaugh, 2018).

The pro-Russian groups present the Georgian and European cultural features as mutually inconsistent, the approachment to the West is considered as a precondition of the demise of Georgian culture and Georgian nation (Thomas, 2016). The government of Georgia manipulates the existing threats stemming from Russia and tries to launch a neutral politics, although by these actions it reinforces an anti-Western rhetoric in the country (Detector Media, 2017, p. 8). This tendency enables the Russian Federation to maintain the satellite states in the post-Soviet space as a buffer zone, thus Moscow has gradually increased the level of (dis)information influence to undermine the public debate – the cornerstone of deliberative democracy in the public sphere of the country.

Undermining the Passive EU. The Russian-backed narrative undermines the image of EU through the following measures:

- In the sphere of politics, it plants nihilism in the society regarding the pro-Western course of the country and bridges the issue of restoration of territorial integrity of Georgia with normalization of relations with the Russian Federation, rather with the Western provision of security guarantees;

- In the realm of culture, it portrays the traditional cultures, among them the Georgian culture, as endangered by the Western liberal conceptions (in this respect these narratives are concentrated on the LGBT rights in particular);

- In terms of economy, the visa liberalization and the market of the European Union, are presented as a non-realistic and undesirable option for the agricultural sector of Georgia due to its regulations; this idea is backed by the false narrative regarding the fall of economies of the Central and Eastern European countries after they joined the EU due to the normative regulations applied. Considering the nostalgia of the Soviet-time readily available Russian market for the Georgian agricultural and mineral products during the Soviet times and mainly until the Russian embargo of 2006 in particular, this message positively resonates among the various segments of the Georgian society (Detector Media, 2017, p. 14).

The influences on the existing ‘societal cleavages’ within the Georgian society have been never overcome or mitigated by any government in office. This fact complicates the process of formation of an unified political identity through solidifying core values, which, by default, reduces the threat of divisive narrative warfare. The deeply entrenched societal cleavages undermine and compromise the democracy and democratization processes in the country, making it vulnerable to the Russian encroachments. The anti-European images are nurtured by the six myths: *Myth 1*. The West fights against the Georgian Orthodox faith and culture-traditions; *Myth 2*. Russia is a source of economic development and welfare for the population of Georgia; *Myth 3*. The West supports the existing government, not Georgia; *Myth 4*. Russia could still protect us from our historical enemy – the Islamic World; *Myth 5*. The West will never accept Georgia as a member of the NATO and the EU; *Myth 6*. The EU and the US demand legalization of a same-sex marriage in Georgia (EI-LAT, 2016, pp. 43-46). By injecting *myths* regarding the West in the Georgian public domain, the alternative image of the West, i.e. Russia, is created, that will successfully contain challenges emanating from the West to the

traditional Georgian culture and society; hence, Georgia's prospects of integration in the Western structures are compromised.

The decrease of the pro-Western rhetoric after 2012, with the change of the United National Movement government with the Georgian Dream one, activated some influential pro-Russian intellectual and political groups (the Soviet-era intelligentsia, first generation politicians of the post-Soviet independent Georgia and a young generation of pro-Russian and pro-Eurasian NGOs), whose statements have created legitimate doubts whether Georgian government's general pledge to continue pro-Western policies is genuine and/or thought through (Nodia, 2013, p. 105). This leaves space for those political forces which argue for the necessity of 'neutrality' of Georgia in its foreign policy course. They became frequent guests of political talk-shows and made their arguments in favour of Russia and against the EU/NATO direction (Gordadze, 2014, p. 58). In the fields of politics, media and civil society the 'varieties of publics' are created for fragmentation of [political] public sphere via ultra-nationalist messages, Eurasia is propagated as an alternative power-pole of the EU and religious similarity between Georgia and Russia is underlined.

3. The Rotating Images of Russia: Russia as the Enemy vs. Russia as the Saviour

The pro-Russian actors promote their narratives through manipulation of social trends, instrumentalization of expectations of various societal groups and that of international context of the Russian-Western relations in the post-Soviet space for their political gains. These aspects create foundation for the creation of the image of Russia as the saviour and/or inevitable neighbour.

3.1. Representation I: Russia as the Savior and/or Inevitable Neighbour

Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy consensus has been undermined by an informal and silent coalition of pro-Eurasian NGO's, a range of political parties, a part of the Georgian Orthodox Church's priests and archbishops, and groups of Russia sympathizers within the country's political and cultural elite. This tendency provides fertile ground for the pro-Russian

narrative, which is channelled through similarities in the two countries' conservative and religious or socio-cultural agendas (Makarychev, 2016, p. 1). The pro-Russian argument is mainly based on religion, centred on Georgia's rapprochement with Russia in the 18th century through the Treaty of Georgievsk (signed between the Kartl-Kakheti Kingdom and the Tsarist Russia in 1783). The fact that this treaty transformed Georgia into a colony of the Tsarist Russia in 1801, rather protected it from the Muslim encroachments, e.g. during the Battle of Krtsanisi in 1795, when the Russian army did not keep its promise to support the King Erekle II in his last battle against Persia, is disregarded in the narrative and co-religious Russia, as the saviour, is presented and instrumentalized in the Georgian political public sphere.

1. The Relationality of Parts. The political and societal actors of the pro-Russian camp try to bridge the idea of normalization of relations between Russia and Georgia and the policy of balancing between Russia and the West. This political discourse on Russia, representing it as the saviour (cultural-religious dimension) and as the inescapable Northern neighbour (geopolitical dimension) are employed for justification of the pro-Russian policy course. The proponents of the cultural-religious dimension have overtly supported the establishment of a narrative and dissemination of political myths, which create receptive ground for the Russian political agenda masked with shared cultural-religious aspects (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 32), that is reinforced by the demonization of the West. The West is portrayed as a colonizer of Georgia, that seeks to transform the country into a NATO military base to secure the Caspian Sea's oil resources (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 14). The cultural narrative evolves around LGBT issues, denouncing such thematic activism in Georgia, as it is against the Georgian culture and traditions (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 18). These political-cultural narratives are disseminated by clerics, anti-Western political forces and representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia who promote the messianic role of Russia, while simultaneously belittling the Western political system and its values (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 48).

2. The Causal Emplotment. The pro-Russian forces claim that complicated relations with Russia, with its culmination in the August War of 2008, was the result of unjustified and irrational anti-Russian rhetoric and the pro-Western drive of the Georgian political establishment in 2005-2008; they argue that there is no possibility of turning to the West without upsetting Russia and without political dialogue and normalization of relations with Russia, Georgia will not regain territorial integrity and ensure its security. The proponents of the 'normalization

policy' after the Russian-Georgian August War of 2008 claimed that had been themselves into the power (mainly former allies and cabinet members of Saakashvili's government) there would be "a high probability that the Georgian government would have not yielded to Russian provocation and war would have been averted" (Civil.ge, 03.12.2008). Since 2012, with the change of the government, some influential pro-Russian intellectual and political groups reinforced the above-mentioned political claim with the idea that certain liberal (Western) values endanger Georgia's national identity. This fact facilitated the pro-Russian voice both, in the parliament, as well as among the non-parliamentary opposition groups and popularized it among the segment of society. Considering the absence of effective integration with the West, a portion of society has started to regard confrontation with Russia as political adventurism for which Georgia paid more than it gained. This might lead Georgia to the path of slow de-Europeanization, sliding deeper into political malaise, social apathy and internal fragmentation (Falkowski, 2016, pp. 45-48). The surge of political polarization, evident since 2020 and gradually reinforced in political public sphere is the testimony to this claim.

