DOI : 10.14746/pp.2014.19.3.14

Lasha MARKOZASHVILI

Tbilisi, Georgia
Poznan, Poland

Transition toward democracy – Georgian problems

Abstract: The process of democratisation in Georgia has its obstacles, mostly connected with cultural and socio-economic aspects. Political challenges are interlinked with societal attitudes and vice versa. The historical role of the Orthodox Church in preserving Georgian national identity throughout the centuries is over-compensated for, with frequent clerical involvements in public life. Non-democratic governments have made no effort to finalise the process of transition and for two decades the state has remained in the grey zone between consolidation and autocracy. 2012 was marked as a year for the new hopes of Georgian democracy, a new government was elected via free and fair elections, but democracy needs conditions to endure and this paper examines those conditions.

Key words: Georgia, democratic transition, political culture, Saakashvili, Orthodox Church

Introduction

In 1989 when Francis Fukuyama hoped for the "end of history" (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 1–18) it was hard to foresee that the Soviet Union would collapse and, as a consequence, set in motion the process later ascertained as a fourth wave of democratic transition (McFaul, 2002). The uncertainty about the future of the post-Communist space was twofold; it contained the political *anoesis* of the liberal world and academic confusion. Finally, the west unveiled region-specific political schemes and, subsequently, this treatment played an important role in shaping academic preferences as well. This pattern can be examined if we take a closer look at the western efforts serving to help former USSR satellites in Europe on their paths toward democratic consolidation; there were serious problems and successes, correspondingly reviewed and analysed by scholars.

The Caucasus is a region that probably had the most difficult post-Communist decade. Severe ethnic conflicts turned into a matter of academic concern. Inescapably, the process of democratisation in the region lost its academic applicability.

The Georgian Republic was among other states that confirmed their readiness to have democracy as a main principle for state building, but owing to unforeseen developments at the beginning of the 90s,[1] the country went through the slush of political stagnation and corruption. The aftermath of two wars left little hope for development, the remnants of the Soviet industrial legacy were privatised and monopolised by the circles of former

[1] After the 1991–1992 coup d'état, power was taken by a provisional Military Council of the Republic of Georgia. In February 1992 the Military Council transferred power to the State Council of the Republic of Georgia.

Communist officials. Although Eduard Shevardnadze often used the word democracy to describe his regime, the country was closer to an oligarchy and did not meet even the minimum criteria of a democracy.[2]

After 2003 and the Rose Revolution, the United States and the EU were sparingly optimistic about the new political elite that emerged from the young, charismatic leaders. Georgia was included in the newly launched European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and welcomed as a partner of NATO. Although there were unseen amounts of reforms initiated and enacted by the government to improve state functioning, evidence gradually showed that the state machinery was frequently used against its own citizens, violating the fundamental values of a liberal democracy (Human Rights Watch, 2011–2012).

In 2012, disclosing the facts of torture and ill treatment in Georgian prisons caused waves of mass protests in the streets. As an outcome, the Government was democratically changed in scheduled elections. President Saakashvili left office after serving two presidential terms, in 2013.

"What is democracy and what is not" (Schmitter, Karl, 1991)? What are the pre-conditions which facilitate democracy to emerge? What are the factors which help democracy endure? Is democratisation a process which necessarily brings consolidation (O'Donnell, Schmitter, Whitehead, 1986, p. 6)? Is there a 'grey zone'? Are hybrid regimes democracies with some problems or autocracies with some democratic features? Enormous academic work has been done to generate and answer these questions.

There are many different definitions of democracy itself, but modern scholars pay more attention to answering the questions which focus on the emergence and endurance of democracy. Some scientists believe that the 'transition paradigm' is outdated, and we should treat the regimes as they are in reality, rather than seeing them at some conditional point in streaming towards democratic consolidation (Levitsky, Way, 2002, p. 51); others remain on the 'transitionalist' side.

This paper is entirely theoretical and utilises some of the answers to those questions to explain the state of Georgian democracy. The author believes that Georgia is a state in transition (which does not mean that other states with the similar features necessarily fall in the same category), but on the way towards consolidation the state has gone via different types of hybrid regimes. To understand the nature of those regimes, and *a fortiori* the reasons for their emergence, it is important to analyse political and cultural dimensions of the state.

The essay will try to answer the questions: who are the main political actors in Georgia? What are the general characteristics of the political parties in power? What are the important features of Georgian political culture? How do all these relate to the state of democracy?

Although the work includes some information from the recent historical experience of the country, it mainly focuses on the period of 2003–2012, and hence how Saakashvili's governance shaped the modern image of Georgia.

---

[2] The minimum requirement of democracy as defined by Joseph Schumpeter and others is a fair election; during the period of Shevardnadze's presidency there were frequent reports about electoral fraud. In 2003 protests were held to support free suffrage, a process ended with the peaceful revolution, later called the Rose Revolution.

The first part of the paper is dedicated to political and economic factors and their relation to the process of transition. The second part grasps the cultural issues and their effect on political life.

Georgian political parties in power

Parties are usually analysed with different approaches which focus on organisational, ideological or other essential aspects, but for the purposes of this paper I would like to categorise political units according to electoral causality; to put it another way: the electorates of parties that fall in a defined group value similar criteria for choosing politicians.[3]

First, people’s parties are the products of popular movements. The leaders do not come from the political elite; they enjoy innate support from fellow partisans.[4] The first stage of organisational existence is a problem based on limited scope and resources, but once a movement gains greater support, political ambitions emerge.

Second, leader’s parties[5] (Wolinetz, 2002, p. 144) have support because of their leaders, who are mostly charismatic and persuasive enough to be appreciated by the masses. The existence of parties of this category is usually limited temporally; when personalities give up politics, the organisations they represent fall apart.

Third, ideological parties are traditional political organisations with defined ideological directions. They have enduring systems passed down generations. People support them because of the principles they represent.

