

Orthodox Politics: formation of orthodox discourse and its socio-political implication in post-soviet Georgia

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Submitted by  
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Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary  
2014

## **Abstract**

The emergence of religious nationalism in post-socialist countries is not a novelty. The relationship between the Church and state has always been the subject of debate. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the raise of religious nationalism in Central and Eastern European countries brought issues and challenges. The dimension of the religious nationalism and the type of the church-state relationships varies from country to country.

In Georgia we face the growth of the power and the popularity of the Georgian Orthodox Church. As surveys suggest the Church is the most trusted institution in Georgia, and the Patriarch Ilya II the most popular public figure. On the one hand Georgian political elite strive to join the Western organizations and build a liberal nation-state, but on the other hand the Church interferes in almost every domain of life; including political, social, cultural and even private.

My research tends to offer new insights on the topic and examine the possible reasons, conditions under which the Georgian Church became extremely strong political and social institution. I will argue that the Soviet experience greatly contributed to the emergence of religious nationalism. The ideological vacuum that was created after the breakdown of the Union was filled up by the Georgian Orthodox Church, which started to shape a new ideological framework. I will demonstrate that the discourse is Orthodox and is based on the religious sentiment. The ideological framework the Church is trying to provide is anti-ecumenical and aims to influence on the decision-making process in Georgia.

The study will examine the reasons of the sudden turn to religion and the leverage the Church is trying to use in order to demonstrate its authority; as the most powerful social and political institution to mobilize people and make an impact on the social and political life.

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## Introduction

*In many of the former republics of the Soviet Union, including Russia, the birth of freedom has brought with it religious tensions, particularly the predominant Orthodox churches and newly emergent religions and sects. But Georgia is unique in the intensity of the violence toward religious minorities, and in the evidence of official complicity in the attacks.<sup>1</sup>*

On May 17, 2013 a clergy-led mob attacked a gay-rights demonstration held in Tbilisi, Georgia. The rally organized by the organization protecting LGBT-rights *Identoba*, was the first anti-homophobic demonstration held in post-socialist Georgia.<sup>2</sup> As scholars evaluate, this event was the most obvious example in the contemporary history of Georgia when the Georgian Orthodox Church, as an institution, vividly demonstrated its socio-political power.<sup>3</sup> The theologian Mirian Gamrekelashvili writes that 17<sup>th</sup> of May revealed the critical conditions of Georgian society. As he notes “it was kind of ‘zombie apocalypse’ which has demonstrated the insights of forming ethno-religious fascism in Georgia”.<sup>4</sup> It was the biggest mistake and therefore, catastrophe for the Georgian Orthodox Church”<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary Georgia is in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand, since the declaration of independence it has striven to build a European-style democratic system, one requiring the acknowledgement of diversity and multicultural principles only feasible through the separation of church and state and ‘religiously neutral’ social conditions. On the other

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<sup>1</sup> Myers, “Attacks on Minority Faiths Rise in Post-Soviet Georgia.”

<sup>2</sup> McGuinness, “Clashes at Gay Rally in Georgia.”

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Shota Kintsurashvili, Mirian Gamrekelashvili, April 15, 2014; April, 09, 2014

<sup>4</sup> Gamrekelashvili, “Martmadidebeli Teologis Mosazrebebi 17 Maisis Movlebebeze (Thoughts about the Orthodox Theology on the 17th of May).”

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Shota Kintsurashvili, April 15, 2014

hand the Church establishes an anti-Western discourse and defines being Georgian as being Orthodox and ethnically Georgian. With recent polls pointing to a high of 93 percent trust, the Georgian Orthodox Church and its almost mystical leader Ilya II has gradually become an integral part of public and private life of the former communist society.<sup>6</sup> But Georgia is not an exception in terms of the rise of power of religious institutions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union ‘religious revival’ was present in all newly independent states, however its implication varied significantly by country. Russia, and to some extent Belarus, managed to integrate the church into mainstream politics, while in Ukraine the church acquired regional rather than national importance because of the division between the Moscow and Kiev Patriarchates.<sup>7</sup> The Central Asian republics, and to some extent Azerbaijan, accepted the spread of religiosity only to a limited degree. With high trust in major religious institutions in all three republics of the South Caucasus, Georgia reached the climax of its ‘religious revival’ with the Georgian Orthodox Church becoming a major actor, an independent and financially robust institution with immense social capital. The Patriarch often serves as a mediator between the government and its opposition commenting on public policies and political decisions from the church pulpit. Furthermore, priests actively participated in campaign rallies and monitored polls during the parliamentary elections of 2012.<sup>8</sup>

While shaping Georgian Nationalism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, religion was not decisive in shaping Georgian identity. Religion served as an important part of the nationalistic project, however, the intensity of its engagement into socio-political life has never been as extreme as in the post-Soviet period. Furthermore, according to the Constitution the Republic of Georgia is a secular state and guarantees the separation of

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6 Georgian National Study. 2012.

7 Titarenko, “On the Shifting Nature of Religion during the Ongoing Post-Communist Transformation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.”

8 Barry, “Church’s Muscle Aided Win of President’s Rivals in Georgia.”

church and state affairs. Therefore, the research purpose is to examine the possible reasons which contributed to emergence of the Georgian Orthodox Church as a powerful institution and the leverage it uses to influence political processes. Besides that, I will be arguing that one of the explanatory factors of the Church's popularity in Georgia is the role of Patriarch. As in most cases he serves as a mediator between the ruling party and the opposition and has a symbolic meaning to the people.

**Research Questions:** *Why is religion the primary tool for constructing ethnic identity in post-Soviet Georgia and why has Orthodoxy served as the main mechanism for social mobilization?*

My main argument will be that *after the collapse of the Soviet-Union, fragile political institutions failed to provide political and social stability and the Orthodox Church filled the ideological vacuum.*

When Ilya II became the patriarch in 1977, the Georgian Church counted only about 5 priests. Since the lifting of Soviet-era controls over religious life, the ranks of the clergy have exploded, with upwards of 1,700 ordained priests active today. Rapid growth means that the quality of their religious teachings varies widely; on the one hand the increased number of priests contributed to the strengthening of the Church bureaucracy, but created a 'vacuum' of knowledge.

In my thesis I will argue that in the case of Georgia increasing the number of churches during the post-Soviet period doesn't necessarily mean that people have become more religious. This study will focus on the role and the place of the Georgian Orthodox Church in Georgian social, state and political life after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I will argue that church now offers a new ideological framework and value-system not only for society, but for state institutions and attempts to make an impact on Georgia's foreign policy.

The thesis is divided into two broad parts: the first one is designed in a way to explain *why and under what conditions* emerged the Georgian Orthodox Church as the most trusted institution. While the last part of the work will demonstrate *how* is the Church trying to provide a new ideological framework and what are the key dimensions of it.

**Timeline:** The research will be mainly focused on the period from the 90s to present, when the Church gained its political power. I will look at history of the Georgian Orthodox Church in order to provide historical background and the past developments that are important for my argument. After the 90s I will focus on two major events; in 1997 when Georgia left the World Council of Churches and 2002 when the Constitutional Agreement between the State of Georgia and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church was signed and ratified in 2013. But in order to illustrate the process by which the church gained power I will analyze the relationship between the state and church from the early 1990s: I will examine the presidency of the first president of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991-1999) then will outline the key events during Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency (1999-2004) and at the end I will investigate the key features of the Church-state relations during the presidency of Mikheil Sakashvili (2004-2012).

**Methodology:** My thesis examines the reasons contributing to emergence of the Georgian Orthodox Church as a dominant institution with the means of exercising social and political influence. The research relies on qualitative methods using both primary and secondary sources. In order to understand the importance of religion in forming Georgian national identity, I will dwell on key authors- Brubaker, Anderson, Breuilly, Durkheim- discussing the relationship between the church and state and the fading role of religion as it gradually became irrelevant in industrial societies. Process-tracing will serve as a tool in determining political circumstances in which the Georgian Orthodox Church involves itself

and the leverage it uses. For this purpose I will use discourse analysis, Patriarch's speeches from 1997 to 2014, news articles related to the church-state relationship, I will use process of systematic monitoring of religious media-sources, such as newspapers, TV and radio channels funded by the Patriarchate of Georgia.

During my field trip in Georgia I conducted in-depth interviews with public figures, including a leader of political party and theologians. I will use their opinions to analyze the key events related to the Church-state relationships and will compare with others' approaches. Further, I will present graphs in order to provide visual and statistical information.

## **Literature Review**

In my thesis I will analyze the relationship between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state and investigate the possible reasons why the Church became such a powerful and the most trusted institution in post-Soviet Georgia. I will argue that the Georgian Orthodox Church tries to shape Georgian identity through utilizing Georgian cultural memory and historical narratives and thus, aims to shape a new Orthodox discourse. In order to examine the possible reasons why religion became the main tool for constructing identity after the dissolution of the Soviet Union I will illustrate the leverage the Church uses to influence political processes, the first part of my literature review will examine the relationship between Church and State in Central and Eastern European countries and will analyze the Church-state relationship in Georgia after the 90s. In the second part I will describe the type of Georgian nationalism and will point out its distinctive features. In the final part I will focus on the question - why and how the Georgian Orthodox Church aims to define "true Georgian."



Already existing literature illustrates the general trend about empowering the Orthodox Church and its engagement in political life, however it fails to question why religion became the main tool for the Church to construct Georgian modern identity.

In the literature review I will be guided by three basic questions that are tightly related to my thesis. I will be addressing: 1. the basic features of the relationship between church and state in general and more precisely in Central and Eastern European Countries, 2. The type of Georgian nationalism, main characteristics and distinctive features, shaping of Georgian identity 3. The concept of chosen nation and imagined community.

The nature of the relationship between nationalism and religion is subject to debate. In this section I will briefly demonstrate that nationalism is in many ways similar to religion. As Carlton Hayes points out, “modern nationalism as a religion has naturally adapted many customs and usages of historic Christianity”.<sup>9</sup> The most important shared feature is that both religion and nationalism have a god. The god in nationalism can be either the patron or “the personification of one’s *patrie*, one’s fatherland, one’s national state”. For my thesis the relationship between nationalism and religion and more precisely, this feature is at most interest. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the religious and nationalistic role of the Patriarch Ilya II is enormous and he plays a role of a spiritual god Secondly, nationalism like any religion calls into play the imagination and the emotions. Hayes points out the imaginary and emotional elements of nationalism, stating that “the imagination builds an unseen world around the eternal past and the everlasting future of one’s nationality”.<sup>10</sup> And lastly, nationalism as a mission of salvation and ideal of immortality. As Hayes argues, both are driven by a “collective faith”. In case of Georgia religion, having symbolic meaning for the state, serves as the continuation of the past and possess a mission to the Georgian nation.

In different countries we encounter different types of the church-state relations. It is interesting to investigate the category that can be applied to the Georgian case. Rogers Brubaker’s article suggests four approaches to analyze the church-state relationship. His categories are different ways to approach the topic and could be used to analyze a single case study. The first category aims to explain the relationship along with ethnicity and race, as analogous phenomena. The second is to specify ways in which religion helps and explains

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9 Hayes, Nationalism.