3. Selective Appropriation. The complicated relations between Russia and Georgia after the August War of 2008 and created stalemate over the conflicting territories of Georgia gave an opportunity to the opposition parties and societal groups to come with peace initiatives and popular promises of normalization of relations with Russia. In 2010, leaders of the opposition parties travelled to Moscow to meet President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, both of whom had expressed a desire to see Mikheil Saakashvili overthrown. These leaders (ex-speaker of the parliament Nino Burjanadze and ex-PM of Georgia Zurab Noghaideli, former allies of Saakashvili) justified their visit with a necessity to find a solution to the deadlock Georgia was found after the August War of 2008: occupied by the Russian Federation without realistic time-frame for restoration of territorial integrity and for integration either in the EU or NATO. If after the August War the image of Russia was cemented as the number one enemy of the country, after 2010 some moderate statements towards Russia appeared, culminated with popular promises of the ex-Russian business tycoon Bidzina Ivanishvili, who challenged Saakashvili in 2011 and brought his rule to an end in 2012 under the promise to change irrational foreign policy towards Russia. He, with his political coalition "The Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia," blamed Saakashvili for his radical policy towards Moscow and promoted a political course of normalization of relations with Russia (Makarychev, 2016, p. 4).

This shift in rhetoric activated the pro-Russian oriented political parties in the mainstream Georgian politics, although as the pro-Russian ideas are not popular, political forces driving the Russian agenda, neither admit it in their party programs, nor propose it through official declarations (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 12). The pro-Russian NGOs influence public opinion through anti-Western propaganda, create a foothold for more aggressive actions by the Russian-oriented political forces and pose significant challenges to state security (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 46). They strive not to be termed as the (pro)-Russian agents of influence and aspire to gain popular support through the narrative of a realistic foreign policy, going as far as to the idea of declaration of official neutrality of Georgia. They argue that the problem of territorial integrity will be solved through a hard process of negotiations with Russia. According to the Russo-Georgian advocates, Eurasia is a rising region that is not confined to Russia alone, while Georgia's European choice is nothing more than utopian "bright future." Russia actually needs the *pro-Georgian* (as opposed to the *pro-Western*) elite in Tbilisi, driven by Georgia's interests and ready to cooperate with the Eurasian Union or serve as a bridge between Russia and the EU (Makarychev, 2016, p. 4).

The pro-Russian forces try to attract pro- and anti-NATO electorate of Georgia simultaneously, as they do not delude either itself or voters about NATO integration; they set the ambitious goal to mend ties with Russia, to start reintegration of Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, under the condition of cooperation with the NATO; meantime, the pro-Russian political parties and CSOs continuously demand a referendum to determine Georgia's foreign policy course (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 36). In reality, Russia requests that Georgia drops Western values and the Euro-Atlantic integration in exchange for normalized economic or civil-political relations (EI-LAT, 2016, pp. 10-11). The pro-Russian narrative gives promise to the latter, whereas avoids to mention that this is possible at the expense of concessions on the former. As a result of selective appropriation of events and plots, the line between cultural and political arguments of the narrative are blurred.

4. Narrative Accrual. The pro-Russian narrative and Russia's image as the saviour is maintained on the basis of cultural elements: some of them accepted, others neglected as a threat to the Georgian identity (Thomas, 2016). It portrays the Georgian and European cultural features as mutually inconsistent and equate the Orthodox religion and the maintenance of key characteristic of the Georgian identity, which reinforces (negative) public attitudes towards Georgia's pro-Western (read anti-Russian) course among the Georgian society. They build on Christianity to

promote ambiguous relations between Georgia and the West and quite often bridge their narratives with the Georgian Orthodox Church, that has successfully exerted influence on political elites (Jones & Kakhishvili, 2013, p. 22). The policy of linking Georgian identity and European values is quite often torpedoed by the statements or declarations of some high-ranking priests. The problem is that it is hard to differentiate whether the Georgian Orthodox Church's sympathies that coincide with Russian positions are a product of the Russian soft power or stem from the ideological convergence of two kindred churches. There is an ideological stance in the Georgian Orthodox Church that presents the West as the enemy of Orthodoxy and Georgian identity, calling for an alliance with co-religionist Russia to preserve Georgia's cultural and spiritual values (Nodia, 2013, p. 106). This tendency particularly sharpened after the power change in 2012, when the new government abandoned the policy of anti-Russian rhetoric (Hug, 2015). The Church, through its moderate statements on Russia, has been enforcing the normalization policy towards Russia initiated by the Georgian Dream after 2012. To strengthen the notion of religious brotherhood, the political groups refer to statements by the Georgian clergy from different sermons demonizing the West and stressing the need for Orthodox nations to unite around Russia (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 35-36).

3.2. Representation II: Russia as the Enemy and/or Inevitable Neighbor

The anti-Russian (read pro-Western) narrative in the political public discourse of Georgia has appeared since the early 1990s, with declaration of its independence and has been the part of the political rhetoric of each president of the country, yet with different accents. The presidents of Georgia were trying to employ the image of Russia as an enemy for their political gains, although through different timeframes of their political careers, considering internal and external political contexts and challenges of the country. The first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992) mainly concentrated on internal politics, struggling with national minorities and opposition, naming them as the agents of Kremlin. His overt anti-Russian paranoia excluded the possibility of launching a normal politics with Moscow after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The image of Russia was split between Soviet imperial Russia, which was an enemy, and the democratic forces of Russia, headed by Boris Yeltsin, who was expected to accede to the Kremlin after the putsch of August 1991 and to disseminate democratic tendencies in Russia and

across the post-Soviet space (LGS, 2013, pp. 120-123; pp. 174-175). Through this policy, Gamsakhurdia failed to create a cohesive image of Russia, which later on enabled Russia to pursue the “politics of normal” in the Russian-Georgian relations of the early 1990s as Gamsakhurdia and his government was blamed for the civil war and ethnic conflicts and for consequent political-economic collapse of Georgia, by the new Georgian political elites and former Soviet intelligentsia, who emerged in the political public sphere to legitimize the new government of Shevardnadze, coming back to Georgia in March, 1992, after the coup d'état of the first democratically elected President of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia in January, 1992.

The second President, Eduard Shevardnadze (head of the state in 1992-1995 and president in 1995-2003), former Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union – an experienced politician with extensive linkages in the international political circles of the time – forged a pragmatic and rational pro-Western discourse by balancing between the West and Russia. The images of the North (Russia) and the West (US and EU) constantly replaced each other in political discourse of the country. In the early 1990s, he expressed concerns over the Russian request to the UN to “get the special rights to exercise the punishing measures against the former republics of the USSR” (Newspaper *Sakhatvelos Respublika*, #43 (587), 05.03.1993) and wrote a special letter to the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Eltsin, on the developments in the local conflicts in Georgia’s secessionist regions, being termed as “the local social-political developments and the internal affairs of Georgia, which might be worsened as a result of external interference in the internal affairs of the Georgian state” (Newspaper *Sakhatvelos Respublika*, #120 (399), 03.07.1992). He did not abstain to blame various fractions of the Parliament of the Russian Federation for the support of the separatist movement in Georgia, which initiated an anti-Georgian action in Moscow (Newspaper *Sakhatvelos Respublika*, #204 (483), 07.10.1992). Later, due to a heavy pressure from the ongoing conflicts in the two autonomous regions of Georgia – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – and internal socio-economic hardships, Shevardnadze first sought for normalization of relations with Russia and later tried to contain the Russian Federation through the international formats. For this purpose, on the one hand, he brought the country into the CIS, thus acknowledging the role of Russia as a power-broker in the post-Soviet conflicts of Georgia through the CIS peace-keeping mission under the UN mandate; while on the other hand, from the mid-1990s, took the advantage of country’s geopolitical location through connecting Georgia’s foreign and security policies: the Western interests towards the energy projects of the Caspian Sea oil resources

enabled Shevardnadze to integrate Georgia into various regional projects (TRACECA, BTC), as the key actor in the transit route between the West and the East, attracting the interest of the US and the EU. Nevertheless, security paradigm failed as by the early 2000s, Georgia was close to a failed state, as “the weakness of Georgia’s statehood under Shevardnadze had never provided any substantial progress either in conducting reforms, which would increase interests of the normative powers like the EU and US, pursuing the policy of democracy promotion, or in challenging Russia’s political leverage over Georgia” (Nilsson 2009, p. 101).