The political history of the independent Georgian Republic does not have much to say about the democratic struggles between established political units, but, in a limited sense, it includes all three above-mentioned party types. Overall, as Tarkhan Mouravi argues: “political parties in Georgia are weak organisations, with low levels of internal democracy and loose structures” (Bader, 2010, p. 75).

At the end of the ‘80s, the anti-Soviet movement peaked in Georgia. It is hard to identify the leaders of the movement among politicians, because under the totalitarian rules political struggle was impossible. They had long experience of defending national values and human rights, but all of their activities were held within the system of an oppressive state. Foreseeing a situation in which the existing conditions could be substituted for more favourable ones may have brought about different hypothetical scenarios, but nobody anticipated the sudden crash of the communist regime. Gorbachev’s perestroika was in its final stages when Georgian dissidents felt it was the right time to politicise their activities, demanding full independence from the Communist state. The unique chance to challenge the Communists in democratic elections required organised parties in opposition. The 1990 coalition formed by the dissidents was called Round Table – Free Georgia, symbolising common roots and aspirations of political organisations included. The oppo-

[3] The paper does not seek to go into an in-depth research into party types, the aim is to present broader definitions for the purposes of the paper.

[4] Support is innate because in this case leaders of the movement and participants have shared, yet not politicised beliefs and aspirations.

[5] Or leader-centred parties as defined by Wolinetz.

sition won the parliamentary elections and later its leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia became the first president of Georgia (The Central Election Commission of Georgia, 2010, p. 7). After the presidential elections, and especially during the period of the military coup, an organisation emerged from the people’s coalition Round Table that was mostly, and single-handedly, associated with the President, accordingly, its supporters were called *Zviad-ists*.

Post-coup elections were held in 1992. Eduard Shevardnadze, a former Communist official and the only candidate accepted by the rebels, was elected through a parallel direct ballot to the position of Chairman of Parliament and Head of State (Nodia, Scholtbach, 2006, p. 11). In 1993, he created the Citizens’ Union of Georgia (CUG), which gained the majority of votes in the next two parliamentary elections (1995, 1999). During the Shevardnadze period, the Georgian Parliament was very pluralistic, out of 36 political parties 24 managed to exceed the 2% electoral threshold (The Central Election Commission of Georgia, 2010, p. 8). Although there were figures within the CUG like Zurab Zhvania who had self-reliant political credibility, the solidity of the party was fully built upon its leader’s authority.

Thomas Carothers, in his well-known article, accommodates the CUG’s Georgia into the grey zone, among countries “which have some attributes of democratic political life” but “suffer from serious democratic deficits” (Carothers, 2002, p. 9). These types of countries have already abandoned autocratic rule but cannot progress towards consolidation (Carothers, 2002, p. 10). The author emphasises “feckless pluralism”, presenting it as the “first syndrome” of the type of system described (Carothers, 2002, p. 10). It is true that with introducing a new electoral barrier of 5%, there were fewer political organisations represented in the parliament after the 1995 parliamentary elections, but by that time a “corrupt, self-interested, and ineffective” (Carothers, 2002, p. 10) political elite had already been formed, and there was no need for ‘newcomers’.

Shevardnadze’s regime ended with the Rose Revolution in 2003 and soon after, the CUG disappeared from the political arena. Most of its loyal members had no chance of a comeback as the opposition; firstly because of Shevardnadze’s retirement and, secondly, because of the post-revolutionary public attitudes. The new public discourse offered by the leadership left no room for any dialogue with the *Ancien Régime*; according to the rhetoric, the CUG had no moral right to be in the public domain, because they had already brought the country to extreme poverty and stagnation. The public shared the elite’s aspirations; simultaneously Shevardnadze’s political absence was a crucial element in forming an outcome where political dialogue was not on the agenda.

In 2003–2013 the United National Movement (UNM), and its leader Mikheil Saakashvili, had no parliamentary opposition. Although there were several attempts by ‘street politicians’ to challenge the UNM, no significant results were achieved (Fairbanks, Gugushvili, 2013, p. 199). The party had full comfort to govern independently, and absence of political opponents did not seem to be temporary. Political parties in opposition had very low public support, and at the same time most of them had no resources to change electoral attitudes. Despite the fact that among UNM members were experienced politicians, the party remained largely a leader’s party. It is true that during several periods particular affiliates were promoted to represent the UNM in public, but none of them was able to present the image of a true leader.

Two important developments took place in Georgia in 2012–2013: first, a new government was elected through free and fair elections. Second, the former governmental party, the UNM, emerged as a legitimate opposition. This can be considered a historical achievement of local political life. A person who had supported Saakashvili’s government from the wings appeared to be the one who brought the regime to an end (Freeman, 2012).

The billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili was a mysterious individual prior to his entrance into politics in 2011. He had never before appeared on TV screens and his name was predominantly connected with his long list of charity activities. “I decided to go into politics because of our Soviet-style government” (Harding, 2012), he explained in an interview given to *The Guardian.* According to him, Saakashvili’s government was an autocratic one and had nothing in common with western democracies, the money he had given to the UNM was intended to modernise the country, but the leadership took Georgia in the opposite direction (Civil.Ge, 2013).

Video footage which leaked from a Georgian prison was a wakeup call for the people. A new leader without a political past but with a good personal reputation brought new hope for the opposition. Political parties who could barely reach the threshold to enter parliament became units of a coalition called Georgian Dream, headed by Ivanishvili. The coalition won the parliamentary elections in 2012; as a result Bidzina Ivanishvili became prime minister. After one year, in 2013, the Georgian Dream’s candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili defeated major rival, the UNM’s David Bakradze, in the presidential runoff.