10 Ibid.

things about nationalism, about its origin, power and its distinctive character, while the third is to treat religion as part of nationalism to specify modes of interpretation and intertwining. The last type of relationship aims to posit a distinctively religious form of nationalism. In case of I will apply the third type of Brubaker's categorization to the Georgian nationalism, because it reveals that religion can be the part of nationalistic discourse.<sup>11</sup>

Studying the impact of the Soviet ideology on the development of nationalism it is interesting to look at his another piece, where he criticizes "repressed" paradigm in nationalistic discourse. While the paradigm claimed that the multi-nationalistic and federal system of the Soviet Union contained previously existing nationalism, he argues that the Soviet politics can be characterized as a nationalistic.<sup>12</sup> He further suggests insights on the politics of the Soviet Union and concludes that the Soviet Union "went too far" compared to other countries before or after that and created the fertile ground for the raise of nationalism.<sup>13</sup> As I will demonstrate in the next chapters, the Soviet rule failed to contain nationalistic claims in Georgia and thus, awakening of religious nationalism was greatly defined by the Soviet experience.

Borowik's work is another important piece to evaluate the relationship between the Orthodox Church and State in Eastern European countries. The article explains that dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism brought a radical change in the position of religion in Central and Eastern European countries. The author argues that the legal position of the Churches changed people's attitude and made them move towards Orthodoxy. However the nature of the religious revival is unclear because the religiosity of Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians also include elements of New Age spirituality. Commitment to the Church activities and the level of religious practice in general are as low

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11 Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism."

12 Brubaker, "Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism."

13 Ibid.

as in the most secularized Western European societies.<sup>14</sup> This work is close to the Georgian case, where alike other post-socialist states, the level of religious practice is low. While Borowik covered the basic trends that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, speaking about the post-Communist countries and the relationship between the Church and state I should mention Titarenko's work where she discusses the issues of religiosity in Belarus, Ukraine and especially Russia and puts the emphasis on the creation of ideological trauma after the 90s. This approach is closely related to my line of argumentation. The work raises questions related to the revival of religiosity after the breakdown of the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup>

The paper by Robia Charles examines the determinants of trust in religious institutions in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Results show some difference between the three countries with regard to two types of variables-trust in secular institutions and socioeconomic factors. The study illustrates that Georgia is the only country in which interpersonal trust is a significant indicator of trust in religious institutions.<sup>16</sup> The paper maintains that Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are considered secular under earlier secularization theories that viewed declining religious practices as a form of secularization. However, these countries are non-secular with respect to more recent religious institutions- as a form of secularization. Thus, the presence of both low religious practice and high trust in religious institutions challenges more recent reformulated secularization theories.

An interesting article of Titarenko examines the mixed nature of contemporary beliefs and religious practices among the post-Soviet countries, with the specific emphasis on the Russian Orthodox Church. The author also examines the historical circumstances of this region that made it possible to apply the theoretical framework of such theories as post-

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14 Borowik, "Between Orthodoxy and Eclecticism."

15 Titarenko, "On the Shifting Nature of Religion during the Ongoing Post-Communist Transformation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine."

16 Charles, "Religiosity and Trust in Religious Institutions."

communist trauma. For my thesis it is relevant to test my argument about the ideological vacuum and post-soviet trauma which emerged in Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This work provides the structure of the analysis I will apply to my main argument.<sup>17</sup>

While drawing a parallel between Georgia and other post-Socialist countries, it is interesting to examine Kalkandjieva's piece. She studies the Church-state relations in Eastern Orthodoxy elaborating on the debates among theologians, scholars and policy-makers. She examines the Orthodox church-state relations in a way to argue that Orthodoxy is a religion in which the church, ethnic community and state grow together.<sup>18</sup> The author provides the typology of Church-state relations in Eastern Europe and argues that the relationship between the Orthodox Church and State in Eastern Europe, and mainly in Russia, is called symphony or *Caesaropapism*. In my thesis it will be demonstrated that Georgian case cannot be characterized as the symphony, as in most cases the Church plays its "own game".

Increased popularity of the religious institutions is among the factors explaining the reason why they managed to play the role of a legitimizing force. The book *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* by Sabrina Ramet is relevant for my hypothesis because it provides different insight suggesting that because of the frequent frustration from the political parties and elites in post communist societies religious institutions served as the political and economic institutions.<sup>19</sup> The book also examines the relationship between governments and religious groups and concludes that the relationship varies according to the particular country and group and thus causes different picture of the political agenda for the purpose of shaping the lives of post Soviet citizens. For my thesis it

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17 Titarenko, "On the Shifting Nature of Religion during the Ongoing Post-Communist Transformation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine."

18 Kalkandjieva, "A Comparative Analysis on Church-State Relations in Eastern Orthodoxy."

19 Ramet, *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*.

explains the reasons of the emergence of the Georgian Orthodox Church as a source of main ideological institution that shapes Georgian modern identity.

### The Type of Georgian Nationalism, Main Characteristics and Distinctive features. The Shaping of Georgian Identity

After studying the conditions under what the religious institutions were the only social organizations that enjoyed the mass popularity and thus, served as a political associations, it is useful to examine the leverage and the tools the Georgian Orthodox Church uses. Pkhaladze's research seeks to examine the leverage Russia uses towards neighboring countries. The study beautifully unites the main characteristics of the Russian Orthodox Church and illustrates its relationship between the Georgian one. The work points out the role of Stalin in creating and contributing to the Russian cultural and social reality.<sup>20</sup> Also, the study shows the importance of the Russian patriarch in shaping broad concepts of civilization and the way the Russian Orthodox Church uses the instruments of "soft power". The study is relevant for my thesis in a way that it shows the successful cooperation between the Church and the State in Russia, where the development of the Church met the expectations of the state and led to the Russian "symphony".

The book *The role of Orthodox Church in establishment of Georgian identity,(the late 20th century –the beginning of the 19th century)* is about detailed analysis of Georgian identity formation and more precisely, the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in identity shaping.<sup>21</sup> The book contains chapters about Georgian Nationalism, illustrating its main features and dimensions. The authors examine historical preconditions of establishment of

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20 Pkhaladze, Sharashenidze, and Kudors, Religion as the Instrument of Russian Foreign Policy towards Neighboring Countries. Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine.

21 Kekelia, Gavashelishvili, and Sulkhanishvili, Martalmadidebeli Ek'lesiis Roli Kartuli Nacionaluri Ident'obis Chamoq'alibebashi XX Sauk'unis Bolo-XXI Sauk'unis Dasac'q'isi (The Role of Orthodox Church in Establishment of Georgian Identity. The Late 20th Century –the Beginning of the 21st century).

Georgian identity, in which the role of Russian politics towards the Georgian Orthodox Church is essential for my thesis. In my research I will focus on this book to support my thesis that in Georgian reality the factor of Russia played and plays one of the most important roles in shaping Georgian modern nationalism.

The essays collection *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective* by Hann and Coltz examine the primary “distinguishing features of the Eastern traditions- iconography, hymnology, ritual and pilgrimage-though meticulous ethnographic analysis.”<sup>22</sup> In my thesis I will analyze the case of mass protests against Georgian ID cards claiming that these cards reference the ‘the sign of the devil’. A lot of anthropological research was dedicated to this chip of the devil thing in the Orthodox Church and not only the Russian/post Soviet context. I will use this essay collection to draw a parallel with the Georgian case and examine how anthropologists explain this phenomenon.

As we already discussed about the Russian influence over the Georgian Church the book by Boris Groys links totalitarian aims of the Communism to the modernists’ demands. He examines the main idea behind the revolution of October 1917. Groys questions the view that socialist realism was an “art for the masses” and argues instead that the “total art proposed by Stalin and his followed was formulated by well-educated elites, who had established the experience of the avant-garde and been brought to socialist realism by the future-oriented logic of avant-garde thinking” (Groys 1992).<sup>23</sup> He argues that Stalinism is the heir of the avant-garde desire to erase the boundary between art and everyday life and to radically reshape society. In my thesis I will use this line of thinking as an explanatory factor why Georgian society fails to escape from Stalinism and Stalin ideology.

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22 Hann and Goltz, *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*.

23 Grois, *The Total Art of Stalinismus*.

Demonstrating the importance of religion in the everyday life of the Georgian society enables us to observe how the traditions, having religious flavor, reflect different trends of the Georgian socio-political life. In my thesis I will analyze the tradition and the meaning of Georgian toasts, as the preserving the memory of the people. The Georgian banquet –the Supra- is an expression of sociability which is very often perceived as excessive. The Supra is a table liturgy of wine with its “priest”, called “Tamada”, who organizes the celebration by proposing toasts. As Gillies Fumey argues in his article *Food and History*, this banquet tradition represents one of the most important sources of national identity in contemporary Georgia.<sup>24</sup> Supra is extremely common in social life and secular rituals, social occasions, national and religious holidays and life cycle transitions are accompanied by the ubiquitous Supra. In most studies Supra is analyzed through gender roles, claiming that toasts are a male genre in Georgia. As Helga Kotthoff observes during Supra “doing culture and gender” is presented.<sup>25</sup> The analysis of the toasts provides insights into the social order of Georgian society, where gender roles were the main interest of the research. For my thesis I am particularly interested in the role of cultural and historical narratives, as an integral part of the people’s memory and how, in which forms religion is represented during Supra. For this regard it is interesting to look at George Maisuradze’s book on this subject. In his book he deals with the cults, nationalistic myths and the religious obscurantism dominant in Georgian culture. He touches upon very sensitive issues of Georgian society, namely claiming how the image of Stalin was replaced by the Orthodox discourse and the figure of Patriarchate Ilya II.<sup>26</sup>

For analyzing the Supra traditions and the role in Georgian society I will use the book by Manning. One of the chapters he observes that Supra provides a “disemic image both of

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24 Fumey, “Excess at the Banquet?”.

25 Kotthoff, “The Social Semiotics of Georgian Toast Performances.”

26 Maisuradze, *Orthodox Ethics and the Spirit of Unfreedom*.



the innocent world of Georgian everyday life, but also for the dystopian world of Georgian politics, and even how the apparently innocent world of everyday life (the Supra) can help produce the dystopian aspects of Georgian public life” (Manning 2012).<sup>27</sup> What is interesting from his work regarding my thesis is his claim that Supra is not only divided politically between moments of democracy and dictatorship, but as he argues these moments are allocated to different material moments of Supra.

Symbolism is very much characteristic to the Georgian society and the Church, as well as the Patriarch Ilya II successfully manage to manipulate with the symbolic processes. As Vlad Naumescu in the chapter *Burying two bishops: legitimating the church through the politics of the pas in Romania* through the studying the case of re-burial of Bishop in 1997 and the burial of Cardinal in 2002, claims “there are more consistent cultural traits hidden behind these symbolic processes, and these cases can be further read as expressions of a lasting pattern of a group’s memory production and transmission”.<sup>28</sup> His analysis is relevant to my thesis, especially for examining the most recent event in Georgia. On February 22, 2014 the Holy relics of Saint Gabriel Confessor and Fool for Christ was reburied with full honors in the Transfiguration Church according to the decision of the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church. I will apply Naumescu’s observation to the Georgian case, arguing in the same chapter that the “Christianization of memory techniques, the split between a circular liturgical memory and a laic memory, the remembrance of the dead and especially of dead saints, became new characteristics of collective memory”.<sup>29</sup>

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27 Manning, *Semiotics of Drink and Drinking*.