During the two consecutive terms of the third president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili (2004-2012), the country went through two stages of relations with Russia – an attempt at rapprochement to Russia and balancing with the West, with a hope to re-gain country’s territorial integrity, and full alienation from Russia, accompanied by an uncompromising pro-Western policy through aspiration to the membership into the Euro-Atlantic structures (after the Russian-Georgian August War of 2008 in particular). The early stages of Saakashvili’s tenure were marked by a period of reaching out to Moscow. In his 2004 inauguration speech he promoted the idea of launching “good relations with Russia,” arguing that he was neither a “pro-American, nor pro-Russian,” but a “pro-Georgian” leader (ISGP, 2007, pp. 60-61). Nevertheless, Russia has been always reluctant to give a free hand to the Georgian government in dealing with the separatist conflicts of the country if serious concessions are not made on its Western orientated foreign policy (Tsereteli, 2013, p. 209). The Russian-Georgian August War of 2008 could be attributed to the Russian revisionist challenges vis-à-vis the West and should be framed through a wider Russian-Western relations (See: Matsaberidze, 2015) on the one hand, and to the transitional nature of democracies, where “nationalist politics go hand in hand with authoritarian elite politics, which has a high probability to engage in wars on the other; in young democracies nationalist sentiments and the politics over the legitimacy of the ruling class tend to be intense and militarism becomes a popular tool for gaining mass support for the regimes” (See: Mansfield & Snyder, 1995). In the post-August War period, the radical image of Russia, as the enemy of Georgia, was created.

1. The Relationality of Parts. The appearance of the radical image of Russia as the enemy of Georgia followed to the August War of 2008. The President of Georgia at that time, Mikheil Saakashvili, through his rhetoric tried to demonize Russia and compared the actions of Russia in the Georgian villages of the former South Ossetian AO to the atrocities conducted in the Balkan

Wars or in Chechnya and made parallel to the situation during the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia, as the idea of freedom was at stake. The actions of Russia were framed through the earlier and similar behaviour of the Soviet Union (read Russia) on international arena: Saakashvili tried to deny any Russian supported allegations on the attack of the central Georgian authorities on the breakaway South Ossetia and recalled the case when Germany claimed that it was attacked by Poland in 1939 and the Soviet Union claimed that it was attacked by Finland in 1939 and by Afghanistan in 1979. Saakashvili tried to frame Russia's actions through the narrative of "returning of history:" the aggressive Russia using any pretext for a pre-conceived invasion and recalled the invasion of Georgia by the Soviet Union in 1921, when Georgia lost its freedom to the 70 years long rule of the Soviet communism. Arguing the continuity of the Russian politics, he named the Prime minister Putin and other Russian leaders "as a product of the KGB system, with some brutal backgrounds, to manipulate the truth to be cynical" (Toal, 2008, pp. 691-692) in politics. The new political context of the Russian-Georgian relations undermined the narrative of cultural-religious friendship and proximity to Russia and weakened the positions of the pro-Russian forces. The image of Russia as an enemy and 'the evil empire' was cemented in the public discourse, that enabled Saakashvili and his political allies to aggressively promote the pro-Western/anti-Russian policy line.

2. The Causal Emplotment. The developments of the August 2008 were brought in a wider context of the regional and international politics, explained by the narrative of revisionist Russia in international arena under motto to re-gain back the lost status of a Great Power after the dissolution of the Soviet Union: "the Soviet Union merely transposed the Russian Empire to the twentieth century, and state-building efforts of Russian leaders, such as Putin, are similarly hostage to such pre-determined paths [...] Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union both resulted in a similar blend of authoritarianism, militaristic expansion and defensive paranoia" (Leigh, 2013). The Russia's grip and actions in its near abroad – in the countries of the post-Soviet space – leads to the danger of a great powers' overstretch (Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014-2015 and since 2022 respectively) as they weaken internally and in order to avoid failure becoming re-assertive internationally. The post-Soviet conflicts are part of Russia's Near Abroad policy, to contain the post-Soviet states on the axis of its influence vis-à-vis the Western interference in its zone of legitimate interest in the Near Abroad.

Popularization of the above-mentioned international context for framing the image of Russia as the enemy of Georgia was linked to the prolonged frozen status of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts, to the August War of 2008 and to Moscow's interference in internal politics of the neighboring country to justify the claim that Russia has always been against the independent statehood of Georgia. Whether it was coincidence or not, the President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, spoke frequently about the territorial integrity of Georgia and modeled himself on the medieval Georgian king, David Agmashenebeli ('the Builder'), who united the fragmented Georgian kingdoms in the 11th century. Saakashvili's nationalist rhetoric concerning the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia became the primary tool for maintaining support for his government, although this rhetoric put the local and the regional politics onto a perilous course toward each other. His anti-Russian approach won him support from the masses, and even when Georgia lost miserably in the August War, thousands of people rallied in the streets showing solidarity toward his government (Rahman, 2009, pp. 141-142).

Just before the August War of 2008, as the Russian President Dimitry Medvedev spoke of the Caucasus as a 'region of privileged interest' for the Russian Federation, Saakashvili's government projected the notion that Georgia could detach itself from its geopolitical context and relocate to the Euro-Atlantic modernity by becoming a member of the European Union and NATO (Toal, 2008, p. 699). Geopolitics also involves ego-politics. Saakashvili's personal bond of friendship with George W. Bush and John McCain (and self-constructed heroic image) enabled 'rebel style,' or what others might frame more negatively as recklessness (Toal, 2008, p. 700) vis-à-vis Russia. Initially Saakashvili tried to cultivate good relations with Putin, but their personal meetings only deepened a general hostility into a personal loathing. Russian-Georgian relations went from bad to worse. In 2006 the Russian government imposed an embargo of crucial Georgian exports (especially wine and mineral waters) and blocked transportation links. In this context, modern communications (like daily phone calls during a crisis) and strong personal ties to Washington reinforced the sense of Saakashvili that Georgia had greater geopolitical proximity to the United States than to the Russian Federation (Toal, 2008, p. 700). This vision of politics miscalculated the Russia's foreign policy directions, driven by the idea of Eurasianism – a strong geopolitical paradigm – which excluded any external interference or involvement in the states of the post-Soviet space, leaving Georgia without the Western support when it was found in confrontation with Russia.

3. Selective Appropriation. The anti-Russian narrative was mainly constructed across the national and state-building issues. The three aspects are necessary for understanding the impact of nationalism on the (trans)formation of internal and external policy discourses of Georgia: *ongoing social changes* (or challenges), *pre-existing ethno-symbolic resources* and *new ideological movement* born out of the former two in the period of transition. The architects of national political project – politicians, intelligentsia, etc. with a help of nationalism, successfully “translate ethno-historical traditions, ethnic beliefs and territorial attachments into the language of modern nationalism [...] where general geo-political situation, including changing international attitudes to ethnic separatism and irredentism, and the regional location of the mooted nation” (Smith, 1996, p. 593) and have a significant influence on its future political course. The post-Soviet national-political projects of Georgia are the testimony of intimate links between the past and present, where *the present* tries to legitimate itself on behalf of *the past* with the blessing either nationalism or ethnicity. The Georgian reality fits within the proposition that “... the ideal of self-renewal and the vision of collective destiny are built into the collective memory of a golden age and justify all the sacrifices that citizens may be asked to make” (Smith, 1996, p. 585), which become the part of the nationalist rhetoric under Saakashvili directed against Russia. The power struggle within Georgian politics and the nationalistic rhetoric of Saakashvili made things worse just before the August War broke out (Rahman, 2009, p. 137). The anti-Russian solidarity was concentrated on past history and late challenges of the post-Soviet independent Georgia, stemming from the Russian policy in the post-Soviet space in general and towards Georgia in particular.