There is no doubt that Georgian Dream used to be Ivanishvili’s coalition. But the most interesting thing was still to come. In his first and last public addresses, Ivanishvili clearly stated that after getting rid of the UNM’s governance, he would leave the political arena and return to the public sector. He kept his promise, with the introduction of his heir – the new Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili.

Delegative democracy, competitive authoritarianism or both?

As was already mentioned above, Saakashvili was strongly supported by the west, mainly because of his political promises to democratise the state. The promises were partially enacted in documented obligations taken with involvement in the European Neighbourhood Policy. The officially declared goal of joining NATO also required the Georgian government to keep on reforming. The state achieved some successes in both directions, but there were some failures as well.

A frequently discussed outcome of the political shortcomings was NATO’s refusal to give the Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia at the summit in Bucharest 2008 (Gallis, 2008, p. 3). A decline in the Freedom House’s rating followed the same year (Freedom House, 2008).[6]

[6] “Georgia’s political rights rating declined from 3 to 4 due to the restrictions placed on political opposition following the November 2007 emergency declaration, and the civil liberties rating declined from 3 to 4 due to the circumscription of media and expression in the aftermath of the November protests.” See: Freedom House.

Saakashvili's political vigour required a strong, aggressive attitude towards the Russian Federation; political decisions were frequently justified as securitisation (Buzan, Waever, De Wilde, 1998, p. 23–26). When a state is not safe from threats to its existence, democracy can be limited by the government for the purposes of national security. People were arrested and labelled agents of the Russian Security forces (Kupunia, 2011). The president continued to demonise the opposition; he had to have an exclusive role in Georgian politics along with his partners from the UNM. Saakashvili postulated that his team was the sole agent of westernisation within the country. According to the governmental discourse, those who opposed the UNM opposed westernisation and, accordingly, were pro-Russians.

There are different classifications of regimes; it is hard to allocate Georgia in one particular category. For the purposes of this paper I would like to establish whether Georgia is a democracy with some problems, or an authoritarian state with some democratic features.

Authoritarianism with democratic features is often described as electoral authoritarianism, or competitive authoritarianism. Incumbents of the regimes do not want to be called dictators, consequently elections are regularly held, even though only one political organisation achieves constant victory.

In the countries where democracy enjoys solid public support, international pressures on the government might serve as limiters of the incumbent's autocratic policies, the same is true of Saakashvili's regime. The state did not shift towards full scale authoritarianism because of the foreign pressure and political bias of the regime. In 2009–2010 when the government adopted the constitutional changes to prepare the state for the parliamentary system, many observers believed that with this configuration Saakashvili "may have intended it to provide a way for him to continue ruling" (Fairbanks, 2014, p. 154), but he had never openly talked about it, the western organisations and politicians had clearly expressed that they would not support Saakashvili's political resurrection after finishing his second term in presidential office.

The UNM's regime was a hybrid, not just in the sense of a problematic democracy; organisationally it included most features of competitive authoritarianism, and simultaneously the composition of the decision making process resembled the type of regime which was classified by Guillermo O'Donnell as a delegative democracy (DD).

Structurally, the country had most of the features of competitive authoritarianism, as defined by Levitsky and Way. If we take a closer look at their argument about the four arenas of democratic contestation the similarities are clearer (Levitsky, Way, 2002, p. 54).[7]

In competitive authoritarianism, elections are regularly held, but with a "large scale of the state power, biased media coverage and harassment of opposition candidates and activists" (Levitsky, Way, 2002, p. 55), Saakashvili's regime was often accused of using state machinery to maintain power. Examples include the mobilisation of high school teachers and administrative stuff during pre-election campaigns; people were taken from town to town to meet UNM members and the president; these gatherings were then broad-

[7] The four arenas of democratic competition include: the electoral arena, the legislative arena, the judicial arena and the media.

cast, to create the image of large scale public support towards the government. The opposition often stated that people employed in the public services were obliged to vote for the UNM in order to preserve their jobs. The problems of the Georgian media have been indicated by the Freedom House, the documents of other international organisations repeatedly reported about the illegal limitations imposed on TV broadcasters and press (Freedom House, 2011). There were cases when the opposition suffered severe abuses, as investigations have shown, persons connected with the Ministry of Internal Affairs blackmailed individuals in order to deter them from politics (Democracy & Freedom Watch, 2013).

“Competitive Authoritarian regimes routinely attempt to subordinate the judiciary” (Levitsky, Way, 2002, p. 56) argue Levitsky and Way, but the UNM’s regime did not need to take serious actions to do so. Politically obedient courts were an intrinsic feature inherited from the previous government. Statistics show that by 2010 the acquittal rate in Georgian courts was no more than one percent (Thomson Reuters, 2011); this literally meant that everybody who stood in front of the juries had been found guilty in advance. Even now, when a new government has come to power, some judicial officials previously affiliated with the UNM help raise doubts about the functioning of the entire system.

As in competitive authoritarianism, the Georgian media were an object of governmental attacks. The frequency and intensity of the pressure depended on particular circumstances and on the political value of the people behind the independent sources of information. For example, channels that had nationwide coverage were under stricter control in comparison to those which covered only Tbilisi and its vicinity. Channels linked with the people who had presented explicit political ambitions were more likely to suffer than those which only played the role of news distributors. Finally, TV 9, founded by Bidzina Ivanishvili, helped to change the government.

Delegative democracy (DD) is more about the attitudes of the elite; it pays greater attention to the means of interaction and examines the leader and his/her political accountability. O’Donnell points out some attributes of the typical president in DD:

“[In DD] the leader has to heal the nation by uniting its dispersed fragments into a harmonious whole… the president and his trusted advisors are the Alpha and Omega… Political parties, interest groups, or crowds in the streets – have to be ignored” (O’Donnell G., 1994, p. 60).