28 Naumescu, “Burying Two Bishops.”

29 Ibid.

## The Concept of Chosen Nation and Imagined Community

The successful formation of nationalism requires to integrate national and cultural narratives and myths, reminding the glory and the "Golden Age" of the nation, should be integrated into one ideology. Idea about the uniqueness in most cases serves as a basis to nationalism. The work of Anthony Smith is in the heart of my argument about shaping Georgian identity on the belief of chosenness, being special and having a unique mission in this life. His piece argues that "sacred belief remains central to national identity, even in an increasingly secular and globalized modern world".<sup>30</sup> He puts the emphasis on the theory of ethnosymbolism in order to understand the dynamics between traditional views of nationalism and modern interpretations. Smith's book illustrates that the conceptual categories 'nationalism' and 'religion' has been the general trend to dismiss the role of religion and tradition in a globalizing world.<sup>31</sup>

The complexity Georgian Church-State relations during the period of transition from communist rule to democracy is nicely analyzed in the article by Grdzeldze. He focuses on the position of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, as a powerful symbol of the Georgian nation, examines the relations between the government and the Orthodox Church of Georgia and studies the attitudes within Georgian society to the Church-State partnership.<sup>32</sup> In my thesis I will address similar issues but will put more emphasize on the formation of the Georgian identity by the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Studying the type of nationalism in Georgia, Chelidze conducts in-depth interviews with clergy members, analyzes the newspapers published by the Patriarchate. She claims that

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30 Smith, Chosen Peoples.

31 Ibid.

32 Grdzeldze, "The Orthodox Church of Georgia."

in Georgian reality the Church emerges as the institution defining and shaping Georgian modern identity. Through utilizing cultural memory, symbols and historical narratives, the Orthodox Church draws the line between “us” and “others” and provides negative flavor of Georgian identity which triggers ethnic and religious conflicts in Georgia.<sup>33</sup> In the article she investigates the roots of Georgian nationalism and puts emphasis on the extreme form of religious nationalism which was established in the early 90s. This article supports my thesis in a way that after the collapse of the Soviet Union religious groups filled out the ideological vacuum and utilized cultural and historical narratives in order to shape religious nationalism.

The book *Religion in an Expanding Europe* by Byrnes and Katzenstein elaborates more on the tools of nationalists. It is divided into three main parts on Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam and respectively the attitudes of these religions towards the European integration process.<sup>34</sup> One of the chapters, part III *Orthodoxy – the way were and should be again? European Orthodox Churches and the “idyllic past”* by Sabrina Ramet, is in particular interest for my thesis.<sup>35</sup> We can draw parallel between Smith and Chelidze’s analysis, suggesting how the highlights of the history can be used for the mobilization purposes. While Catholicism can be regarded as the most trans-national of the three religious traditions, Eastern Christianity appears to be the least, owing to the nationalist character of Orthodox churches and their relation to the state. As Ramet claims, today the majority of developing post-soviet countries strive towards European Union and try to adopt EU requirements, but the main hinder is in century-old traditions and regulations of Orthodox Church. From the orthodox viewpoint, the “idyllic past” is seen as opposed to the sinful

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33 Chelidze, “Erovnuli Ident’obis K’onst’ruireba Religiur-Nacionalist’ur Disk’ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse).”

34 Byrnes and Katzenstein, *Religion in an Expanding Europe*.

35 Ramet, “The Way We Were ?”.

present. She argues that for Georgian Orthodox Church this “idyllic past” is to be found in the times, before Christianity was separated into Eastern and Western churches.

As Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire and then by the Soviet Union, it was highly influenced by the political decisions made in Russia. Paul Werth examines the nationalistic claims and the discourse provided by the Russian Orthodox Church from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> He claims that after the revolution of 1905, nationalist agitation within Orthodoxy became more expressed. This agitation was fairly mild and involved the desire for greater expression of ethnic particularity within Orthodoxy, especially with regard to language. The author points out that situation in Georgia was different. Not only bishops there used Georgian language, but the Church also had full ecclesiastical independence – autocephaly – in the ethnically and historically Georgian provinces of Transcaucasia. In one of the sub chapters of the article, he examines the relationship between nationality and Orthodox Universalism, which is the most relevant for my thesis research. The main argument I will be using to support my thesis is that striking characteristic of Christianity is the absence of a sacred language and the license to translate scripture again into a wide range of languages, from Latin and Coptic to countless vernaculars subsequently. In a relationship to a “chosen people”, the new testament puts reference to a world consisting of ‘peoples’ and ‘nations’.

The collection of essays by Clifford is one of the important works for my thesis in a sense that it describes the relationship between religion and symbols. He says that a system of symbols is merely something that conveys meaning.<sup>37</sup> It is a physical, tangible object or an act that signifies an abstract notion, feeling or idea. Religious activities create or induce moods and motivations. Religion affirms that the world has an order and a sense and creates

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36 Werth, “Georgian Autocephaly and the Ethnic Fragmentation of Orthodoxy.”

37 Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System.”

the set of values under what people redefine the present and world as a whole. Clifford's work alongside with Hayes' piece will support my argument regarding the symbolic role of the Patriarch. I will draw parallel to the Georgian case, where the Church manipulates with the famous old adage 'everything happens for a reason and we deserve it what we have and the way we are'

## **Russian Politics Towards the Georgian Orthodox Church Before and During Communism and the Process of Formation of Georgian Nationalism**

In this Chapter I will analyze the key events of the Georgian history that explain the emergence of the Georgian Orthodox Church as a powerful political institution since the 90s. After being under the Soviet rule for 70 years, Georgia managed to gain independence in 1991. The newly independent state faced external and internal challenges. The process of nation-building after the Soviet dissolution was decisive for Georgia to shape modern identity.<sup>38</sup> After the Soviet times, the only institution that retained its stability was the Georgian Orthodox Church and it successfully replaced the Soviet ideology. I will further demonstrate, the developments through which the Church emerged as the most powerful institution.

In this chapter I will provide the history of the Church and the impact of the socialist church-state relations on the post-socialist situation in Georgia. As Chelidze puts, one of the explanation factors of the emergence of the religious nationalism in Georgia is the Soviet

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38 Kekelia, Gavashelishvili, and Sulkhanishvili, *Martalmadidebeli Ek'lesiis Roli Kartuli Nacionaluri Ident'obis Chamoq'alibebashi XX Sauk'unis Bolo-XXI Sauk'unis Dasac'q'isi* (The Role of Orthodox Church in Establishment of Georgian Identity. The Late 20th Century –the Beginning of the 21st century).

experience.<sup>39</sup> I will be arguing that the Soviet politics towards Georgia greatly contributed to the political strength of the Church after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As Brubaker argues in his piece, the Soviet Union failed to contain nationalistic claims and moreover, it created good preconditions to the emergence of religious nationalism in post-Communist states<sup>40</sup>

I will look at the historical overview of the Georgian Orthodox Church and outline the key events related to my main argument. The Georgian Orthodox Church, founded in the fourth century gained the autocephaly in the fifth century.<sup>41</sup> Because of the geopolitical conditions and the historical processes, the discourse in the 17th-18th centuries illustrates that being an Orthodox and being Georgian became almost synonyms. “Georgia’s present political situation is determined by the historical peculiarity. The importance and the power of the Church, as a social institution, have the following reasons: Georgia as the oldest Christian country and Christianity as the inevitable part of the nation’s narrative”.<sup>42</sup> Further, if we look at the narrative, being Georgian was almost synonymous of a being Orthodox. Consequently, Georgian Muslims were referred as “Tatars”, Monophysits as “Armenians”, Catholics as “French”.<sup>43</sup> “Compared to Europe, where the religious center is located in Rome, in case of Georgia it is placed in the same country and is intertwined with the history of Georgia”.<sup>44</sup> Gamrekelashvili’s opinion shows the logic of the historical development and explains the type of church-state relationship through the historical point of view.

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39 Chelidze, “Erovnuli Ident’obis K’onst’ruireba Religiur-Nacionalist’ur Disk’ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse).”

40 Brubaker, “Myth and Misconceptions in The Study of Nationalism”

41 Dowling, Sketches of Georgian Church History.

42 Interview with Soso Manjavidze. April 11, 2014

43 Kekelia, Gavashelishvili, and Sulkhanishvili, Martalmadidebeli Ek’lesiis Roli Kartuli Nacionaluri Ident’obis Chamoq’alibebashi XX Sauk’unis Bolo-XXI Sauk’unis Dasac’q’isi (The Role of Orthodox Church in Establishment of Georgian Identity. The Late 20th Century –the Beginning of the 21st century).

44 Interview with Mirian Gamrekelashvili. April 9, 2014

The current socio-political problems or developments in Georgia are tightly related to Russia's historical desire to gain absolute control in the region. Through reconstructing the Georgian Orthodox Church Russia aimed to establish the hegemony over the Georgia. The process of fighting against the Georgian Church has deep historical roots which started during the rule of the Russian Empire.<sup>45</sup> It is important to mark the 1783, when the treaty of Georgievsk was signed between Russia and Georgia and served as the precondition to the abolition of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church in the future (Alasania 2006).<sup>46</sup> The following statements from the document clearly demonstrate the conditions of the treaty "... after the unification with Russia and the Russians, our coreligionists, his Excellency wished that the Catholicos, i.e the Archbishop occupies the eighth place on the hierarchical scale of Russian bishops after Tobolsk".<sup>47</sup> In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgia became the part of the Russian Empire and lost the independent status.

In 1801 the Russian troops occupied the country on the basis of a manifesto and the rule of the Russian Empire started. The autocephaly the Church enjoyed was deprived in 1811. Sermons were banned in Georgian language almost during a century. The bureaucracy of the Russian Empire strongly affected on the fate of the Georgian Orthodox Church and served as a precondition to the decline of the Church.<sup>48</sup> As Naskidashvili writes "under the Russian rule a process of weakening the Church started; large numbers of local priests were replaced by Russians, and a significant amount of property (ancient icons, valuables and

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45 Kekelia, Gavashelishvili, and Sulkhanishvili, *Martalmadidebeli Ek'lesiis Roli Kartuli Nacionaluri Ident'obis Chamoq'alibebashi XX Sauk'unis Bolo-XXI Sauk'unis Dasac'q'isi* (The Role of Orthodox Church in Establishment of Georgian Identity. The Late 20th Century –the Beginning of the 21stcentury).

46 Alasania, "Twenty Centuries of Christianity in Georgia."

47 Paichadze, *Georgievskii Traktat* / G.G. Paichadze.

48 Kekelia, Gavashelishvili, and Sulkhanishvili, *Martalmadidebeli Ek'lesiis Roli Kartuli Nacionaluri Ident'obis Chamoq'alibebashi XX Sauk'unis Bolo-XXI Sauk'unis Dasac'q'isi* (The Role of Orthodox Church in Establishment of Georgian Identity. The Late 20th Century –the Beginning of the 21stcentury).

land) was transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church or confiscated by the authorities”.<sup>49</sup> If before losing the autocephaly and establishing hegemony of Russia over Georgia religion was one of the markers of Georgian identity, after the deprivation of the independence the Georgian Orthodoxy lost its authority.<sup>50</sup>

In spite of many difficulties Georgia was facing during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the Russian Revolution in 1917, it managed to restore the Church’s autocephaly. After the establishment of the Communist rule, the Church became one of the main targets of the repressions.<sup>51</sup> As a part of the politics, to gain full control over the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Russian language was replaced by the Georgian as the official language of the sermons. “It is our church’s duty to remind humanity of the name of the Georgian nation. It should contribute to our consolidation and unification” Catholicos Patriarch Kirion Sadzaglishvili was referring the Georgian nation (Alasania 2006, 11). This message can be analyzed as the Church’s claim to preserve Georgian nationhood and to underline the uniqueness of the people. As Anthony Smith provides the broad theory of the chosen nation, the nationalism is intertwined with the idea of being chosen, special.<sup>52</sup> Further, as Hayes argues the utilizing the national narrative and supporting the idea of the uniqueness invites people into the one imaginary community, where the nationalism, based on the shared belief of the common faith, embodied with the imaginary elements.<sup>53</sup>

Interestingly, during the short period of the independence (1918-21) the Georgian Social-Democratic government recognized the need of the secularization. In 1920 the issues

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49 Naskidashvili, “Orthodox Politics: Religious Renaissance and Its Political Implications in Post-Soviet Georgia,” 19.