Polarization and confrontation both, with the conflict regions, as well as with Russia, were reinforced. The anti-Georgian stance during the Rose Revolution of 2003 was the ultimate motive of the Russian latent or open aggressive actions against Georgia. Saakashvili argued that Russia’s plan has always been to take over the whole of Georgia, with the aim to undermine the Georgian democracy and to establish its satellite government in Tbilisi. This enabled the Georgian government officials to internationalize the crisis, arguing that the small Georgian nation was brutally attacked by its big neighbor Russia and that Georgia was dealing with twenty-first century barbarians (Toal, 2008, pp. 691-693). Saakashvili and his team tried to demonize Russia after the Russian-Georgian August War. At a ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the August War on 7 August 2009, he made an emotional speech and put the entire blame on

Russia for seeking to “destroy Georgia’s freedom, democracy and statehood.” Recalling a long embargo, economic blockades, provocations, bombardments, threats, boycotts and other rough but finally not successful pressures, Saakashvili named the August War as the attempt of the old KGB followers to finish the so-called “Georgian Project” – a common attempt to create a modern, European, democratic, successful state in the Caucasus (GPA, 2009). Saakashvili has put special emphasis on Georgia’s pursuit of ‘Westernization’ and on attempts to establish peaceful relations with the national minorities and Russia – which failed as the discourse of the latter two have been ambivalent and less determined. Saakashvili tried to use the case of the Russian-Georgian War for creation of a wider discourse, that would portray Russia as a revolt state against the European values and the Western security architecture. He has never admitted defeat in the August War and argued that there was no winner as the image of Russia as an enemy to the Western, liberal order, became public (GPA, 2009).

4. Narrative Accrual. After the August War of 2008, the President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, sharply divided society into “patriots” and “non-patriots.” The latter group was labeled as the Russian proxies and the *enemy agents*, acting as the “fifth column” against the Georgian statehood and nationhood. The political and societal groups, subsumed under this segment, were termed as “traitors” who tried to undermine Georgia’s sovereignty and aspirations to become a member of the civilized world. By the end of Saakashvili’s rule, every single individual, group of people or political opponents who had alternative vision and approach had been labeled as the “pro-Russian” and “non-patriotic” in the society. Russian news agencies and TV channels were suppressed, although the Georgian public could still have information regarding the attitudes of ideologists in Moscow. For example, Alexandr Dugin’s famous exhort was frequently broadcasted to illustrate the real intentions of the Russian elites: “Tanks to Tbilisi! – this is a voice of our national history. Those, who do not second the ‘Tanks to Tbilisi!’ are not Russians [...] ‘Tanks to Tbilisi!’ – that’s what should be written on every Russian’s forehead” (Shekhovtsov, 2009, p. 698). These types of narratives further sharpened anti-Russian mode in the country and reinforced the image of Russia as the enemy.

The narrative of the 200 years-long Russian colonization of the country overshadowed religious commonality between Russia and Georgia, whereas shared cultural values with Europe were taken to the forefront of the political discourse. The latter bonds were activated through mythology of Georgians as an ancient European nation, whereas the Orthodox Russia was re-

presented as a “threat to the existence” of Georgia. Anti-Russian tendencies were linked to the period of the fall of the Tsarist Russia, to the wake of the Bolshevik revolution and to the emergence of the European alternative, to which both the Whites and the Bolsheviks posed a threat (Falkowski, 2016, p. 9). The 20th century events (massacres of Georgians in 1956 and 1989 by the Soviet forces) were referred as the prove of the image of Russia as eternal and permanent enemy to the statehood and nationhood of Georgia and Georgians. It should be mentioned though, that the aversion to Russia, which was widespread in Georgia, did not transform into a common aversion to the Russian people or to the Russian language and culture (Falkowski, 2016, p. 10). This provided resources for the sub-political narrative, arguing that the Russian political establishment is the enemy of Georgia, not the Russian people, and Georgians are not against the Russian culture.

The dominant Georgian narrative sees Russia with its imperialism as the main obstacle on Georgia’s way to Europe, a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity and an epitome of backwardness, in contrast to the West, which is associated with progressiveness (Falkowski, 2016, p. 8). This idea provided rational to denote the notion that *in 1801 Georgia joined Russia of its own free will* as the myth and to argue instead that Russia simply *annexed* Georgia. This narrative was later extended to the Soviet Union as well, which *Sovietized* Georgia; the legacy of the Soviet Union and its socio-cultural heritage were denounced, expressed through opening the section of the Soviet Occupation in the National Museum of Georgia and recalling the legacies of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) which was concurred and Sovietized by the Red Army, thus forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union and detached from the European political and cultural space. In this context, the new Rose Revolution government, according to its first act, changed the Georgian flag from the 1918-1921 era, to a new design – the five-cross flag of the Crusades and that of the Medieval Kingdom of Georgia, free of ‘socialist’ connotations. This was a sign of projection of the country into the pro-European line: the new flag was staged together with the flag of Europe in front of governmental buildings and at the public or political ceremonies. After the August War of 2008 the policy took its sharpest forms: e.g. Saakashvili referred to Russia in public speeches as “the last authoritarian empire in the world” and to Putin as a KGB agent (Karadag, 2019), which was enemy not only of Georgia, but posed a serious threat to the West/Europe as well.

The narrative, representing Russia as the enemy of Georgia, was successfully constructed in the context of the strained Georgian-Russian relations through recalling the past behaviors of Russia against Georgia. Through selective evocation of such episodes from the history the narrative of co-religious Russia was substituted with a proposition that in reality Russia has been always undermining the both – Georgia’s cultural-religious foundations, through Russification policies, as well as Georgia’s statehood and nationhood, aimed at incorporation of Georgia into its framework or transforming the Georgian state into the ‘failed state’ without ambitions of acting on international arena. Thus, Georgia would become a subjugated or a satellite state of Moscow, not acting against the Kremlin’s interests in the South Caucasus. After 2012, the attempts of the new government to normalize its relations with Russia, remained under captivity of the image of Russia as the enemy of Georgia, which is still reinforced by actions of Russia in the conflict zones of Georgia.

4. The Rotating Images of the West/EU: EU as the Savior vs. EU as the Enemy

In the Georgian political public sphere, the image of the EU is bifurcated between its image as the chance of the last resort to escape from the Russian bonds by the pro-Western forces and as an enemy of the traditional Georgian culture, as represented by the pro-Russian forces. These alternative visions lead to the fluctuations of the [political] public sphere in Georgia in terms of attitudes towards the EU. The EU needs to go through the policy transformation via rethinking not only in terms of differentiation of its approach towards the EaP member countries, but also in linking the ideas and ideals, as well as its normative power-play, with security elements, tailored for the local grievances. A better understanding of the geopolitical importance of the South Caucasus to the wider region of the Eastern Europe/Middle East would increase each South Caucasus state’s importance vis-à-vis the EU, although this needs to comprehend the greatest single challenge to regional development and security, which is instrumentalized by the Kremlin’s interventionist approach (Kakachia et al, 2018, p. 15).

4.1. Representation I: The EU as the Savior – Returning Back to the European Family of Nations?

The Rose Revolution revealed Georgia's strong manifestation on the basis of the Georgia's long-standing aspiration to its Europeanization process and to become part of Europe. The EU's democracy promotion efforts have brought geopolitical implications in their wake, thus it should surprise no one if, in the absence of more robust Western engagement, Georgia gradually moves toward an increasingly non-aligned position between Russia and the West (Cornell, 2018, p. 254). The increasingly unpredictable, even volatile geopolitical situation, in which old patterns of alignment no longer apply (Cornell, 2018, p. 259) might undermine the approach of the EU towards the region through the concept of 'resilience', as resilience in the countries of the Eastern Europe (read the EaP – D.M.) is of a geopolitical nature and it makes the EU a geopolitical competitor of Russia in the shared neighborhood (Mikhelidze, 2018, p. 268).

The EU needs a dual strategy: structural reforms and transformative policies, provision of security guarantees and engagement in conflict resolution, as the relevance of the EaP for regional actors is directly linked to the EU's ability to deliver on its commitments, especially regarding security and prosperity (Simao, 2018, pp. 40-41). Considering the fact that for the South Caucasus countries fundamental issues linked to their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity has raised concerns regarding the ability of Western institutions to assure the security of smaller states (Simao, 2018, p. 39), the EU underestimated itself, failing to understand that its soft power actually did have a geopolitical dimension. The concept of strengthening social and economic resilience in the neighborhood is indeed a geopolitical idea (as was 'democracy promotion') challenging Russia's position in the shared neighborhood (Mikhelidze, 2018, p. 281). In addition, Euroscepticism has created a climate of uncertainty about the future of the EU, a climate that undermines the EU's engagement and credibility in the Eastern Partnership region in general and in Georgia in particular.