All these features are true when describing Saakashvili’s regime. He had enormous political power; mostly ignored everyone apart from his closest circles to play the role of saviour and moderniser. He often compared his governmental projects to the period of the most successful Georgian king, David IV (the builder) (Jawad, 2006, p. 2). Saakashvili’s ambition to leave his mark in history was described as one of his weaknesses by former US ambassador Richard Miles: “construction projects made the former president’s mark in the country but served no economic function” (Georgia News, 2013). The same diplomat also mentioned that Saakashvili worsened relations with Russia because of his impatience.

In good representative democracies, decision making is relatively slow in comparison to DDs, where presidents have “practically no horizontal accountability” (O’Donnell G., 1994, p. 62). Saakashvili did everything quickly, and the outcomes of his actions were mostly unsuccessful. He lost popularity, similarly to other leaders of DDs:

"Presidents in DD tend to suffer wild swings in popularity: one day they are acclaimed as providential saviours, and the next they are cursed as only fallen gods can be" (O'Donnell G., 1994, p. 62).

The goal of the new Georgian government, as the former Prime Minister Ivanishvili clarified several times, is to transform the semi-authoritarian state inherited by the UNM into a representative, liberal democracy. Undeniably, the challenge is tough and requires sufficient political mobilisation.

The time given to the Georgian Dream may not be enough even to prepare a functional framework for the system. Pluralism without institutionalisation often leads to chaos – Georgia already saw this in the '90s. Some theorists of democratisation might argue that the ambiguity introduced by Ivanishvili with his renunciation might serve as an impetus for real democratic processes, but others, like Adam Przeworski, may argue that uncertainty can work in favour of democracy only when "institutions are in place" (Przeworski, 2003, p. 76).

So it seems on the surface that Georgia is moving forward, leaving DD behind. Inasmuch as constitutional changes have entered into force, the Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili is the one who has to lead the government; he has more accountability both from the legal and political points of view. Legally, he is responsible for working in tandem with the parliament, president and the cabinet of ministers. Politically his actions should fall within the general value framework of the coalition which brought him to the power.

Pre-conditions of democracy

Theorists of democratisation often try to establish the favourable pre-conditions for democratic consolidation. Some of them assert the criteria which are needed to be in place to achieve good democracy, others point out that these criteria may just serve as facilitators, but not necessarily lead to consolidation.

"The question is not how a democratic system comes into existence. Rather it is how a democracy, assumed to be already in existence can best preserve or enhance its health and stability" (Rustow, 1970, p. 339). Dankwart A. Rustow, in his influential article, emphasises the factors which help democracy to endure, he is very demanding while analysing the causality of democratisation, criticising the "endogenous" model of modernisation, and instead of the social pre-conditions proposed by Lipset, gives a single "background condition" – **National Unity** (Rustow, 1970, p. 350). For him this condition is to be "accepted unthinkingly" and even a "vocal consensus" about it can be a cause for concern (Rustow, 1970, p. 351). Rustow asserts that the next phases of democratisation are only possible if national unity is taken by everyone for granted. If we try to find this condition in Georgia, we might touch upon a very serious problem.

The state has two occupied regions with ethnic minorities. Abkhazians and South Ossetians, and those who do not yet have Russian passports, are *de jure* considered to be holders of the rights that all Georgian citizens have. But in reality, as recent historical experience shows, these people do not associate themselves with the Georgian state. Both self-declared regimes have Russian political and military support and, therefore, are fully controlled by the Kremlin. Simultaneously, as the international economic embargo is in force, their regimes are highly dependent on Russia (BBC, 2013). After two wars and the

complete separation of the former compatriots, hostile political establishments and Russian involvement are making dialog impossible. Accordingly, there is nothing extraordinary in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian adverse attitudes toward the Georgian State.

The first and fundamental problem regarding national unity lies in the sovereignty of the Georgian state. The official jurisdiction of Georgia does not, in reality, extend over the regions and people in the way it is declared in the constitution. **The second problem** is a result of the first one, in that, from the very beginning, Georgian governments made some serious political mistakes while dealing with the institutionalisation of the bureaucratic legacy of the occupied territories. And **third**, Saakashvili’s government not only followed the wrong path but made it even more complicated.

The Georgian state is not willing to waive its claim to the occupied regions, and these aspirations are rightfully upheld by the western democracies, but the problem that comes along with this struggle lies in the partial neglect of nation building. If any of the governments have focused on the future, they have done so without understanding or accepting the present.

After the conflict in Abkhazia, Shevardnadze brought almost the full spectrum of institutions of the Autonomous Republic to Tbilisi, including the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Abkhazia and, ironically, even city halls and ministries which were operating before the war were located in the capital.

Nobody had considered the fact that useless institutions could generate bad cultural outcomes. The chief of the police of the town of Gagra, the mayor of Sokhumi, the head of the government of Abkhazia, and many others – these were all officials without any other function than to serve a purpose that might be called illusion making. As a consequence, the Georgian citizens themselves were left confused.[8]

The structure created alienated internally displaced persons, or IDPs; for example, when local children from the high schools of Tbilisi are taken for the medical check required by the Ministry of Defence of Georgia in groups (according to their place of residence), IDP children have to go separately to the Commissariat of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic.

Compact settlements of IDPs, which were everywhere in Georgia, had a kind of cultural ghetto effect. The people who lived there were mostly related families, or families who lived together, or knew each other before the war and had no real need or opportunities to be fully integrated in the local, very specific Tbilisian community. The term *refugee* was used (at least) as frequently as *internally displaced* in public.[9]

IDPs had to overcome the negative attitudes of locals, but these attitudes were mostly caused by social problems. The refugees were additional trouble for the poor state, and this issue was easily converted to create scapegoats out of them. To clarify, there was no real feeling of unity between IDPs and locals, and the government helped this negative trend to endure through bad political decisions.

---

[8] Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons is responsible IDP problems.

[9] Merriam Webster Dictionary: “Refugee – someone who has been forced to leave a country because of war or for religious or political reasons,” – *Georgian war victims who lived in Georgia were internally displaced* [Author].