50 Tomka, *Expanding Religion*.

51 Pkhaladze, Sharashenidze, and Kudors, *Religion as the Instrument of Russian Foreign Policy towards Neighboring Countries*. Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine, 7.

52 Smith, *Chosen Peoples*.

53 Hayes, *Nationalism*.



of the separation of the Church and the state, the Church budget, the conditions of life of the clergy and the unification of Eparchies were on the agenda and the ecclesiastical council started considered those issues. This demonstrates that there was an attempt to construct the Georgian Orthodox Church and create more “democratic” model of the church-state relations.

The process of weakening the Georgian Orthodox Church reached its peak during the Communism. The goal to create Soviet citizens and alongside with the ideology of an atheism resulted in the oppression of the Georgian Church. During Communism arresting priests was the common practice. In 1921 Georgia was annexed by the Bolshevik Red Army (Alasania 2006). Ambrosi Khelaia, the Georgian Patriarch sent a memorandum to the “Genoese Conference” trying to reveal the problems of the Georgian Church and brought to the world’s attention stating that “the Georgian nation was deprived of the mother tongue and its ancestral national culture and religious belief were profaned”.<sup>54</sup> He demanded from the withdrawal of the Russian military occupation from Georgia. Unfortunately, the international community failed to react on his letter. Consequently, the Orthodox Patriarchates did not recognize the autocephaly of the Georgian Church and accepted that the Georgian Orthodox Church was part of the Russian Church. By the 1943 the number of the churches was reduced to 15. However, the Church continued to protect nationhood and the endeavor to support the nation had its positive effect. In 1943 the Russian Church recognized the territorial autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church announced on 12 March, 1917.<sup>55</sup> The Georgian Church started to restore the cancelled churches, but the oppression of the Georgian churches and monasteries continued even after Stalin’s death. In 1977 Ilya II, the Metropolitan of Tskum-Abkhazeti was elected as Catholicos-Patriarch in Tbilisi.<sup>56</sup> The role of

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54 Alasania, “Twenty Centuries of Christianity in Georgia.”

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

the patriarch Ilya II as a mediator in church-state relationship is crucial for my thesis and will be analyzed in the last chapter.

In 1986 Gorbachev called for a “decisive and uncompromising” struggle with religion.<sup>57</sup> “The Soviet regime changed its policy toward the Georgian Orthodox Church during the last decades- it acknowledged its existence, but subordinated it to state control”.<sup>58</sup> However, the Soviet Union was already about to collapse and the newly emerging republics had the opportunity to define the church-state relationship. On 9 April, 1991 Georgia managed to regain political independence and alike the rest of post-Socialist countries, Georgia chose the path towards secularism. However, as I will further demonstrate the privileges and the popularity of the Orthodox Church started to grow since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In order to understand the outcomes of the Soviet rule it is important to analyze the importance and key features of the church-state relationship during Communism. One of the reasons of emergence of religious nationalism after the 90s is the Soviet experience.<sup>59</sup> As Chelidze argues, the Soviet ideology, which is based on atheism, failed to contain nationalism and encouraged nationalistic movements on the response. The movements successfully integrated religion as the integral part of the nationalism. As Chelidze discusses the reasons of the emergence of the religions nationalism, she argues that one of the important reasons was the lumpenization<sup>60</sup> of citizens.

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57 Naskidashvili, “Orthodox Politics: Religious Renaissance and Its Political Implications in Post-Soviet Georgia.”

58 Sulkhaniashvili, “Struggle for Power.”

59 Chelidze, “Erovnuli Ident’obis K’ons’truireba Religiur-Nacionalist’ur Disk’ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse).”

60 Lumpen-proletariat, the lowest, the most degraded stratum of the proletariat. This term originally was used by Karl Marx. See <http://revolutionaryliberationgospel.ning.com/m/blogpost?id=3385150%3ABlogPost%3A2353>

Lumpenization resulted in the segregation of the society, where due to the economic and political hardship after the 90s, majority of the people lost their social status. Changes in the social position resulted in the utter need to seek for hope and relief.<sup>61</sup> People lost the sense of uniqueness which caused the mass frustration thus, had a great need to fill out the ideological gap created after the 90s. The fear and disappointment from the socio-political conditions were aggravated by the vagueness of the future.<sup>62</sup> Discussing about the Soviet experience and the negative effects, Titarenko argues that the revival of religiosity and the trauma were bi-products of the breakdown of the Union.<sup>63</sup> The specific features of the Russian Orthodox Church and its relationship with the post-soviet countries are one of the major issues that should be addresses while studying the post-Communist developments in the countries belonging to the post-socialist block.

In Georgian society as the political institutions failed to provide socio-political stability, the need of a new ideology was provided by the Orthodox Church. Furthermore, if we look at the recent developments the Church managed not just to fill out the ideological gap, but create the need for it.<sup>64</sup> Georgian society successfully absorbed the combination of the nationalistic and Orthodox ideology. Further, she names the absence of the theological education as one of the important factors that contributed to the emergence of the religious nationalism. As all respondents agreed, there is a huge problem when it comes to the theological education among clergy members. The theologian Shota Kintsurashvili claims that the poor conditions to get proper theological education, the problem regarding curriculum, textbooks and the actual process how a priest becomes priest are important issues

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61 Chelidze, "Erovnuli Ident'obis K'onst'ruireba Religiur-Nacionalist'ur Disk'ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse)."

62 Ibid.

63 Titarenko, "On the Shifting Nature of Religion during the Ongoing Post-Communist Transformation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine."

64 Chelidze, "Erovnuli Ident'obis K'onst'ruireba Religiur-Nacionalist'ur Disk'ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse)," 4.

that should be addressed while discussing the critical condition of the Georgian Orthodox Church. He argues that “there is no transparent process how priest is being assigned in contemporary Georgia. Moreover, “there is no official requirement for ‘future’ priests to have a diploma”. The problem regarding the lack of knowledge causes that religiosity is based on stereotypes.<sup>65</sup> In most cases the problem occurs even among the clergy members which creates a fertile ground for the raise of religious nationalism. As Mirian Gamrekelashvili argues increased number of priests does not necessarily mean that all of them had proper educational background and moreover, if we take into consideration the fact that there is no transparent process to control the number of priests and the way they get the status, the danger of providing subjective and non-balanced information to the believers is considerably high.

To sum it up, historical developments and Russo-Georgian interaction on the international level had created the background to the emergence of religious nationalism. Georgia’s struggle to gain independence during last two centuries has greatly affected on people’s attitude towards politics in general. After the dissolution of the Union, strong ideological basis- the Communism was suddenly disappeared and the newly independent state failed to establish democratic institutions. Therefore, after the 90s the Church was the only institution which managed to fill the ideological gap and as I will demonstrate in next sections, offered a new, Orthodox discourse to people.

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65 Chelidze, “Erovnuli Ident’obis K’onst’ruireba Religiur-Nacionalist’ur Disk’ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse).”

## The Process of Formation of Georgian Nationalism in the 19th Century and the Tools of Nationalism

In order to claim that Georgian nationalism is religious nationalism currently, I will discuss the formation of nationalism. Even though national aspirations were present in medieval ages, I will not examine this period.<sup>66</sup> I will look at the year 1918 when Georgia gained political independence as the turning point for Georgian political and social developments. I will consider the main political trends, elite strategies and social institutions that demonstrate the formation of Georgian nationalism in that period.

In order to have a clear picture of the conditions under which Georgian nationalism was shaped, I will look at three years of independence as well as several crucial earlier events. The liberation movement of the period I will be discussing is connected to its leader, Ilya Chavchavadze (1837-1907), who was the publisher and owner of the first Georgian newspaper and national bank. He is considered the father of the Georgian nation and was canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church.<sup>67</sup> His famous phrase “language, fatherland and faith” was the basis of the independent state and remains the core of the Georgian identity. Overall, in this chapter I will demonstrate the social tools by which the elite aimed to introduce and achieve cultural and political autonomy from the Russian Empire.

In this chapter I will be arguing that despite obvious emphasis on language and faith, nationalism discourse in this period can be characterized as civic rather than ethnic. As Aleksandre Gabisonia argues in his research, the policy which Ilya Chavchavadze and his

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66 Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*.

67 Gabisonia, “Formation of the Georgian National Discourse.”

companions had towards Muslim minorities and efforts to reach social equality through anti-feudal policy, are clear demonstrations of the type of nationalism they were supporting.<sup>68</sup>

### First Independence

As national consciousness and the first Georgian Republic appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is useful to sketch some general ideas about this period. Many scholars stress the idea that the concept of a modern state was created after the French Revolution.<sup>69</sup> As authors argue, national consciousness is based on several social trends, namely the development of the household, introduction of printed media and creation of a universal educational system based on national language. Going into deeper analysis, Gellner divides the social history of mankind into three phases: the pre-agrarian, the agrarian and industrial and thereby focusing on the latter two in illuminating his theory of nationalism. In agrarian societies the vast majority of the population consists of agricultural producers, who live generally stationary lives. It follows that these groups are highly isolated from one another. Any kind of specialized knowledge is passed down from generation to generation. The ruling classes, such as aristocrats, clerics or military elites, spread over an area encompassing ‘folk culture’, conversely sharing a ‘high culture’ of their own which is in turn clearly demarcated. He argues that nationalism emerges when agrarian societies become industrial. Whilst education in the agrarian society is limited, education now needs to be more explicit and thus, needs to make use of universal symbols and means of communicating.<sup>70</sup>

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68 Ibid.

69 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Gellner, *Nations And Nationalism*; Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

70 Gellner, *Nations And Nationalism*.

Regarding Eric Hobsbawm, he sets off the definition of nationalism given by Ernest Gellner, stating that political and national units should be congruent.<sup>71</sup> Hobsbawm's approach is broadly chronological, beginning with the birth of modern nations in the bourgeois revolutions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and ending with some speculation about the fate of nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What is a nation for Hobsbawm? He addresses the question of how this came to be important with a view to examining the social and political developments when nationalism would become a force to be considered. He shows that the balance of the ethnic and the political elements with the nation concept has shifted. But we should point out, that he follows Benedict Anderson in viewing the nation as a kind of 'imagined community, stating that relationships we have to other members of the nation are imaginary or constructed, they are based on ideas.

As Hobsbawm argues, territory defined within certain boundaries is one of the key features of a modern nation-state. In most cases, as I will further demonstrate in the case of Georgia, the boundaries are determined by the intellectual elite.

Ilya Chavchavadze and his companions were influenced by their studies at St. Petersburg University. At that time, the University was the best place to gain Western education without knowing European languages. Therefore, it is not surprising that Western education was crucial for the groups in Georgia. Chavchavadze and his friends demanded to establish Georgian as the language for the country's internal affairs. In March 1881 he wrote that "it is necessary to introduce judicial changes in regard to the national language. Nationality, as well as religious belonging, is a personal matter. It is easier to teach the language of people to several officials than to force the whole nation to learn a foreign one".<sup>72</sup>

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71 Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

72 Lebanidze, Iliia Chavchavadze. Works, internal Review.

According to Hobsbawm, the establishment of a national language for official usage is a necessary condition for becoming a nation-state.<sup>73</sup>

As the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the period of national unrest in many European countries, the socio-political events inspired the future leaders of the Georgian liberation movement. Chavchavdze dedicated many poems to liberation movements in Western Europe and sought to join Garibaldi's army as a volunteer. These chronicals clearly demonstrate that Georgian elite was influenced by Western liberators in this period.