1. The Relationality of Parts. The EU supports peace and stability in Georgia as well as programmes of political and economic reforms to enable social and economic development. The Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Agreement builds a foundation for far-reaching Georgian political and economic integration with the EU. The AA is itself an outcome of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), an important part of the EU's foreign policy, of which Georgia is one of 16 partner countries. It enhances the prosperity, stability and security of an enlarged EU and its neighbours. The EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) (launched in 2009) works towards greater

mobility of citizens and stronger collaboration in a number of sectors, as well as maintained EU's firmly commitments to its policy of supporting Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally-recognised borders as well as engagement with the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in support of longer-term conflict resolution. In addition, the EU supports Georgia in developing its economic potential through international cooperation. Nevertheless, the idea of Europe has not arisen as a result of a similar dichotomy of 'otherization' between Georgia and Europe when we consider the Georgian political history. Georgia focused on its European identity, which became a major cultural focus of the political discourse that gradually emerged throughout the country's troublesome history and constant struggle for survival amidst various empires (Jones, 2004). The pro-Western/European discourse in Georgia could be divided into the following main aspects: 1) The Georgian nation-state is the only acceptable political framework for the development of the Georgian nation; 2) Europe or the West in general (these two terms are not conceptually divided) serves as the provider of a larger (framework) identity, as the role model, and the presumed ally. This means that: (a) By its essence, Georgia is part of Europe, it should be recognized as such and be part of main institutions of the West such as NATO and the European Union; (b) the West serves as a blueprint for the construction of the Georgian state - that is, it is only legitimate as a democratic state. If it does not fully conform to this normative framework yet, it is on the way to doing so; (c) the West is Georgia's main friend, ally, and protector (Nodia, 2010, pp. 93-94).

2. The Causal Emplotment. The dynamics of the Georgian Europeanization address various representations/articulations/references about how the 'idea' of Europe and 'Georgian Europeanness' are re/constructed in different 'critical junctures'. The pro-Western, that is European discourses in the Georgian [political] public sphere appeared through the following terms employed by political elites: 'ideational construction of Europe', 'Rose Revolution', 'Multiple Pathways to Europeanization' and 'the role of the EU as a soft power vis-à-vis the other international actors'. In 2004, during his inauguration, president Mikheil Saakashvili, articulated Georgia's 'rightful' position among the European countries and as a part of the European civilization as follows: ...Georgia should be formed as the state assuming international responsibility, as the dignified member of international community, as the state, which regardless the highly complicated geopolitical situation and location, has equally benign relations with all its neighbors, and at the same time does not forget to take its own place in European family, in

European civilization, the place lost several centuries ago. As an ancient Christian state, we should take this place again. Our direction is towards European integration. It is time for Europe finally to see and appreciate Georgia and undertake steps towards us. And first signs of these are already evident. Today, we have not raised European flag by accident - this flag is Georgian flag as well, as far as it embodies our civilization, our culture, essence of our history and perspective, and vision of our future (Civil Georgia, 2004). As early as 1999, Zurab Zhvania, who was a former chairman of the Georgian parliament, made his famous and much quoted declaration during Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe: "I am Georgian, therefore, I am European", whereas the chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly, Lord Russell-Johnston, addressed the Georgian delegation with the following words - "Georgia, welcome back home!" This came as a finalization of the first stage of the idea "return to Europe" to which Georgia embarked since declaration of its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, considered as the de-Sovietization process in the Georgian political discourse.

The Rose Revolution of 2003 was defined as the final break with the Soviet past and its remnants, which brought about a clear manifestation of Georgia's self-identification with Europe and convergence with Europe/West, both at the ideational level and at the institutional level. Along with the Rose Revolution, the European integration is portrayed as 're-uniting' with Georgia's 'real path', after a long period of 'interlude' due to the historical circumstances/hardships, such as the constant struggle for the territorial survival amidst various empires and forced incorporation into the Soviet Union (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, pp. 171). In this context, the Rose Revolution was interpreted as "the masses upholding Georgia's national dignity and democratic values" that addressed to re-entry into Europe (O'Beachain & Coene, 2014, pp. 930), followed by the emergence of democracy and security as the fundamental elements which necessitate and amalgamate the connection between Georgia and Europe. Currently, Georgian Europeanization followed to the Rose Revolution gave 'a new wave of confidence' to the Georgian people as it 'broke the mold of powerlessness' and challenged the 'social memory' of the 1990s that many Georgians had suffered due to the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the state's weakness, the stagnation and corruption, and the acceptance that no government would achieve any better (Nodia, 2005, p. 104).

The new political discourse on 're-uniting with Europe' primarily based its narrative on Georgia as a 'European' state and 'an ancient part of western civilization' that was separated

(against its will) from its natural path by ‘historical cataclysms’ such as the annexation of Georgian land by Russian Tsardom and forceful integration to the Soviet Union. The desire to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures derived from the idea that the EU and NATO are the ‘bearers’ of the same values as those shared by the Georgians, which also includes similar ‘political culture’ seen as European. In this sense, during the post-Rose Revolution era until 2012, the Rose Revolution was articulated as a ‘real victory of the European values of Georgians’ (Mitchell, 2004).

3. Selective Appropriation. The ‘idea of Europe’ and ‘Georgian Europeanness’ traces its roots prior to the establishment of its relations with the EU; this has been the main component of Georgia’s foreign policy orientation since declaration of its independence in 1991. With respect to its ideational elements, Georgia has defined itself historically connected to Europe especially in terms of geopolitical, political and cultural aspects, and as a part of the European civilization through its Christianity, cultural values and forms of ownership (Kakachia, 2013, pp. 41-51). The idea of Europeanization has been rotating in the political public sphere of Georgia and emerged through discursive articulations through the concepts such as ‘shared values’ ‘cultural belongingness’ ‘returning to Europe’, Georgian ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘national identity’, ‘post-Soviet transformation.’ The idea of Europe has evolved through various ‘critical junctures’ and political/cultural occurrences (including the enlightenment and modernization under the Soviet ruling, and the Democratic Republic of Georgia between 1918–1921, etc.) all of which contribute to how Georgian people perceive/construct Europe and identify themselves as a part of Europe.

The Georgian ‘Europeanness’ can be addressed as a larger ‘framework’ identity for the Georgian people, beyond the post-Soviet independence process, incorporating ideational/‘ideal’ and a practical/pragmatic quests. The Europeanization in Georgia incorporates cultural-historical and political security components, highlighting vulnerability of its territorial integrity in particular and setting the ‘Euro-Atlantic’ integration as the main foreign policy priority of the country (See: Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000; 2006; 2011; Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011) ‘National security concept of Georgia’ (2011). Although Georgia’s membership to NATO is seen as the primary target for the Georgian security, the European Union is also perceived as an actor for the similar purpose with its ‘soft-power instruments’. The idea of Europe and Georgian Europeanness, building on ‘returning to Europe’ discourse reaches beyond any institutional

cooperation. Merely, the idea of Europe can be traced back to the first independence process, even pre-modern time in the mental map/political memory of the Georgian people. In the Georgian case, the multi-layered self-identification with Europe has not emerged irrespective of the ‘other’ constructed as opposed to what symbolizes ‘the Georgian’ (Bechev & Nicolaidis, 2010, pp. 1-11). Quite the contrary, it has revealed itself in the form of ‘detaching/disassociating itself’ from the past: i.e. including both the imperial era and the Soviet experience. Against this backdrop, the Rose Revolution paved the way for the Georgian new state elites to re-construct the ‘idealized image’ of the West/Europe, as it locates ‘we’ as a part of European culture vis-à-vis the Soviet/Imperial Russian notion of the ‘other’.