When a person lives in one town but officially belongs to another which unfortunately no longer exists, or never existed for him/her (due to being part of a new generation), a decision has to be made. Choosing a new reality should not be a moral compromise made by the people; the government is the institution capable of doing an "immoral" thing and making it right for the state interests. Officials should ensure every person's full integration in the community of citizens.

Mikheil Saakashvili was considered to be a great moderniser of the country, but instead of fixing the problems that I have mentioned above he went further, establishing the Temporary Administration of South Ossetia. The project was promoted and advertised broadly, with music videos, concerts and so on. His populist decisions, which were illustrated using military footage, had an exclusively negative impact, especially if we look back, considering the outcomes of the five day war in August 2008.[10]

Rustow's article was an answer to the scholarly debate in which Seymour Martin Lipset contributed, underlining certain social requisites as an essential factor in the emergence of democracy. He argued that if a legitimate state has enough wealth and a high level of industrialisation and urbanisation combined with a good literacy rate, the political system is more likely to be a democratic one (Lipset, 1959, p. 69–105). Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi are among those academics who accentuate the positive role of economic development but they argue that: "[t]he emergence of democracy is not a by-product of economic development," and "[o]nly once it is established do economic constraints play a role: the chances for the survival of democracy are greater when the country is richer" (Przeworski, Limongi, 1997, p. 177). The main idea of Przeworski's work emphasises the role of social conditions in consolidating democracy, but it avoids Lipset's "optimistic equation"[11] where democracy is considered to be a direct outcome of modernisation. Guillermo O'Donnell confronted Lipset's modernisation paradigm, coming to the conclusion that economic development may lead to the rise of bureaucratic authoritarianism (O'Donnell G. A., 1973, p. 1–48). Samuel Huntington sees a significant role for modernisation in bringing positive social changes, but at the same time he does not share the optimism that economic development will necessarily lead to democracy (Huntington, 1968). He argues that if there is a "lack of civic morale and public spirit and political institutions capable of giving a meaning and direction to the public interest. Not political development but political decay dominated [dominates – L.M.] the scene" (Huntington, 1968, p. 4).

Social conditions

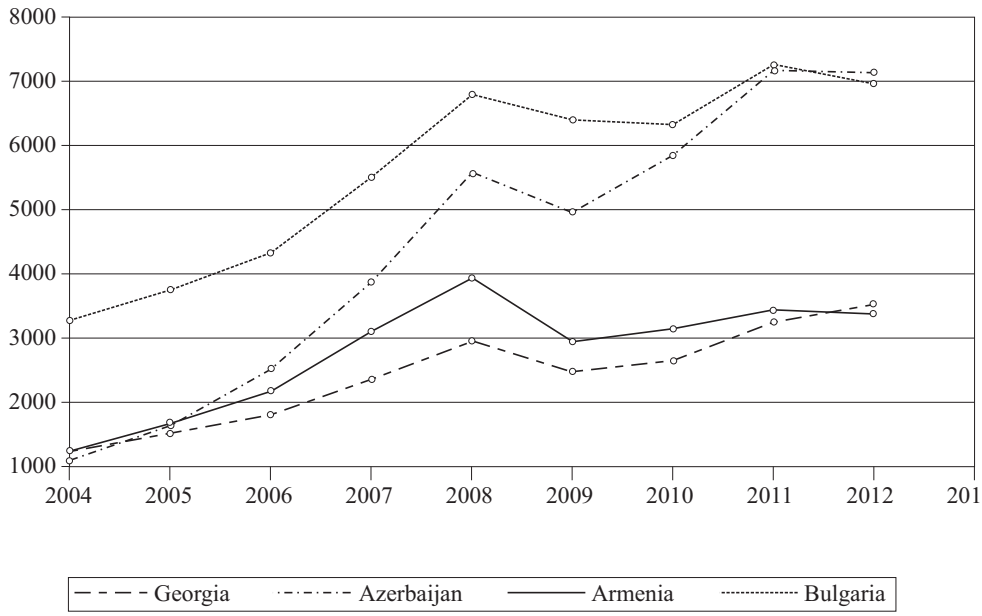
In Georgia for the last two decades there has been an almost total absence of the factors necessary for development of democracy. Economic growth has been steady, but ac-

[10] The military videos served to raise public expectations of the Georgian Army – those expectations were too high, before facing Russian aggression and, as an outcome of the lost war, citizens received another disappointment.

[11] The term "optimistic equation" is used by Guillermo A. O'Donnell; "More Socio-Economic Development = More Likelihood of Political Democracy."

companied by increasing foreign debts. Low GDP *per capita*, combined with high inequality in wealth distribution, makes the overall picture even murkier. Even though the university acceptance rate is high, this is not reflected in overall levels of education. The lack of qualified teachers in higher education is reflected in worrisome literacy statistics.

Graph 1. GDP *per capita* (current US dollars) – World Bank Data



Source: World Bank.

Graph 1 is useful to show the approximate state of the Georgian economy; it shows GDP *per capita* comparisons in the last decade. The graph is generated from statistics prepared by the World Bank and the data includes Georgia’s closest neighbours (Azerbaijan, Armenia) and one EU state – Bulgaria, which has the lowest average GDP among the 28 EU members. All these states had to deal with a Communist legacy, and only Bulgaria is designated by the Freedom House as ‘free’. Azerbaijan is an oil rich country and accordingly, has solid GDP growth, exceeding that of Bulgaria in 2012. Georgia and Armenia retain relatively similar statistics, but the former has a better rating for democracy.

If we take into consideration the “optimistic paradigm of modernisation,” Georgia has a long road ahead of it to reach the economic threshold. Simultaneously, the country’s Gini index is the worst among the post-Soviet states (Fact Check, 2013). Substantial inequalities in wealth distribution serve as an obstacle for the emergence of a politically aware citizenry.