In order to better understand the relationship between the importance of national language and the development of nationalism, it is helpful to refer to Gellner's hypothetical Megalomanian Empire and its periphery Ruritania.<sup>74</sup> Ruritania has a proletariat population who speak dialects, while the official language of Megalomania is completely different. The small elite of Ruritanian intellectuals educated in Megalomania have better skills than their countrymen. However, they are unable to have better prospects in Ruritania. The establishment of an independent Ruritanian Republic requires many efforts and the most important thing to deal with is national consciousness. The intellectual elite who are supposed to establish the national movement needs the mass support of the proletariats. This model suggested by Gellner closely resembles the development of nationalism in Georgia, where a group of young, educated and motivated people were inspired by the ideas of liberation. After returning back to Georgia they formed an intellectual elite, later transformed into a governmental elite, and initiated a Georgian liberation movement.

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73 Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

74 Gellner, *Nations And Nationalism*.



## Tools of Nationalism

In this section I will demonstrate the instruments of nationalism on the basis of which the intellectual elite of that time managed to unite people and create the common sense, which are the key to the process of nation-building.

The only periodical journal of the time “Tsiskari” which was first published in 1852, was written in the outdated language. The language of the journal was not accessible to the masses, because the population was illiterate and the journal remained an elitist publication. The critical letter about “Tsiskari” published by Chavchavadze in 1861 immediately received reaction. Chavchavadze and his team aimed to establish their own periodic publication “Sakartvelos Moambe (eng. Georgian Chronicle, 1863-1877) and “Iveria” (an old name of Georgia 1877-1905). Publication of a daily newspaper was a very important step in the formation of the Georgian nation.

As Anderson argues in his theory about “imagined communities” the rise of print-capitalism, especially the newspaper changed the reflection of time and created a vernacular readership.<sup>75</sup> As he further elaborates on his theory, newspapers create a feeling of simultaneity and sense of social unity. The print-media provoked the sense of imagination that their “brothers and sisters” act rationally and in unison. When a newspaper is issued, all events are united into one single day. “Readers have a feeling that thousands of members from their community read the same paper”.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, newspapers allowed liberation movements to provide their message via national propagandist appeals. Publications, like scientific and social articles, can be packed with patriotic content and appeal to the masses. As it happened in case of Georgia, the first Georgian newspaper served as the main factor in the emergence of national sentiments.

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<sup>75</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>76</sup> Gabisonia, “Formation of the Georgian National Discourse.”

Overall, it was crucial to establish one, universal language, build an educational system and use this language as in the movement's publications, as well as in official state matters. These were the problems Georgia was facing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the liberation movement reflected them on the political agenda.

Establishment of one official language served as a tool to unify the broad variety of dialects all around Georgia. Printed literature maintained a strong feeling of common past, which is a cornerstone of national self-consciousness.

The "Iveria", besides articles with direct national appeal, had chronicles from Georgian history alongside with the folklore section covering popular art. These roughly demonstrate the nationalistic discourse the periodical had during that time. According to Gabisonia's observation, "the new newspaper provoked an ambivalent feedback".<sup>77</sup> There were two significant tasks Chavchavadze and his team aimed to accomplish: on the one hand they wanted to reach the lower class through simplified language, on the other hand, work against the feudal system. Overall, both sides- the old and the new generations- agreed that the newspaper and Chavchavadze were serving the national interests. It is also worth mentioning that the simplification was not just about the language policy, but spreading national ideas through introducing new Georgian words, namely: "nation, radical party, volunteer, national guard, tractate, slogan, confederation, municipality, tyranny, autonomy, republic, revolution, agitation".<sup>78</sup>

Even though national symbols are significant for the nationhood, they fail to accomplish the mission without proper economical conditions of people. For this regard, Chavchavadze and his companions were aware on the issue and started to fight for peasants'

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Sharadze, Ilia Chavchavadze: Life, Activity, Works.

rights and welfare. They used newspapers and ideological strategy for achieving these goals and established the first Georgian national bank.<sup>79</sup>

### Early Years: 1918-1921

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire was in the process of stagnation and transformation, which was affected by Russia's several defeats in the war with Japan as well as the dissatisfaction with Tsarism. Several groups in the Empire's peripheries realized that it was the very best moment to obtain national liberation. Consequently, Chavchavadze and his team took this advantage of the situation and founded the Committee of Georgian Nobles. The main goal of the Committee was to achieve autonomy for Georgia and send it to the Emperor.<sup>80</sup> Further, Chavchavadze founded the National-Democrats Party to fight for the cultural and political autonomy of Georgia. In order to create a rough image of what kind of state the movement was trying to create, I will highlight the main points of the party's program. 1) Education- the program was clearly promoting the right of education regardless of origin, sex, religion or posterity. Besides that, the liberation movement made an emphasis on the right for private and public initiatives for funding educational institutions and to teach in Georgian language. Further, Chavchavadze's team was actively supporting the idea of establishing an educational system consisting of free of charge public schools. 2) Church- regarding the Georgian Orthodox Church, the aim was to restore the autocephaly and grant maximum freedom to all religious groups. 3) Autonomy- this points out the right to

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79 Gabisonia, "Formation of the Georgian National Discourse."

80 Dondua et al., *Kartuli Gazetebis Analit'ik'uri Bibliografi*a (Analytical Bibliography of Georgian Newspapers ).

establish an autonomous government, to defend the rights of national minorities and determine the borders of Georgian autonomy.<sup>81</sup>

Chavchavadze was killed before Georgia's independence in 1907, but his companions continued his work and Georgia declared independence on May 26, 1918. The main principles of Georgia's future democracy were reflected in the Act of Independence. It outlined the following: "the Democratic Republic of Georgia equally guarantees to every citizen within her limits political rights irrespective of nationality, creed, social rank or sex".<sup>82</sup> During a short period in 1919-1921, the Constituent Assembly of Georgia adopted 126 laws, including the laws on citizenship, local elections, official language and political arrangements for ethnic minorities. On February 21, 1921 the Assembly adopted a constitution of Georgia, the first fundamental law in the country's history. The Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in Exile was recognized by Europe as the only legal government of Georgia. However, on 25 February 1921 the Red Army occupied Tbilisi and independence was lost. Soviet rule was thus established in Georgia.

To sum it up, as the founder of Georgian nationalism stated: "in our opinion, neither the unity of language, nor the unity of religion and kinship can fuse the people with each other as the unity of history". This quote and the events I demonstrate in the chapter illustrate that it was secular nationalism that was the core of the development of Georgian culture in the late 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As Gabisonia argues, without secular nationalism "cultural integration of the linguistically and religiously diverse population of Georgia would have been far more difficult, if not impossible".<sup>83</sup> Regardless the fact that Ilya Chavchavadze was canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church, as I have demonstrated that religion was not part of the project.

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81 Sharadze, Ilya Chavchavadze: Life, Activity, Works.

82 Berdzenishvili, Istoriiia Gruzii (The History of Georgia).

83 Gabisonia, "Formation of the Georgian National Discourse."

## **Analysis of the relationship between the Church and government since 1990**

Georgia was part of the Soviet Union for 70 years and managed to achieve independence only in 1991. The newly independent state faced both external threats and internal civil turmoil. The only institute that retained its stability in the early 90s was the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Church successfully replaced Soviet ideology and filled out the ideological vacuum which was created after the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, people started to live in a globalized world: enjoyed the use of internet, traveled to different countries. On the other hand, fear of socio-cultural and political challenges has intensified and that was an outcome of the “closed politics” advocated by the Church.<sup>84</sup>

In this chapter I will analyze the nationalistic discourse prevailing during three governments after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The analysis will help us to create the basic image about the relationship between the Church and state since 90s, through which I will demonstrate the socio-political developments that supported the Church to become a powerful political institution.

### **Printed Media Analysis**

I will use the analysis of the Georgian printed media done by Gavashelishvili. First period from 1989 to 1991 is the first decade after the declaration of independence and dissolution of the Soviet Union. This period was be marked by social, political and economic turbulence for Georgia. Every institution and state apparatus was affected in the process. Early years of independence were highly influenced by the President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his dictatorial national ideology. Later he was criticized because of his ethno-national

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84 Gavashelishvili, “Anti-Modern and Anti-Globalist Tendencies in the Georgian Orthodox Church.”

rhetoric, but during his presidency, he was quite popular among the population. Gamsakhurdia was advocating closed foreign politics and isolation from the outside world. As Gavashelishvili concludes on the basis of the press analysis during that time, Gamsakhurdia's government integrated the Orthodox ideology with the state ideology. He declared Major Orthodox celebrations as official holidays in the country. The lecture he gave at the Idriart Festival in the Tbilisi Philharmonic House in 1990 was imbued with religion and nationality.<sup>85</sup> In his speech he argued about Georgia's spiritual mission and linked nationality with faith. The speech outlines the ethnogeny of the Georgians and deals with questions of theology, mythology history and religion. However, the Church was not the main actor during his presidency and one can barely find religious topics at that times. The government of Gamsakhurdia didn't go far to determine the relationship between the Church and State and despite the emphasis he was making on religion in his speeches, the Georgian Orthodox Church didn't have a political influence.

#### Eduard Shevardnadze

In this paragraph I will be arguing that during this period the Church and state acted in accord and after signing the Concordat in 1999, the Georgian Orthodox Church gained significant popularity.<sup>86</sup> After the presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze, who was the minister of foreign affairs under Gorbachev, was elected as the second president of Georgia in 1995. Shevardnadze failed to provide stability in the country and the level of corruption notably increased. For that reason, the increased popularity of the Georgian Orthodox Church coincided a difficult socio-political situation.

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85 Gamsakhurdia, "The Spiritual Mission of Georgia. A Lecture Delivered at the Idriart Festival in Tbilisi Philharmonic House."

86 Gavashelishvili, "Anti-Modern and Anti-Globalist Tendencies in the Georgian Orthodox Church."

Shevardnadze tried to get the legitimization from the Church and one of his first moves was a clear demonstration of that. He was baptized as an Orthodox Christian after coming back from Moscow. This was perceived as “a new epoch in the history of Georgia as the state handed the church a key to politics”.<sup>87</sup> The popularity of the Church started to grow; the new government provided financial support for the construction of churches. In the early years of his presidency Shevardnadze’s government focused on the national constitution, whereas the status of religion should have been defined. In 1995, after the document was successfully passed, Georgia became a secular state. However, it is important to mention that the historical importance of the Georgian Orthodox Church was highly underscored. The document states: “the state emphasizes the special importance of the Georgian Orthodox Church and in Georgian history, but simultaneously declares complete freedom of religious belief and confessions, as well as the independence of church and state” (Article N9, the Constitution of Georgia)).<sup>88</sup>

The article is a clear example of a clash of liberals and traditionalists. Liberals wanted to bring new ideas into Georgian politics and achieve Church-State separation, while traditionalists supported the idea of establishing Christian Orthodoxy as a state religion. “Shevardnadze opted the ‘middle ground’”.<sup>89</sup>

Since 1997, after leaving the World Council of Churches, the Georgian Orthodox Church became more “closed to the world”. During a personal interview Shota Kintsurashvili provided the analysis of the period, saying that “in 1997 the Georgian Orthodox Church was split into two parts. One party was supporting the withdrawal from the Ecumenical Council. They wanted to ‘close the church’ to the outside world and after that they even went ‘too far’

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87 Naskidashvili, “Orthodox Politics: Religious Renaissance and Its Political Implications in Post-Soviet Georgia,” 34.