4. Narrative Accrual. The ‘idea of Europe’ obtains multiple meanings/references, addressing the Georgian political history and collective memory and it has been reproduced vis-à-vis changing ‘characterizations/representations’ of what constitutes the ‘other’ in different political contexts. In this constellation, ‘belonging to Europe’ seems to take a major domain in the Georgian political discourse, as a part of the Georgian ‘*significant we*’, taking its appearances in the reflection of what constitutes ‘*the other*’, which are mostly identified on the grounds of occupying forces that impeded Georgia’s territorial integrity and achieving ‘modern’ statehood. The political discourse about the Georgian self-identification with Europe, i.e., ‘Georgian Europeanness’ and ‘belonging to European family’, are closely interrelated with what Europe and the EU represent for Georgia, as well as how the idea of ‘belonging to Europe’ is attached to the ‘ideational’ elements of ‘modernization’, ‘enlightenment’, and ‘territorial integrity’ in parallel to the post-Soviet state and nation building process of the country (Karadag, 2019). The Europeanization process has been intricately interwoven with ‘transformative’ and ‘critical junctures’ such as modernization, enlightenment, even territorial integrity/security dimension as well as ideational one. Georgia in ‘connecting’ itself with Europe emanated from the idea/notion of seeking ‘saviour’ from ‘external’ threats (both cultural and territorial) in parallel with the ‘Georgian-self,’ indicating rather continuity with Europe despite the geopolitical shifts that happened at different critical junctures in the past history.

4.2. Representation II: The EU as the Antithesis – Decadent Civilization?

The cultural-religious tools are particularly successful to fragment the attitudes of the Georgian society towards the EU/West and Russia; most of the disinformation messages cause confusion regarding imminent threats stemming from the Kremlin's incursion in Georgia and undermine the normative driven agenda of the EU, hence the democracy promotion project of the West in the country. Under the fragmented political public sphere there is a danger of divergence from the pro-Western line either to the idea of neutrality (likelihood is high) or to the pro-Russian foreign policy course (likelihood is relatively low) as the membership in the EU and NATO is not a realistic promise for Georgia in the foreseeable future.

1. The Relationality of Parts. The Russian Federation “successfully exploits divide between liberal and more authoritarian-minded groups, particularly on the issues of identity (Raines et al, 2017, p. 2), which could gradually distort Georgia from the pro-Western orientation and transform into a semi-authoritarian or hybrid regime (Detector Media, 2017, p. 7). Georgia is particularly vulnerable to this tendency as population is bifurcated across the identity and value axis and even split between the liberal-democratic model (the Russian propaganda systematically focuses on the themes as moral decay of Europe and the impeding collapse of the West, fragility of liberal democracy, equating liberalism to the LGBT rights’ promotion, thus being unacceptable for the historically traditional population of Georgia) and the Orthodox-Christianity (Russia, being the leader of this camp, presented as the defender of conservative, Orthodox and traditional values vis-à-vis liberal, degraded and hedonistic West) (Polyakova, 2016A). The strategies of Kremlin’s dis-information activities, which cause turbulence in politics, media and civil society, include the following measures: 1. Discrediting political elites; 2. ‘Containing democracy’ via building bridges with the leaders of illiberal or semi-authoritarian leaders, etc; 3. Disseminating fake news, which will either question or erode credibility of the liberal democratic project; 4. Sharpening divide and antagonizing mainstream political parties on the one hand and left- and right-wing parties on the other.

The 2016 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community has predicted that Georgia might abandon its Euro-Atlantic integration and turn toward Russia; The danger of Tbilisi abandoning its pro-Western foreign policy, along with its democratic reforms, is considered to be real (Lebanidze, 2016, p. 1). The initial concerns about a likely change of Georgia’s foreign policy priorities following the rise to power of Bidzina Ivanishvili (in 2012) did not materialize, and, in the internal dimension, Georgia did not break with the legacy of the

Rose Revolution either; although, symptoms of deepening multidimensional social and political crisis significantly affected foreign policy ended with an apparent polarization by the Presidential elections of 2020 which has not been defused so far. As people's standards of living have been stagnating, political and social malaise have been breeding Euro-skepticism and disenchantment with the West, while pro-Russian forces, openly contesting the foreign policy line that Georgia has been pursuing to date and calling for a turn towards Russia, have been gaining prominence (Falkowski, 2016, pp. 5-6). The failure of Western actors to sufficiently empower democratic reform coalitions in Georgia; strengthened anti-reformist forces, which are supported by Russia and feel stronger due to the current fatigue in the process of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration; overall lack of a democratic political culture among the ruling elites (both current and previous) (Lebanidze, 2016, p. 3) all caused a drift in foreign policy of the country. The Georgian Dream government has no clear strategy towards normalization of relations with Russia or membership of NATO and the EU; the relative success of the Georgian Dream's foreign policy so far has been largely a product of exogenous circumstances that encouraged the West and Russia to look more favorably on Georgia (MacFarlane, 2015, p. 1).

The Georgian Dream coalition government failed in its two major foreign policy priorities: improving relationship with Russia and accelerating country's integration into the EU and the transatlantic community through NATO (MacFarlane, 2015, p. 3). The latter could be explained by the fact that the Georgian Dream had a very weak base of contacts in Western diplomatic circles. It also had very little experience of diplomacy, public relations and lobbying abroad (MacFarlane, 2015, p. 5). The former – failed attempts of normalization of diplomatic relations with Russia – were constrained by the major obstacle of the Georgian-Russian relations since 2008: Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and their recognition as sovereign states, followed by security and economic agreements, bilateral agreements and specific policy vis-à-vis Georgia, what was termed by the Georgian central authorities as creeping annexation (MacFarlane, 2015, p. 11). Statement of the foreign minister of the Russian Federation, Sergei Lavrov, "attempts to condition the development of political ties on Russia withdrawing its recognition of existing realities have no prospect and are counterproductive and will produce nothing" (MacFarlane, 2015, p. 12), brings the normalization policy of the Georgian Dream coalition into deadlock.

Pro-Russian forces acting in Georgia mainly rely on anti-Western propaganda and strive not to be termed as [pro]-Russian agents of influence in the country. They promote themselves as

pro-Georgian political force(s) and argue that they know in its best how to save the country out of its current troubles. They promote the narrative of launching a realistic foreign policy of Georgia, going as far as to the idea of neutrality, to be officially declared by the country. In such case foreign policy should reflect on the following reality: Georgia could not be integrated in the Western structures (NATO and EU), thus it needs to normalize its relations with Russia. In such case, sooner or later the main problem of territorial integrity will be solved through a hard process of negotiations with Russia.

2. The Causal Emplotment. Fortunately, openly pro-Russian ideas are not popular among Georgia's population, and parties with pro-Russian sentiments do not openly talk about their ideas. None of the political forces, which are considered as implementers of a Russian agenda in Georgia, do not admit it openly in their party program or even at the declarative level (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 12). Alternatively, the parties that are loyal to Russia, prioritize openly anti-Western propaganda or call upon the idea that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration is desirable, but unreachable and unrealistic. Simultaneously, pro-Russian group of NGOs tries to influence the public opinion through rhetoric and propaganda and to create a certain foothold for more aggressive actions, which may give rise to significant challenges for state security (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 46). In reality, these political forces have overtly supported establishing a narrative, and dissemination, of political myths, which encourage a strengthened political agenda of the Russian authorities in Georgia (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 32). Their main paradigms are consisted of the following aspects: religion belief – a basis of unity; national identity – public discourse formed on the basis of historical past and shared values; cultural proximity – common cultural experience (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 42), all of them shared with Russia, not with the West. Each of these narratives has their medium – clerics, anti-Western political forces and representatives of Soviet intelligentsia. They are forming and cultivating political myths on the basis of these narratives and introducing the Messianic role of Russia (or its leader), while on the other hand, belittle and dismiss the Western political system and its values (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 48). Through these political groups, Russia is trying to create a certain anchor in Georgia (and in other post-Soviet countries) for the event of its own aggressive actions, which will give an opportunity for manipulation and for justifying its aggressive actions (EI-LAT, 2016, p. 46).