Huge military expenditure was justified by Saakashvili’s government as an unavoidable answer to the security challenges they faced. This argument was well promoted and was never a matter of broad political discussion. Giving priority to unmerited military re-

forms and retaining a relatively large standing army, kept civilian education out of budgetary preferences.

According to recent polls conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), social problems remain the biggest concern for citizens. The majority of the population does not feel the effects of any significant economic improvements after the governmental change; nevertheless, the Georgian Dream coalition is still the most popular political organisation (Navarro, 2013).

Political culture

Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba introduced a complex approach to political culture and its role in democracy. The authors argue that a "democratic model of states requires more than formal institutions" (Almond, Verba, 1989, p. 3). Civic culture, for them, is what makes democracy consolidated and enduring. This is a public culture which includes the political attitudes, norms, and values of both the elite and the citizenry. These researchers first identified political orientation types, dividing them into three categories: cognitive orientation, affective orientation and evaluational orientation (Almond, Verba, 1989, p. 14).

The cognitive orientation includes general knowledge of the political system, affective orientation deals with the feelings about the political system and its subjects, and evaluational orientation is a mixed judgment of the political system involving both feelings and knowledge (Almond, Verba, 1989, p. 14).

Out of these categories, the researchers generated questions for the populations of the five countries. The research results were theorised and presented in cultural patterns.

A subject political culture describes a public which is aware of the political system, sees the outputs of policies, but fails to see the inputs and especially the "role of the self as an active participant" (Almond, Verba, 1989, p. 17). The citizens are like observers and do not feel their responsibilities and importance in the democratic process. The public knows the government, has construed attitudes and feelings towards the policies; however the judgments are passive and rarely lead to concrete actions.

During the Georgian presidential elections in 2013, only 46% of registered voters came to the ballot boxes. This low political turnout might not be rare, even in European states, but in the Georgian context, more participation was expected. Presumably the balloting was a last step to finalise the process of governmental change – supported by the majority of citizens, but less than half took the responsibility to go and vote. The Georgian political attitude includes the most of the elements of a subject political culture as defined by Almond and Verba.

The authors of the approach consider the development of political culture in Britain as an example of civic evolution. They argue that a civic culture is a mixture of the past and present. These two cultural sets interact, via clashes between modernisation and traditionalism; the clashes can be strong, but not strong enough to ensure the victory of one side or the other, even if temporarily stronger. The outcome of these clashes is a value consensus, which leads to an enduring political balance (Almond, Verba, 1989, p. 5).

In Georgia, traditional values are mostly associated with the Orthodox Church. The institution apparently played a considerable role in preserving Georgian national identity

throughout the centuries, and nowadays possesses enormous influence on the society. According to polls, the Patriarch Ilia II is the most trusted personality, and correspondingly he represents a dominant public institution (International Republican Institute, 2011, p. 34). The special status of the Georgian Church was authorised by the government with the constitutional agreement. The concordat between the state and the patriarchate gives the religious institution full freedom and significant material benefits.

Elizabeth H. Prodromou argues that “orthodox Christianity and democracy are compatible,” but the Church holds certain ambivalence in attitudes toward pluralism (Prodromou, 2004, p. 62). In the case of the Georgian Orthodox Church, the theological understanding of pluralism is not the main problem which serves as an obstacle for the emergence of a democratically aware citizenry.

The Soviet Perestroika loosened state control over ideologies. Accordingly, Georgians were granted a limited opportunity to rebound from complete atheism and return to the Church. Being a Christian, by that time, was equivalent to being opposed to the Soviet Union. Religion embedded defiance of the totalitarian regime. Orthodoxy served as an ideological vehicle for attaining independence. The tradition of religiosity had been lost during the 70 years of Communist rule; newly emerged Christians did not have any religious knowledge, but they possessed a strong need for cultural disobedience. The strongest antagonistic values, by that time, could be found in the realm of God. I would like to argue that the re-Christianisation of Georgians was shaped by the political and cultural environment, and therefore the idea of the Georgian independent state remained more meaningful than the idea of organised religion.

On 9 April, 1989, Russian tanks were approaching Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi. Thousands of protesters stood in the middle of the road between St. George’s Church and the Soviet Government House. Trying to avoid possible bloodshed, Patriarch Ilia II addressed the people, asking them to go inside the Church to pray. But the public confronted him, staying for a tenacious civil protest. Subsequently, soldiers equipped with sharpened spades reached the area and soon after there were violent clashes. After the massacre, 21 protesters were slaughtered, more than 300 were injured.

The night was a victory for positive secularism: people felt the intrinsic difference between civic and religious spirituality. Unfortunately, the momentum did not last long, after gaining independence, attitudes towards the state and the Church changed. A bloody *coup d’état,* two wars and a severe economic crisis generated public disappointment in the Georgian state. The political frustration initiated a second wave of re-Christianisation of the vast majority of citizens. The Georgian Orthodox Church expanded, obtaining more and more adherents.

Georgians were unaware of statehood because they had never lived in an independent democratic state.[12] Their earlier expectations about independence were absolutely different from what actually occurred. Instead of acquiring the necessary skills for civic life, they had relinquished the role of active participants in political processes and, *in lieu*, affiliated themselves to an institution with God given legitimacy.

---

[12] The first democratic republic of Georgia existed only for three years 1918–1921.

These developments were pragmatically backed by the political elite. The corrupt government had never cherished democratic aspirations. Shevardnadze needed stability and passive citizens. He backed the Church and publicly attended services; he was even baptised by the patriarch. This peaceful coexistence was legalised with the concordat. Saakashvili continued the same practice in his relations with the Church.

Verba and Almond explain that the British case of the formation of civic culture is unique, and others do not necessarily follow the pattern, but I find their arguments plausible. The fact that there has not been even a single clash between traditionalism and modernism in Georgia in which the participating parties had roughly similar qualitative power means that one actor holds the most of the societal influence.