88 Naskidashvili, “Orthodox Politics: Religious Renaissance and Its Political Implications in Post-Soviet Georgia.”

89 Hanf, Nodia, and Nodia, *Georgia Lurching to Democracy*.

and backed for the idea to leave the Council.” In the interview he continued arguing that “since 1997 the Georgian Orthodox Church started the process of gaining ideological power. They enjoyed the control over the media, newspapers, magazines and most importantly- the pulpit, from where they could directly rule the parish. They realized the power of controlling masses through religious rhetoric.”<sup>90</sup>

The Church developed as anti-Western attitude which was in harmony with the state’s foreign policy. In next chapters I will demonstrate the way the Church as a mobilizing force manages to utilize historical and cultural narratives in order to shape anti-Western discourse.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the most inclusive ecumenical organization that aims for Christian unity.<sup>91</sup> The organization unites churches, including world’s Orthodox churches scores of Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, also church fellowships and denominations in 110 countries. The WCC offers a great opportunity for its members to speak, debate, act and work together. The Georgian Orthodox Church joined the organization in 1962. The Patriarch Ilya II was a president at the WCC from 1979 to 1983. On May 20, 1997 the Georgian Orthodox Church left the WCC and the Conference of European Churches (CEC). This was the first time since the council was established in 1948, that an Orthodox Church left the organization. It was a period when the cleavage in the Church was present and the decision about leaving the Council was taken at an emergency meeting of the Holy Synod of the Church. The decision was greatly affected by the pressure from Georgia’s leading monasteries. One month before that Ilya II got an open letter from Archimandrite Georgi, Father Superior of the influential Shio-Mgvima Monastery. In the letter he stated that “his monastery was halting communion with Catholicos-Patriarch Ilya II because of his

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90 Interview with Shota Kintsurashvili. April 15, 2014

91 Zolotov, “Georgian Orthodox Church to Leave WCC and CEC.”



ecumenical heresy”.<sup>92</sup> The Archimandrite enjoyed the support of leaders of other monasteries and on 19 May a group of priests demanded withdrawal from the WCC.

As observers claim the decision to leave the WCC was affected by the internal problems of the Church. The Holy Synod was led by the desire to maintain the unity of the Church.<sup>93</sup> As Giorgi Andreadze (one of the leaders of the Orthodox society in Tbilisi) mentioned in the interview with the Ecumenical News International (ENI), “nobody in the Georgian Church, even the advocates of withdrawal from the WCC had expected the Synod to take such a ‘sudden decision’”.<sup>94</sup> Further, as Corso argues in the article, the Georgian Orthodox Church moved in a conservative direction since it left the WCC in 1997.<sup>95</sup>

The decline of government popularity coincided with the increased public support the Church was enjoying. Political parties realized the needs and benefits of receiving legitimization from the Church and in the early 2000s the liberal wing of the Civil Union started supporting the idea of the constitutional agreement between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state. The document aimed to provide the financial support to the Church. As Naskhidashvili presents her interviews, one of the respondents admits that “A former minister, who supported acceptance of the document, admitted that some of his colleagues were conscious of the emergence of fundamentalism”.<sup>96</sup>

The agreement between the Church and state was signed in 2002 and according to the document “the state recognizes material and moral damage suffered by the Georgian Orthodox Church during the Soviet Regime and takes responsibility to partly compensate for this damage” and “the state and the Church confirm their readiness for cooperation for the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Corso, “Georgia.”

<sup>96</sup> Naskidashvili, “Orthodox Politics: Religious Renaissance and Its Political Implications in Post-Soviet Georgia,” 33.

well-being of the population of the Country in accordance with principle of reciprocal sovereignty” (Article 1)<sup>97</sup>

As the agreement didn’t specify how much the state “owes” to the Church and furthermore, failed to provide the exact procedures for reimbursement, this statement was a turning point to provide increased funding to the Church. As Zurab Japaridze (an MP from the National Movement) mentions in the interview “an article on taxation ‘is very well used by some church hierarchs and they sell any type of goods as religious products” (Naskidashvili 2013 ).<sup>98</sup>

As the Article 5.1 of the Concordate states, “educational institutions shall teach orthodox religion upon their choice. Curriculum's drafting and changing, teachers’ appointment and dismissal shall be subject to Church competence”.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the Church and the state would collaborate jointly to protect the cultural heritage. As these articles illustrate the Church was given priority in educational and cultural spheres. It is important to mention that the agreement significantly increased the political power of the Church. The agreement was not the direct reason to gain political influence, but enabled the Church to have an access to the mechanism to impact the political and social life.

### Mikheil Saakashvili

The third stage I will be discussing covers the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili. I will focus on the period between 2008-2011. In 2004 Saakashvili got almost the full support

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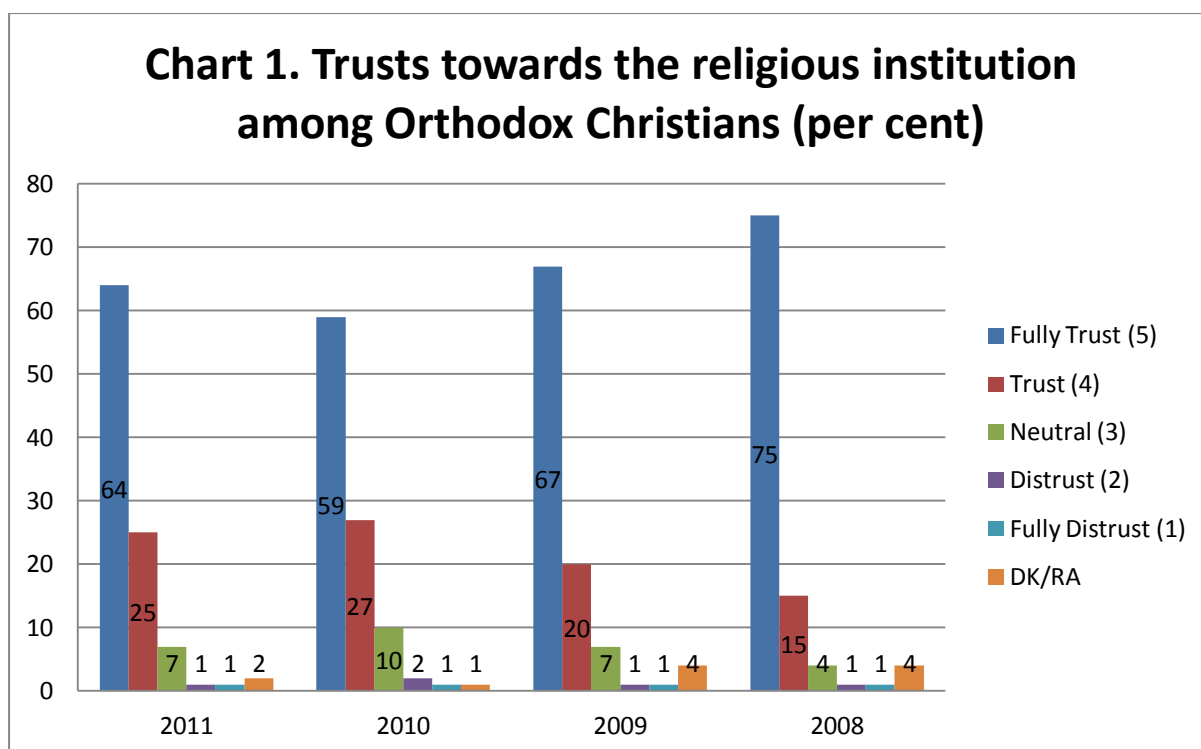
97 “Constitutional Agreement between the State of Georgia and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church.”

98 Naskidashvili, “Orthodox Politics: Religious Renaissance and Its Political Implications in Post-Soviet Georgia.”

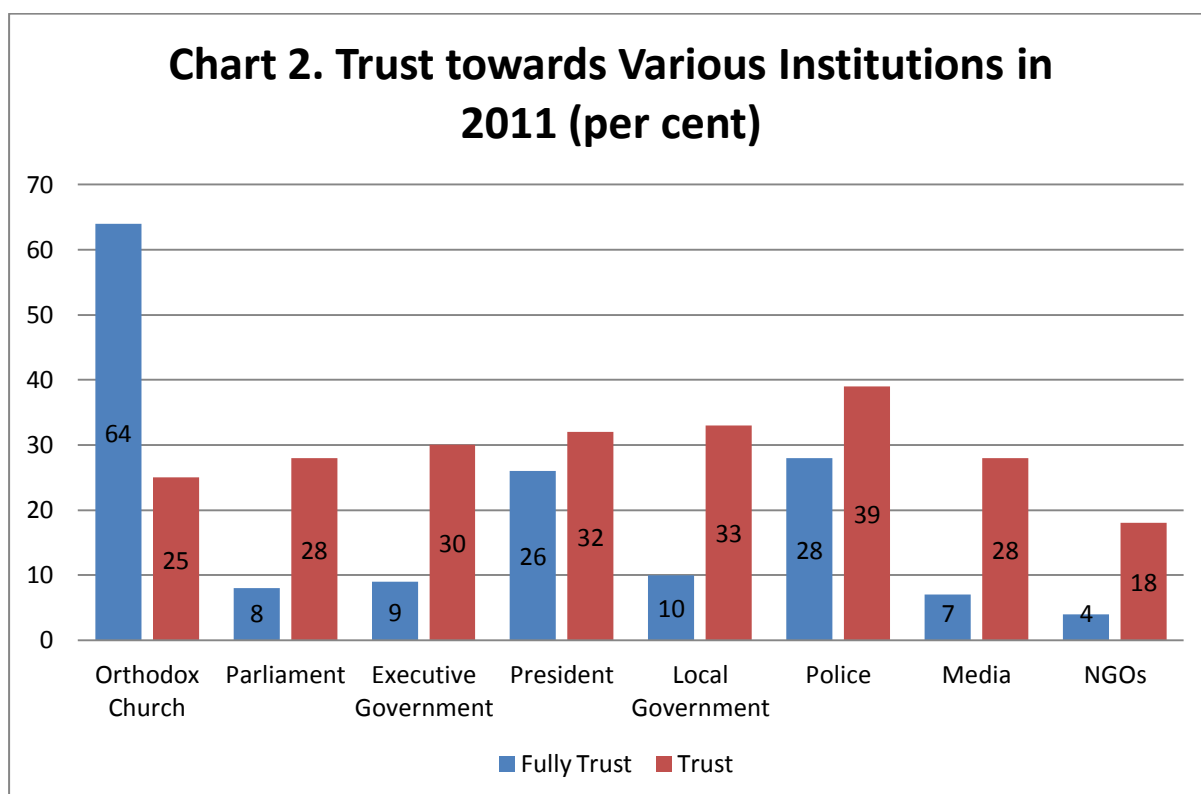
99 “Constitutional Agreement between the State of Georgia and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church.”

from voters and became the president of Georgia. The presidential election was followed by a peaceful demonstration, which later was recognized as the “Rose Revolution”. The constitutional agreement failed to save Shevardnadze's government.