The Georgian media has become increasingly fragmented and the consistent governmental policy or action framework for the containment and combatting the Russian disinformation have

not been elaborated yet. Quite the contrary, in 2015-2017, the government of Georgia, for purposes of dissemination of information, contracted those media outlets and platforms which were notorious for their homophobic and anti-Western propaganda and even pursued the pro-Kremlin editorial policies (Lutsevych, 2016, p. 9). Thus, the national media (the Public Broadcasting and number of pro-Russian media outlets) became the main vehicle for dissemination of the Kremlin's narratives. The media messages strive to correct purposefully fabricated and falsified information regarding the Russian-Georgian relations and assist the young generation of Georgians to become familiarized with the real historical past of their country (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 11). The main messages argue that Georgians need to make a clear choice between flirting with the West or maintaining its historical values and identity, thus, promoting the idea of launching the balanced politics between the West and Russia and arguing for considering mentality during making allies (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 20-21).

The media sources, promoting the pro-Russian messages, are mainly established and run by the NGOs or CSOs: the news agency Sakinformi was the media platform of the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR and after the declaration of independence, between 1993-2004, it came under direct subordination of the president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze; it was abolished after the Rose Revolution, but in 2010, the news agency was re-established by its former journalists under the same name. Together with its media-partner The Obiekt-TV, it became the main locomotive of anti-Western and homophobic ideas. The anti-Western propaganda is disseminated by the Sakinform.ge, together with the web-portal Geoworld.ge, which are founded by the NGO Historical Legacy with the aim to reach out the wider audience. The organization strives to correct purposefully fabricated and falsified information regarding the Russian-Georgian relations and assists the young generation of Georgians to become familiarized with the real historical past of their country (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 11). The web-portal Geoworld.ge partners with Modest Korolev, who is the founder and editor of the Rex.ru and Regnum.ru and is the main ideologist of Russia's relations with the CIS countries. He was also responsible for avoiding further dissemination of the 'velvet revolutions', which brought peaceful change of governments in Georgia and Ukraine (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 16-17). The Geo-World.ge partners with the media platform Iverioni, founded in 2012, which mainly disseminates anti-Turkish, anti-Western and pro-Russian

narratives. One of its editorial posts, titled 'Imperial Russia, or the West heading towards LGBT?!' argues that Georgians need to make a clear choice between flirting with the West or maintaining its historical values and identity. It promotes the idea of launching a balanced politics between the West and Russia and suggests to consider mentality when making allies (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 20-21).

The pro-Russian and anti-Western sentiments are spread by the broadcasting company the Patriot TV, established by the Eurasian Choice and the Society of the King Erekle II. The message-box of the TV station includes, but is not restricted to the need of preservation of Georgian traditions and culture and also propagates negative influences of the EU norms and regulations on the economy of the Eastern European countries after they joined the union. It claims that Georgia's economy can be competitive only by integration with the 'Eurasian' market; this creates negative scenarios of the future cooperation between Georgia and the EU and frequently associates the West, and particularly Europe, with gay rights; another TV Station Dro established in 2014, popularizes less famous faces of the Georgian public space through its programs 'Language, Motherland, Religion,' 'Time of Dialogue' and 'Time of Solidarity,' focused on cultural and traditional aspects, that are sensitive topics for Georgians. The multi-media project Sputnik, the foreign service of the Russian state news agency Ria Novosti and the radio station Russian Voice launched the Sputnik Georgia (January, 2015), is running an on-line portal and radio station simultaneously. The National Communication Commission of Georgia did not give license to the Radio Sputnik to operate in Georgia, thus it now runs a news website in Georgian language, featuring articles, online TV and radio (Nilsson, 2018, p. 41), which demonize the West/EU-US and try to polish the image of Russia through the religious-historical narratives.

3. Selective Appropriation. Main messages of the pro-Russian media, NGOs and political parties acting in Georgia are centered on the issue of saving the country from the degraded West and to restore traditional Russian-Georgian friendship. These organizations are mainly occupied with the popularization of the Eurasian Union in Georgia as a possible alternative to the West and the future partner (Dzvelishvili & Kurpreishvili, 2015, p. 4). The Eurasian Institute serves as an umbrella organization. This institution, with its satellite organizations became particularly active since 2012 (Dzvelishvili & Kurpreishvili, 2015, p. 7). The institute disseminates both, political and cultural narrative, which demonizes the West and promotes pro-Russian drive in

Georgia. Their main political narrative portrays the West as a colonizer of Georgia, who wants to transform the country into the NATO military base in order to secure Caspian Sea's oil resources (Dzvelishvili & Kurpreishvili, 2015, p. 14). The cultural narrative evolves around the LGBT activism in Georgia, which sends deadly signals to the Georgian culture and the Georgian nation (Dzvelishvili & Kurpreishvili, 2015, p. 18). As a moderate alternative to the European drive, the pro-Russian forces, both political parties and NGOs, propose co-religious Russia as a salvation and redemption of Georgia. To strengthen their arguments on religious brotherhood, these political groups quite often cite words of the Georgian clergy from different sermons. These political organizations continuously demand to hold referendum for determination of Georgia's foreign policy course (Dzvelishvili & Kurpreishvili, 2015, pp. 35-36). The political, cultural and religious aspects of the pro-Russian narrative do attract significant portion of the Georgian electorate/society.

The Eurasian Institute and the Eurasian Choice are the main vehicles promoting the anti-European political discourse among the population of Georgia. The Eurasian Institute cooperates with the Russian organization Lev Gumilev Center (founded in Moscow in 2011) which popularizes the idea of Eurasianism as a source of resolution of ethnic conflicts and considers prospects of Georgia's integration in the Eurasian Union (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 22-23), which is considered as profitable for the country's economy and a step ahead towards normalization of relations with Russia and resolution of territorial conflicts of Georgia (Detector Media, 2017, p. 8). The fraternity between the Georgian and Russian peoples are highlighted on the bases of the Orthodox faith (Nilsson, 2018, pp. 40-41). 'Calling Russia occupant is termed as a high treason,' as during the talks behind-the-scenes, the Russian politicians and experts stated that if Georgia changes its foreign direction and renews strategic partnership with Russia, Moscow will support Georgia in resolution of its conflicts (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 38-39). This sort of political messages plant false hopes in the hearts of a portion of the Georgian society, which reinforces division between the pro-Western and pro-Russian camps. These ideas resonated with the conservative ideology of Moscow and if coupled with disinformation policy, they reinforce the economic and culturally driven narratives of the pro-Russian forces and undermine the pro-Western one. The pro-Russian forces promote the idea that Russia is irritated because of Georgia's rapprochement with the West and refer to various Russian politicians in Moscow, who express their readiness to turn to the 'politics of normal'

with Georgia (Detector Media, 2017, p. 8). These messages in different forms were constantly voiced in the Parliament of Georgia between 2016-2020 by the political party Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, referred as the pro-Russian political party by the pro-Western political forces and portion of the society, self-designated and pretending to be the sole pro-Georgian political party. Interestingly, it allied with the far-right groups of Georgia during their street-protests and demonstrations in 2021-2022.

4. Narrative Accrual. The civil society actors create communication platforms through intellectual circles, which legitimize and further disseminate the anti-European narratives (Detector Media, 2017, p. 8). They undermine the pro-Western discourse through patriotic slogans and lexicon, based on identity and values issues, that are successfully securitized. They breed fear that integration in the Western structures and acceptance of the Western values would undermine national identity, religious practice and sexual identity; therefore, the anti-Western messages mainly relies on the idea of defence of dignity (Detector Media, 2017, pp. 17-18) and protection of conservative values vs. liberal values. In civil society, the Russian supported organizations are mainly centered on humanitarian activities and promote the idea to prohibit CSOs which are funded by foreign donors. This message is identical to the message included in The Russian Federation's State Security Strategy of 2015, depicting these organizations as threats to the state security and portrayed against the traditional spiritual values (Detector Media, 2017, pp. 20-22). The anti-NATO slogans and arguments are disseminated by the Eurasian Institute of Georgia, established by the young generation and graduates of the HEIs of Georgia, running various societal platforms: The Club of Young Politologists, The Center for Problems of Globalization, The Caucasian Cooperation, The Center for the Study of the Problems of Globalization and The Center for Global Studies. The Eurasian Institute prepared a review paper 'Georgia-NATO – Myths and Reality,' which described the negative image of NATO. The organization is blamed for its aspirations to create its military bases in the South Caucasus for balancing Russia on the Black Sea coast, whereas remains neutral towards the issue of territorial integrity of Georgia. It needs Georgia for cheap soldiers for its peace-keeping missions and does not provide security reassurance. Although it is argued that NATO could be a good balancer for Georgia vis-a-vis Russia, due to NATO's actions in Kosovo, it is proclaimed as an unreliable partner in restoration of territorial integrity of Georgia (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 30-31). They argue that there is a mismatch between NATO's aspirations in the region (primarily

centered on democracy promotion) and expectations of the Georgian authorities (NATO as a security guarantee vis-à-vis Russia for Georgia), which indirectly reinforces the claim that without normalization of politics and dialogue with Russia, a breakthrough in terms of resolution of Georgia's primary concerns – national security and re-gaining territorial integrity – is not possible.