On 17 May a demonstration of LGBT activists was violently attacked by thousands of citizens, actions which "had been accompanied, supported and encouraged" by the religious authorities (Amnesty International, 2013). Finally, the police were able to ensure the safety of victims. This event serves as an illustration of the social influence of the Church, and clarifies Prodromou's arguments. Unfortunately, the authorities were cautious even in their condemnation of these violent actions, and therefore no real legal measures were taken against the abusers.

Dealing with Messianism

In a lengthy letter explaining his reasons for leaving politics, Ivanishvili presented thought-provoking points; notably, he stated that with his renouncement, political life would eventually become more pluralistic; a defeated, but legitimate UNM in opposition and a government coalition which consists of divergent political subjects clearly contribute to the plausibility of the assumption. The new political spectrum seems peculiarly bereft of charismatic leaders; it might be a challenge and/or a new beginning for parties to become more organised and ideologically coherent.

Furthermore, the former PM mentioned his eagerness to transfer his activities from the political sphere to the public sector. The aim, as he declared it, is to aid society to modify its outdated political attitudes. Among the old-fashioned civic values, the 'Messiah problem' was strongly highlighted. Earlier in 2011 Thomas de Waal argued that "Georgia has a messiah problem" (de Waal, 2011) – political leaders have Messianic pathos and the public likes this discourse. In a similar manner, Bidzina Ivanishvili asserted that the constant search for a Messiah is a sign of the political immaturity of the Georgian citizenry; citizens who voted for the Georgian Dream did not form their choice by reason of evaluating the manifesto proposed by the coalition, they voted against the unjust regime of Saakashvili, "I don't want to turn into a new Messiah, we should end the epoch of Messianism in Georgia" – Ivanishvili declared.

Both De Waal and Ivanishvili alluded to the low level of political culture in Georgia. Arguably, the term Messianism may be applied to characterise Georgian public preferences in the political process; particularly, if we take the popularity of the 'leader's parties' into closest consideration, but if we utilise a more detailed approach we might find out that Georgian citizens vote for the leaders because of the weakness of political organisations. I argue that Messianism might be a cultural challenge, but insofar as the condi-

tions to test the assumption have never been in place, correlating the attitude to political immaturity may be misleading. Furthermore, voting *against* rather than *for* someone does not necessarily only happen in politically old-fashioned societies. Bill Durodié, reviewing modern western societies, argues: “[w]hen people do vote, it is often on a negative basis – against an incumbent, rather than for a replacement” (Durodié, 2005, p. 5) – accordingly, this negativity in political preferences is not specific to states with little political tradition.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine the most important obstacles to Georgia’s democratic consolidation. Structurally, these problems are interlinked in a functionalist manner, on the one hand they act together as subsystems of the whole organism, but on the other hand each of the factors has independent paths of development. For example, in the Georgian context at least two important conditions need to be in place to achieve national unity: first, a secular citizenry and second, the political will. If the concept of a secular public is more or less clear, it is important to clarify what is the meaning of political will. The political elites should learn to confront the Church, even if this confrontation is outside their comfort zone. This confrontation might cause a long term struggle between traditionalists and modernists. This is a situation where the process is more important than the outcome; it will help citizens to see the difference between spiritual and public values. Finally, religious differences (or public differences caused by religious beliefs) will be less important insofar as a consensus on public values is achieved.

If real plurality seems to be a long term goal in current conditions,[13] there is room for optimism in the public sphere. Georgians agree that democracy should be “the only game in town” (Linz, Stepan, 1996, p. 14), they acknowledge the importance of the rule of law, and the public feels the value of a free media.

There are some positive impulses from the government as well. Together with the Orthodox Church, four other religious groups will receive state funding (Civil.Ge, 2014); this step might be considered as a gesture of willingness to develop a positive secular approach.

Hopes in the political arena are apparent as well. In the near future, the broadly discussed Messiah problem might lose its relevance, as leader’s parties are no longer present in the political domain.

The planned signing of the association agreement with the EU might serve as a boost for democracy, but the real test for the new government will be the next parliamentary elections. As Yonatan L. Morse argues: “[e]lections that were restorative in nature had an expected onetime boost in democratic quality, while elections that were foundational were much more volatile” (Morse, 2012, p. 74). The voting in 2012 was of that ‘restorative nature’, the foundational election will come in the future.

---

[13] Plurality here is not only about the public acceptance of religions other than Orthodox Christianity, it also includes plurality in terms of personal lives and attitudes which are condemned by the Church.

References

Almond G. A., Verba, S. (1989), *The Civic Culture Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, SAGE publications.

Amnesty International (2013, May 17), *Georgia: Homophobic violence mars Tbilisi Pride event*, http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/georgia-homophobic-violence-mars-tbilisi-pride--event-2013-05-17.

Bader M. (2010), *Against All Odds: Aiding Political Parties in Georgia and Ukraine*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.

BBC (2013, November 12), *Abkhazia Profile*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18175030.

Buzan B., Waever O., De Wilde J. (1998), *Security a New Framework for Analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London.

Carothers T. (2002), *The End of Transition Paradigm*, "Journal of Democracy", 7–17.

Civil.Ge (2013, November 21), *Ivanishvili's Open Letter*, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26708, 1.09.2014.

Civil.Ge (2014, January 27), *PM: Four More Religious Groups to Get State Funding*, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26890.

de Waal T. (2011, October 27), *National Interest*, Georgia's Political Shake Up: Enter the Oligarch: http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/10/27/georgia-s-political-shake-up-enter-oligarch/8knm.

Democracy & Freedom Watch (2013, January 15), *Georgian military intelligence used sex to blackmail*, http://dfwatch.net/georgian-military-intelligence-used-sex-to-blackmail-40569.