The new government led by Mikheil Saakashvili began the implementing of civic ideology, promoting Western values and integration with NATO and the EU. The power and the popularity of the Orthodox Church reached its peak during the presidency of Saakashvili. As we can decipher from graphs N1, 2, in the last years of the Saakashvili's rule the Church was the most trusted institution in the country and therefore, enjoyed the maximum popularity. The new government was blessed by the patriarch and he once again, served as a legitimizing force. Equally, as the graph illustrates, during Saakashvili's presidency state funding increased 20 times. Funding dramatically increased within the last ten years and the total amount of fund the Church received in 2012 was 22.8 million GEL. Government leaders seeking the Church's support increased the state funding in order to get legitimization from the Church. This allowed the Orthodox Church to become more powerful institution. At the same time, this trend reveals that the Church as a legitimizing force enables it to exercise the political influence over the state and make an impact on the actual process of decision-making. The data is compiled from the Budget Execution Reports from 2005 to 2012 and the Budget Plan from 2013. The data was accessed at the website of the Ministry of Finances (The Government of Georgia 2005 to 2013)

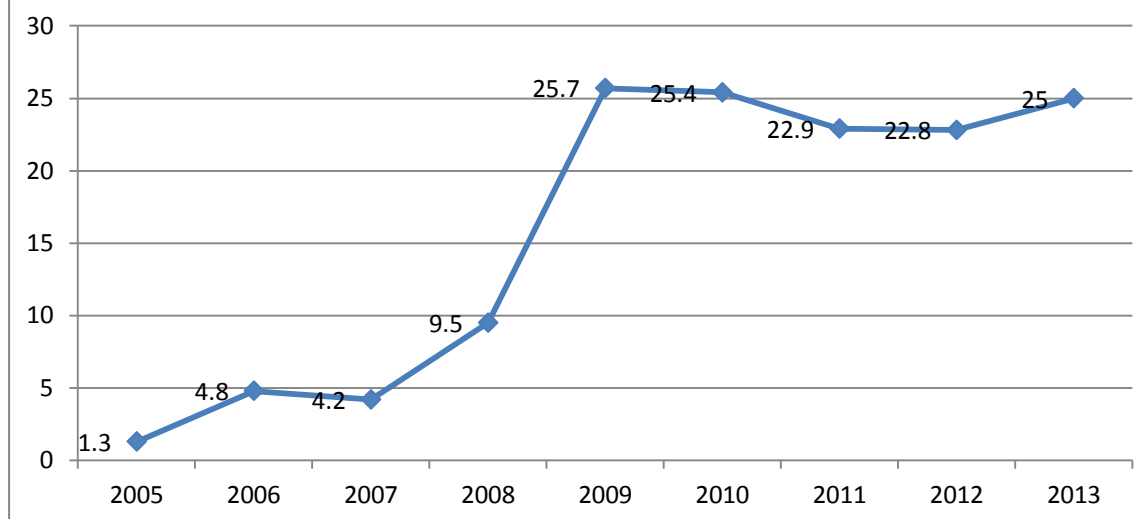


Source: CRRC 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011



As Charts N2 and N3 illustrate the trust towards the Georgian Orthodox Church is much higher compared to other institutions.

**Chart 3. Budgetary Funding Received by the Georgian Orthodox Church (million GEL)**



The data is compiled from the Budget Execution Reports from 2005 to 2012 and the Budget Plan from 2013. The data was accessed at the website of the Ministry of Finances (The Government of Georgia 2005 to 2013)

As the chapter aimed to illustrate, after the breakdown of the Soviet Union the Church immediately realized the power it could have. The relationship between different governments demonstrated that the popularity and the strength of the Church started to grow after the 1997, when Georgia left the WCC and Orthodox discourse became anti-Western, anti-ocumenical. Further, as I have suggested the Constitution Agreement of 2002 between the Church and state enabled the Church to gain more political power. Also, through the analysis of the financial support from the state, which is considered to be a demonstration of the government's desire to gain legitimization from the Church, suggest that the Georgian Orthodox Church reached the peak of its popularity during the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili.

## **Instrumentalization of Historical and Cultural Memory, Shaping Orthodox Discourse**

In this part of the thesis I will demonstrate the leverage the Georgian Orthodox Church attempts to use to make a political and social influence. As Serrano points out “the collapse of the Soviet Union has created a new context that changes the relationship between national identity and orthodoxy: on the one hand, the function of the nationalist discourse has changed with the existence of an independent State-which is not shape the future of the nation, on the other hand, persecution of religious practices has ceased, religion is no longer relegated to the private sphere or confined to the embodiment of a secular idea of the nation”<sup>100</sup>

As theologian Mirian Gamrekelashvili argues, in the personal interview, nowadays we face the successful attempt of shaping a religious state. He continues saying that it is hard to draw a parallel with other countries. “We might look at the example of our neighbor Armenia, where church has close relations with the state, but there is a different factor we should carefully examine. In the case of Armenia the Church is the main partner of the Diasporas and in case of conflict between the Church and state, the Armenian Church will stop helping Diasporas”<sup>101</sup> While in the case of Georgia we have the model of the “direct support”, meaning that people support and trust the Georgian Orthodox Church.<sup>102</sup>

Gamrekelashvili explains the importance of history in the process of nation-building, saying that “any state is based on the historical and cultural memory, experience. In our

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<sup>100</sup> Serrano, “De-Secularizing National Space in Georgia.”

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Mirian Gamrekelashvili. April 9, 2014

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

country due to the bad experience of the Communism and the trauma, the social-democratic experience we had was not utilized as a tool for the identity formation after the 90s. The Soviet experience was discredited and politicians started to lobby the idea of ‘historical Georgia’<sup>103</sup>

In this paragraph I will highlight the tools the Georgian Orthodox Church uses to shape the Orthodox discourse. The ideology the Church is providing has different dimensions, namely; Georgia as a unique nation, the importance of the Orthodoxy as the only true religion. I will argue that the discourse the Church is shaping is anti-Western, anti-globalist.

The first and the most important thing is to define Georgian according to religion and ethnic belonging.<sup>104</sup> “We are blessed by God for two reasons; first and most importantly the fact that we are granted life and the second is that we are the Orthodox Christians, which means that we follow the true religion. There are millions of people around the world without Orthodoxy and we should be proud that God gifted us the Orthodoxy.”<sup>105</sup> This idea was elaborated by Anthony Smith, who suggested the theory of the chosen people, stating that sacred belief still remains as a core to the national identity.<sup>106</sup> Despite the fact that he doesn’t mention the relationship between religion and cultural foundations in Georgia and his book covers the analysis of the development of individual nations over many countries, his theoretical framework and model can be applied to the case of Georgia. His main argument is that the power of myths, the memories of a “Golden Age” and victimization can be used as a tool for social mobilization. In Georgia the narrative of the “Golden Age”, when the country

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103 Ibid.

104 Chelidze, “Erovnuli Ident’obis K’onst’ruireba Religiur-Nacionalist’ur Disk’ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse).”

105 “Sap’at’riarkos Uc’q’ebabi (The Publication of the Patriarchate),” 2004.

106 Smith, Chosen Peoples.

reached its peak of cultural, social and political developments during the reign of the Queen Tamar, is the integral part of modern Georgian nationalism.<sup>107</sup>

Before providing a more detailed analysis of the Patriarch's speeches that demonstrate the importance of Orthodoxy, I will reveal the following quote, illustrating the special importance of Orthodoxy to Georgians. Ilya II argues in his speech that Orthodoxy is the explanatory factor to the cultural development and the success of Georgia; "Georgia was powerful and thus the Georgian talent and gene is powerful as well...the population of Turkey is more than 5 million and because of the restrictions of their religion the country failed to create anything valuable in history. Georgian Orthodox creates and will always creates fascinating things".<sup>108</sup> The aspects of nationalism, such as national pride, patriotism and protection of national interests are being considered as the distinctive feature of the Georgian history.<sup>109</sup> The main idea behind this is that the concept of chosen nation and the importance of history obliges the country to act accordingly and be the guardian of Orthodoxy.

Another dimension of religious nationalism in Georgia is the concept of messianism. Messianic nationalism means that one nation is supreme over another nation and again, it implies the idea of the chosen nation. If we look at the publications of the Patriarchate we can encounter messianic sentiment the following phrases: " God loves Georgia more...", " miracles happen only in Georgia", the rest of the world will be surrounded by sin, only Georgia will survive", "Georgia is the country which will save the mankind", "Georgians are closer to God than other people"<sup>110</sup>

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107 Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*.

108 "Sap'at'riarkos Uc'q'ebabi (The Publication of the Patriarchate)," 2004.

109 Chelidze, "Erovnuli Ident'obis K'onst'ruireba Religiur-Nacionalist'ur Disk'ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse)."

110 Ibid.



One of the features of religious nationalism in Georgia is to claim the uniqueness of the Georgian language and alphabet. The Patriarch in his speech mentions: “the Georgian language- the world wonder! It is music, but not terrestrial, it is a spiritual music. The Georgian language will be used as one only language during the judgment day”<sup>111</sup>

Another important dimension of Georgian nationalism is that it is anti-globalist and questions all Western values that are perceived to be threats to the Georgian nation. It is not a big surprise that nationalism emerged as a response to globalization. In Georgia, the Church as an institution aims to condemn liberal values and criticize the West at every level.<sup>112</sup> If we look at this problem from a broader point of view, this is a clash between the Georgian Orthodox Church and liberal ideas. The Patriarch as well as clergy members often address the issues regarding globalization. As the bishop Stephane tries to persuade us “Georgia is facing a big threat. [Others] strive to deprive our true religiosity. Liberalism is going to be established as a state religion” .<sup>113</sup>

Religious figures often underline the stories about masons in their speeches.<sup>114</sup> One of the examples how the Church tries to use the anti-Western discourse is the dispute over the digital ID cards. In August 2011 the Ministry of Justice made new digital ID cards. Card holder can do online banking, pay utilities online, buy tickets and arrange some other activities online. Despite all these advantages, the Church opposed the adoption of these cards, claiming that the card has “a sign of the devil” and signal “the second coming of Christ” .<sup>115</sup> This phenomenon is not a novel to the Georgian society and the anthropology book by Hann and Coltz illustrate the problem of the “sign of devil” through anthropological

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111 “Sap’at’riarkos Uc’q’ebabi (The Publication of the Patriarchate),” 2005.

112 Chelidze, “Erovnuli Ident’obis K’onst’ruireba Religiur-Nacionalist’ur Disk’ursebshi (National Identity Construction in the Religio-Nationalist Discourse).”

113 “Eri Da Beri (The Nation and the Monk).”

114 Gavashelishvili, “Anti-Modern and Anti-Globalist Tendencies in the Georgian Orthodox Church.”

115 Georgia’s ID Cards.”

perspective.<sup>116</sup> Further, the European integration was also criticized by the Church. In 2008 it was argued that “any step towards European integration and ecumenization are a deviation from Christ’s path and accordingly, a foreign investment sustaining the Antichrist agenda”.<sup>117</sup>

### Analysis of the Patriarch's Speeches

In this chapter I will examine the role of the Patriarch Ilya II and his engagement in the socio-political life of Georgia. I will argue that the Patriarch, as the most trusted figure in Georgia, plays the role of the mediator between the ruling party and the opposition as well as between people and the state. This can partially account for the popularity and therefore, political influence of the Orthodox Church. The speeches I will be discussing include the time period from 1997 to 2014.

His Holiness the Catholicos Patriarch Ilya II was born on 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1933 in Vladicaucassus.<sup>118</sup> In 1952 he was enrolled to Moscow Theologian Seminary and later on, he continued studies at Moscow Theologian Academy. During 1978-1983 Ilya II was President of Ecumenical Church Council. In 1997 he was elected full member of World Information Science Academy at UNO. In the speeches the Patriarch outlines different issues connected to social and political life. The most important issue Ilya II addresses in his speeches is how the Orthodox Church defines the function of the state. “For people it is not enough to show the way how to save their souls, but it is essential to have a proper social life [...] Christianity showed the essence of being to the supreme manifestation of the society- the state”<sup>119</sup>. According to his point of view, the state legislation should be based on the “divine laws”

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116 Hann and Goltz, Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective.