The Eurasian Institute mainly carries out analytical activities and organizes conferences and round tables. Together with the Society of Erekle II it cooperates with the International Eurasian Movement and provide free of charge Russian language courses with the support of the *Ruskii Mir* throughout the entire post-Soviet space (Lutsevych, 2016, p. 9) and classes of Russian literature and history of the Russian state (Nilsson, 2018, pp. 40-41). The Eurasian Institute initiated a project *The Popular Movement for the Georgian-Russian Dialogue and Cooperation*, which contributes to the improvement of the Russian-Georgian relations, being artificially worsened by the forces acting within the country, as well as beyond its borders. Through its expert interviews and comments in the media, the organization provided a positive assessment regarding Bidzina Ivanishvili and his political party, the Georgian Dream, before the parliamentary elections of 2012, thus reinforcing expectations of the normalization and improvement of the Russian-Georgian relations (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 6-7).

The Society of the King Erekle II uses statements of clerics in its anti-Western propaganda and argues that the foreign policy of Georgia should be directed according to the Orthodox religion, shared by Georgia and Russia, and denounces the Western-funded NGOs, which are hostile towards Georgia and undermine the interests of the country (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 41-42). Its efforts are reinforced by the CSO Scientific Society of Caucasiologists, founded in 2010, which contributes to sharing knowledge and experience among scientists of the Caucasus for the improvement of relations between the people residing in the Russian Federation and other CIS member countries. In September 2014, the society organized a round table on the topic 'The Russian-Abkhazian Relations: The New Dimensions and Contours of Integration' (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, pp. 23-25) to re-build the positive image of Russia as a chance for conflict settlement in Georgia. The Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy, created under the decree of the president of Russian Federation, Dimitri Medvedev, established the Russian-Georgian Societal Center, which promotes the idea of non-alignment of Georgia in foreign policy as a chance for normalization of

relations with Russia (Lutsevych, 2016, p. 23). Its narratives are shared with the Russian officials, who claim that the Euro-Atlantic integration is a device to drain natural resources of the post-Soviet countries and lure their states into NATO, in order to replenish its human resources to fight the US-incited wars globally (Lutsevych, 2016, pp. 12-13).

The religious aspect is also strongly manipulated and securitized by the pro-Russian CSOs. In 2010, the new organization Popular Orthodox Movement was established, which promoted the idea of building the Georgian state, based on the orthodox values, ensuring development of the Georgian identity and traditional Christian mode of life. It also expresses its readiness to cooperate with the Patriarchate of Georgia and shares with it the idea of restoration of the monarchy as the mode of state order in Georgia (Dzvelishvili & Kupreishvili, 2015, p. 32). The role of Christianity in strengthening Georgia's affiliation with the Western, Christian world is rather ambiguous. The Georgian Orthodox Church has exerted influence on political elites and their foreign policy choice to different degrees at various times, although its impact on foreign policy can be best described as marginal (Jones & Kakhishvili, pp. 2013: 22). The problem is that it is hard to differentiate whether the Georgian Orthodox Church's sympathies that coincide with Russian positions are the product of the Russian soft power or stem from the ideological convergence of two the kindred churches.

5. Conclusion

The paper demonstrates that the public political narratives are created and employed by political elites for legitimization of their particular political discourse in the country's foreign and domestic affairs. The narratives create controversial representation of Russia and the EU in the Georgian political public sphere through diverse interpretation of one and the same event(s). The main axis of the images of Russia and EU either as enemies or saviors are constructed through selective appropriation of various moments from the history of the Russian-Georgian and the Georgian-European relations according to the aims of a particular political message/narrative. The narrative on Russia, representing it as the enemy, seeks to disassociate Georgia from the Northern vector in the post Russian-Georgian August War of 2008 reality in particular; whereas the narrative of Russia as the savior of Georgia from the Muslim yoke, thus preserving its religious identity, promotes the idea of normalization of relations with Russia, as

this will lead to the resolution of the territorial problems of the country. It refers to the commonality of the Orthodox religion between Russia and Georgia as a source of these efforts. The same images of the EU rotating as a counterweight forces – that is the EU as a savior from the Russian yoke or EU as an antithesis of the traditional Georgian culture.

The images of Russia and the EU of enemy and savior are contradictory as they are created through the techniques of selective remembering and forgetting, which has receptive ground in a wider society in the context of the present challenges and past grievances. These challenges and grievances are constructed through the events and transformed into the solid narratives constructed by political and cultural actors. The both representations of Russia and the EU try to provide foundations for the politically motivated narratives, connecting particular developments in a way to impose desired order via setting causal links between selected events and planned political discourse. Each narrative has its own ‘resource of flexibility’ for projection on the future on the basis of the past events on the backdrop of the fluctuating relations between Russia and Georgia and the EU and Georgia. The both narratives are under strong influence of geopolitics, which is behind of each public political narrative in the contemporary Georgian

The mutually exclusive images of Russia and the EU, rotating as the meta or grand narratives, are attached to one and the same geopolitical space – that is Eurasia, which is differently conceived and power-projected by Russia and the West/EU where Georgia plays its central role. Therefore, Russia’s and EU’s images in the Georgian political public sphere appear as a part of the wider political game at the Eastern periphery of the EU between the Moscow and Brussels, which is the part of security gamble in the wider region of Eurasia. The different reflections on international context and conceptualization of the Russian-Georgian and Georgian-Western relations enable both, the pro-Russian and anti-Russian, as well as pro-European and anti-European forces in the Georgian politics to frame their domestic and foreign policy discourses around the mutually exclusive images of the EU(rope) and Russia – represented as the savior or enemy of Georgia and to insert the both images simultaneously in the Georgian [political] public sphere.

The exclusive metanarratives damage Georgia’s relations with the EU at the expense of its normalization with Russia, as it represents a kind of zero-sum game between the different visions of country’s future security. Though Georgia remains on a pro-Western course, in reality gradual shift towards Russian political and civilizational sphere is felt in the country, primarily through

activation of pro-Russian forces in the spheres of media and politics. During the presidency of Saakashvili main avenues of transmission of their slogans and propaganda to the mass audience was effectively blocked and contained through counter, anti-Russian propaganda. The rhetoric of pro-Russian forces under the Georgian Dream government became open, which created a fruitful base for the opportunity of a shift from the Western sphere to the Northern direction, with a strong securitization component.

This new reality is the testimony to the fact that the pro-Western drive, which mostly remained on elite level since declaration of independence of Georgia in the early 1990s, has not become a sole option for the foreign policy orientation of Georgia. Its alternative – the northern vector and pro-Russian sentiments – are quite strong and if wrapped in anti-Western narratives, rather than openly delivered to mass society as simple pro-Russian direction, could be easily bought by a significant portion of the Georgian society, with a false promise of territorial reintegration and security reassurance (by whom?) of statehood and nationhood. This two-fold tendency – pro-Western political drive and pro-Russian sentiments – the latter nurtured by religious aspects, brings country on a rocky terrain. Fluctuated politically and bifurcated culturally between the West and Russia, Georgia might be found in a trap, facing a hard choice: either saved by normatively driven Europe, to which it needs to comply, or helped by the big brother – Russia, in exchange of obedience, to be started with negation of the pro-Western course once and for all.

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