Durodié B. (2005), *The Concept of Risk*, "Nuffield trust Global Programme on Health Foreign Policy and Security", 1–26.

Fact Check (2013, October 25), *According to Giorgi Margvelashvili, Georgia's index of wealth distribution is the highest among the former Soviet Union countries*, http://factcheck.ge/en/article/georgia-is-one-of-the-most-retarded-countries-in-terms-of-wealth-distribution-our-coeffi cient-for-the-distribution-of-the-countrys-wealth-among-the-people-is-40-to-be-more-precise.

Fairbanks C. H. (2014), *Georgian Democracy: Seizing or Losing the Chance*, "Journal of Democracy", 154–165.

Fairbanks C. H., Gugushvili A. (2013), *A New Chance for Georgian Democracy*, "Journal of Democracy", 116–127.

Freedom House (2008), *Freedom in the World – Georgia.*

Freedom House (2011), *Freedom of the Press – Georgia*, http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2011/georgia#.UvQrqPQW1yU.

Freeman C. (2012), *Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili launches election challenge against Mikheil Saakashvili*, "The Telegraph", http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/georgia/9559874/Georgian-billionaire-Bidzina-Ivanishvili-launches-election-challenge--against-Mikheil-Saakashvili.html.

Fukuyama F. (1989), *The End of History?*, "The National Interest", 1–18.

Gallis P. (2008), *The NATO Summit at Bucharest, 2008.* Congressional Research Service.

Georgia News (2013, November 25), *He is not completely crazy – Former US Ambassador Richard Miles about Saakashvili*, http://www.georgianews.ge/politics/25422-he-is-not-completely-crazy-former-us-ambassador-richard-miles-about-saakashvili.html.

Harding L. (2012), *Bidzina Ivanishvili: the eccentric billionaire chasing Georgia's leadership*, "The Guardian", http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/01/bidzina-ivanishvili-profile-georgia.

Human Rights Watch (2011–2012), *World Report – Georgia*.

Huntington S. P. (1968), *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press.

International Republican Institute (2011), *“Georgian National Study 2011”, October 27–November 11*, IRI.

Jawad P. (2006), *Diversity, Conflict, and State Failure: Chances and Challenges for Democratic Consolidation in Georgia after the “Rose Revolution”*, Cornell University Press.

Kupunia M. (2011, July 7), *Georgia, Looking for Spies, Arrests Photographers*, “The New York Times”, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/08/world/europe/08georgia.html?_r=0.

Levitsky S., Way L. A. (2002), *The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism*, “Journal of Democracy”, 51–65.

Linz J. J., Stepan A. C. (1996), *Toward Consolidated Democracies*, “Journal of Democracy”, 14–33.

Lipset S. M. (1959), *Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy*, “The American Political Science Review”, 69–105.

McFaul M. (2002, January), *The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World*, “World Politics”, no. 54(2), p. 212–244.

Morse Y. L. (2012), *The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism*, “World Politics”, 161–198.

Navarro L. (2013), *Public attitudes in Georgia*, National Democratic Institute, Tbilisi.

Nodia G., Scholtbach Á. P. (2006), *The Political Landscape of Georgia*, Eburon Academic Publishers, Delf.

O’Donnell G. (1994), *Delegative Democracy*, “Journal of Democracy”, 55–69.

O’Donnell G. A. (1973), *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism Studies in South American Politics*, University of California.

O’Donnell G., Schmitter P. C., Whitehead L. (1986), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Prodromou E. H. (2004), *The Ambivalent Orthodox*, “Journal of Democracy”.

Przeworski A. (2003), *Democracy and Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*, in: R. Dahl, I. Shapiro, J. A. Cheibub, *The Democracy Sourcebook*, The MIT Press, London, p. 1–556.

Przeworski A., Limongi N. F. (1997), *Modernization: Theories and Facts*, “World Politics”, 155–83.

Rustow D. A. (1970), *Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model*, “Comparative Politics”, 337–363.

Schmitter P. C., Karl T. L. (1991), *What Democracy is… and Is Not*, “Journal of Democracy”, 75–88.

The Central Election Commission of Georgia (2010), *Georgia History of Elections 1990–2010*, CESKO, Tbilisi.

The Central Election Commission of Georgia (2010), *Georgia History of Elections 1990–2010*, Tbilisi.

Thomson Reuters (2011, April 21), *Low acquittal rate in Georgian courts weighs on justice system*, Trust.org, http://www.trust.org/item/?map=low-acquittal-rate-in-georgian-courts-weighs--on-justice-system.

Wolinetz S. B. (2002), *Beyond the Catch-All Party: Approaches to the Study of Parties and Party Organization in Contemporary Democracies*, in: R. Gunther, J. R. Montero, J. J. Linz, *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 1–384.

Tranzycja w kierunku demokracji – problemy Gruzji

Streszczenie

Proces demokratyzacji w Gruzji ma swoje trudności, głównie związane z aspektem kulturowym i społeczno-ekonomicznym. Wyzwania polityczne są powiązane z postawą społeczną i odwrotnie. Historyczna rola kościoła prawosławnego w zachowaniu gruzińskiej tożsamości narodowej przez wieki jest

nadmiernie kompensowana z częstymi pisarskimi uwikłaniami w życiu publicznym. Niedemokratyczne rządy dokonały wszelkich starań, aby sfinalizować proces transformacji i przez dwie dekady stan pozostawał w szarej strefie między konsolidacją i autokracją. Rok 2012 został oznaczony rokiem dla nowych nadziei demokracji Gruzji. Nowy rząd został wybrany przez wolnych i uczciwych wyborców, ale demokracja wymaga warunków aby przetrwać i ten artykuł je bada.

Słowa kluczowe: Gruzja, demokratyczne przemiany, kultura polityczna, Saakaszwili, Kościół Prawosławny