117 Gavashelishvili, “Anti-Modern and Anti-Globalist Tendencies in the Georgian Orthodox Church.”

118 The Patriarchate of Georgia, [http://www.patriarchate.ge/\\_en/?action=patriarqi](http://www.patriarchate.ge/_en/?action=patriarqi)

119 Ilya II, 2008, 112, Christmas Epistle, 1997-98

rather than the principle of the “absolute mind”<sup>120</sup>. Here it is important to mention that according to his belief the “true faith” should be guarded by the state. He states that the government should provide the right ideology in order to guarantee the right way of living and define the essence and the form of the everyday life. This means that the government should “legitimize” the religious worldview as the only tool and means for the functioning of the state.

The Patriarch points out the tendencies of the post-imperial society to the need of a “new leader”. He considers dignity, freedom and responsibility as the basis of the state, which can only be defined by Christian teaching<sup>121</sup>. Accordingly, he clearly indicates that the role of the church is to “transform” the society, rather than lead individuals to the way of personal salvation and of which the government should take responsibility. Further, he defines the principles the government should be guided by: Orthodox values and Georgian traditions<sup>122</sup>. Interestingly, he perceives “non-traditional” religions as the anti-state elements. He thinks that they are present in “post-atheistic” societies. Thus, he believes that the state is obliged to protect the nation and prevent the “spiritual aggression”<sup>123</sup>. Accordingly, from his point of view Orthodoxy is the “soul of the Georgian statehood”, which aims to recognize the “Orthodox truth” on the state level. He also points out the historical importance of the autocephalous church in protection of Georgian nationhood<sup>124</sup>.

The Patriarch suggests a very controversial approach to the West. He points out that the main goal behind using the concept of democracy is to conflict with the uniqueness of the Georgian nation<sup>125</sup>. He uses the term “pseudo- culture” which is perceived as the “propaganda

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<sup>120</sup> Ilya II, 2008, 30, Christmas Epistle, 2000

<sup>121</sup> Ilya II, 2008, 79, Easter, 2005

<sup>122</sup> Ilya II, 2008, 112, Christmas Epistle, 1997-98

<sup>123</sup> Ilya II, 2008, 114, Christmas Epistle, 1997-98

<sup>124</sup> Ilya II, 2008, 80, Easter, 2005

<sup>125</sup> Ilya II, 2008, 28, Easter, 2000

of sin” and obliges the state to protect the core values of the nation<sup>126</sup>. Consequently, this designates that the formation of religious nationalism should replace the civic nationalism.

As for the problem of religious freedom he defines that religious pluralism and equal conditions guaranteed by the constitution is “religious indifferentism”, which neglects the principle of “true religion”. At the same time, he points out the tolerance of the Georgian Orthodox Church towards other religious communities and demonstrates his desire to create a commission in the National Academy of Sciences to study the history of Christianity and other religions<sup>127</sup>. This might imply that every religion has a right to “exist” but there is only the one truth and the government should guarantee the ‘implementation’ of the truth.

His attitude towards the principle of freedom deserves a close analysis. He approaches freedom through the context of “everything is permitted”, which leads a person to abortion, violence and moral degradation. He believes that these “symptoms” are resulted by the absence of the “true faith”<sup>128</sup>. In the same speech he explains that the principles of secularism endangered the moral categories of freedom.

His attitude towards globalization is negative and he observes the process of globalization as the greatest threat to national traditions. He considers it as a mindset struggle which reminds him one of the famous battles from the history of Georgia. Therefore, in order to translate the “Georgian idea” into reality, the Georgian nation should preserve the Orthodoxy and national-cultural values. Hence, to accomplish this “mission” the state, Church and society should be united<sup>129</sup>.

It is very important to discuss the Patriarch’s last Christmas epistle, which caused huge public debates. In his last Christmas speech he addressed very sensitive issues to the Georgian society, pointing out the need of help for the sexual minorities to “overcome the

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126 Ilya II, 2012, 565, Christmas Epistle, 2000

127 Ilya II, 2008, 30, Easter, 2000

128 Ilya II, 2012, 669, Easter Epistle 2012

129 Ilya II, 2008, 192

sinful propensities”. He argues that the same-sex marriage is a threat to the values of the Georgian family and a child adopted by those families becomes a “thing”. Further, he supports and welcomes the fact that the membership of the European Union does not necessarily mean the legislation of same-sex marriage. In the same speech he notes; that minority groups are being advertised by non-governmental organizations and their final goal is to influence the constitution<sup>130</sup>.

The last epistle is also interesting to demonstrate how the Patriarch approaches gender roles in Georgian society. He thinks that the family should be based on love and the hierarchy, defining that husband’s role as to provide financial support, while a woman is supposed to be submissive and responsible for taking care of their children and other family members. He continues that women’s denial to have a child, is considered to be irresponsibility.

#### Patriarch as a Mediator

According to the survey done by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) 96% of the total population trust the Patriarch Ilya II<sup>131</sup>.

“Regardless the fact that church is very strong in Serbia and Romania, the extreme popularity and high trust towards the Georgian Orthodox Church depends on the worship of the Patriarch Ilya II in Georgia”.<sup>132</sup> In this sub chapter I will develop the argument that the Patriarch often serves as a mediator between the state and society and successfully manages

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130 Ilya II, Christmas Epistle, 2013-2014

131 “NDI-S Gamok’itkhvebis P’at’riarks Mosakhleobis 96% Endoba. (NDI Survey: The Popularity of the Patriarch Is 96 Percent).”

132 Interview with Shota Kintsurashvili. April 15, 2014.

to gain the absolute trust from people. As Kintsurashvili argues the “soviet people” needed a leader to follow and as it happened in Georgian reality the Patriarch successfully managed to act like a messianic leader after the 90s.

The patriarch does not openly interfere in politics and is a symbol of ‘unity’. However, his role as a mediator to reconcile political parties during political crisis is obvious. If we take an example from the last events, it is clear that the Patriarch tries to invite parties for dialogue and offer his office as a meeting point. For example, in January 2013, Ilya II invited the prime minister and the president to celebrate New Year’s Eve together.<sup>133</sup>

This symbolic gesture demonstrated the power of the Church and the need to acknowledge its legitimizing power since the prime minister and the president were from opposing parties and did not enjoy a peaceful relationship following the 2012 parliamentary elections in Georgia.

There are more examples when the Patriarch clearly demonstrated his power as a mediator during political crisis. I will look at the early years of the presidency of Saakashvili and provide an example of the first large scale demonstration in 2007. In November 2007 this was the first demonstration that took place since the withdrawal of Shevardnadze. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of November the police cracked down the protest rally and stormed into the TV station IMEDI, owned by Badri Patarkatsishvili (one of the leaders of the opposition). The state emergency, announced by the president, banned public gathering and news programs for 15 days.<sup>134</sup>

The political situation was intense, but on the same day the Patriarch made a speech and expressed his concerns. He immediately offered mediation between the parties and

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133 Ivanishvili Da Saak’ashvili Dzvelit Akhal C’els Ertad Shekhvdnen (Ivanishvili and Saakashvili Celebrated Old New Year Together).

134 Chivers, “Georgia Protests Erupt in Violence as Police Try to Clear Demonstrators - The New York Times.”

consequently, the meeting took place at the headquarters of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Regardless of the fact that the parties failed to achieve any negotiations, the dialogue was led by the Patriarch and further, he gave a ‘blessing’ for the further negotiations. Even though the meeting did not have any outcome, the Patriarch demonstrated his participation in politics and played an important role in mitigating the situation.

The Patriarch’s role was also very obvious in 2009, when opposition supporters gathered at the Dinamo Stadium.<sup>135</sup>

They went towards the main Cathedral where Ilya II was giving a sermon. He stated that demanding the resignation of a president became the common practice for Georgia and if we look at the history since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, resignations have not brought anything good for people.<sup>136</sup> He was reminding people that the overthrowing of president Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze did not bring any positive results for Georgia. At the end he blessed the protesters and the crowd disappeared.

Interestingly, Ilya II even tries to regulate inter-state conflicts. In 2008, after the war between Georgia and Russia he was the only mediator in Russo-Georgian relations. He met Medvedev, the president of Russia and discussed relations between Russia and Georgia.<sup>137</sup>

Further, he tried to soften the image of Russia and aimed to ease political tension between two countries. This trend is more observable after the Parliamentary elections in 2012. Since then, the Patriarch more openly expresses his loyalty towards Russia as an Orthodox country.

Overall, the Patriarch’s ability to ease the political tension as in the country as well as on the international level highlights his political and moral authority. Furthermore, it

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135 “Thousands Attend Georgia Protest.”

136 “Church Leader: Give Up Categorical Thinking.”

137 “Head of Georgian Church Meets Medvedev.”

underlines the importance of the Church's involvement in political disputes and emphasizes the need for closer collaboration with the Georgian Orthodox Church.

## **Conclusion**

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union Georgia managed to regain its political independence. The newly independent country faced as internal as well as external challenges. Georgia was given a chance to successfully build European nation-state based on the democratic values and institutions. However, in the contemporary Georgia we are facing the raise of religiosity; the importance and the intensity of the Orthodoxy has never been as extreme as today. The core of the formation of the Georgian nationalism in the 19th century was not religion. Even though, it was one of the important instruments to build a national consciousness, the power of the Church has never been as important as nowadays. The purpose of my research and the main research question I was guided with was to investigate the possible reasons and conditions under which the Georgian Orthodox Church emerged as the most powerful institution.

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union all political and social institutions failed to provide stability and the only institution which started the process of unification of the nation was the Georgian Orthodox Church. As the research demonstrated, the Church is the most popular institution in Georgia. The process of gaining political and social power was gradually intensified through the state-church relations since the 90s. After the analysis of the relationship between the Church and three governments, we have observed the main developments, suggesting that the Church gained almost absolute power during Saakashvili's



presidency. Consequently, the financial support as the means of collaboration was considerably high during 2007-2012. Since the Church enjoyed the maximum popularity, almost all political leaders acknowledged the need for gaining legitimization from the Church. Interestingly, Georgia was not the only country where the awakening of the religious sentiments was present. Like Georgia, other post-soviet countries experienced the growth the religiosity. However, the intensity and the dimension were different in case of Georgia.

The main argument of my thesis was that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union the trauma, caused by the historical memory and the most importantly, by the painful Soviet experience, was perceived as the ideological gap which was successfully filled out by the Georgian Orthodox Church. Through the analysis of the key events from the history of Georgia, I have demonstrated that newly independent state faced two main challenges: to build secular state based on the liberal values and to fill the ideological vacuum, created after the collapse of the Socialist ideology.

After the 70 years of experience being under the Communism and the frustration from the political situation, defined the future of the Georgian nation. The Georgian Orthodox Church with its spiritual leader Ilya II started the process of shaping the new ideological framework. The discourse which served as the basis of the religions nationalism was anti-globalist, anti-Western and anti-ecumenical. The Church successfully utilized national and cultural narrative and points out that the Georgian language is the unique; therefore, the Georgians are “blessed by God”. The Church underlines the importance of Orthodoxy to Georgia and through the analysis of the historical events, claims that Orthodoxy is the only and true religion. As a result, Georgia has its “special mission” and protecting Georgian traditional values is and should be the number one priority for every Georgian.

As I have demonstrated the Church served as a mobilizing power and in times of social or political turbulence it played the symbolic role to reconcile political parties. As

some authors claim, one of the reasons of the extreme popularity of the Church in Georgia, compared to other countries, is the personal factor of the Patriarch. Through the analysis of his speeches and the active engagement in political and social life, he serves as a mediator between the political parties. He also negotiates social and political tensions between the state and the people. Furthermore, he moderates on the international level and tries to reconcile parties during political crisis, as it happened after the Georgian-Russian war in 2008.

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