

Suspended Development:
Institutional Transformation and Lack of
Improvement in the Higher Education System of
Post-Revolution Georgia

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no materials accepted for any other degrees, in any other situation. Thesis contains no materials written and/or published by any other person, except when appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Date: 23.11.2015

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates system change in higher education (HE) in the region undergoing post-Soviet transition. It pays attention to the reforms that represent instances of transnational policy and institutional transfer into national contexts. Specifically, the research looks at the reforms that have been launched in accordance with the educational model promoted by the Bologna Process and contests its outcomes. The research moves beyond evaluating whether or not the transitional HE system came close to the Western counterparts, as the main and the most desirable outcome of the reform. Instead, it focuses on the dissonance between successful institutional redesign of the HE system and its poor outcomes. It further broadens the conceptual premises of the current scholarship by incorporating external factors in the analysis and expanding the pallet of internal factors beyond corruption and Soviet legacy.

The HE reform process in post-revolution Georgia that was guided by the Bologna Process serves as an illuminating case in this regard, as it has reached an institutional proximity to the Western HE systems to a higher degree than any other post-Soviet country that is part of the Bologna Process. Nevertheless, the institutional reforms have not translated into actual improvements of the HE system.

The dissertation examines the problem through two main questions. It first inquires why the post-revolution government adopted Bologna-inspired reforms to transform the Georgian HE system. Through the analysis of this question, it establishes that the government consciously adopted the Bologna-guided reforms in order to gain legitimacy

in the global educational space. As a result, the national HE system has been decoupled, hence its development has been suspended.

The second question grapples with the factors causing the suspended development of the HE system in Georgia and the reasons for it. The research finds that three internal factors reinforce each other and suspend the HE system development in Georgia. First, the goals of the reforms were framed in an abstract manner and as a result they came short of guiding the policy implementers. Second, while introducing the new institutions in the HE system, the purpose of these institutions was not clearly communicated in the Georgian HE context due to the absence of local transfer agents. Third, in the absence of local transfer agents, the government introduced an overly detailed legal framework to institutionalize a single dominant interpretation of the ‘Western’ institutions.

The dissertation therefore argues that transnational institutional transfer only symbolically reforms the HE systems in the countries of post-Soviet transition. New institutions lack substance and remain decoupled, suspending the system’s development.

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List of Abbreviations

BFUG	Bologna Follow up Group
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MES	Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia
NCEQE	National Centre of Education Quality Enhancement
NEAC	National Education Accreditation Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSF	Open Society Foundation
OSGF	Open Society – Georgia Foundation
QA	Quality Assurance
TI	Transparency International
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNM	United National Movement
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

Prologue

A 'Crisis in Education' happens when the traditional task of the education system to mediate between past and the future becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible, writes Arendt in her book *Between Past and Future* (Arendt, 1961). Arendt questions the aim of education in her modern world, because the past, as we know it, she states, proved to be damaging, detrimental, and even threatening, hence it can no longer act as an anchor for the future (Arendt, 1961). In the modern world, educators, instead of serving as mediators between the past and the future, are simply trapped between the two. Essentially, the question Arendt poses is: what role can education play in a context where existing traditions, norms and values, making up state identity (Herrmann & Shannon, 2001) are no longer legitimate? What is the purpose of education once it is incapable of providing a framework for the future?

Arendt's question remains pertinent today, more than 50 years after its original formulation. In our modern world, we observe an increasing number of transition states that are trapped between their irrelevant national past and an ever-globalised future. The acute concern regarding the purpose of education in these states endures. The intellectual quest that this dissertation is pursuing stems from Arendt's question.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses its analytical lenses on particular challenges emerging from the efforts of higher education (HE) system change in the post-Soviet region. To put it in Arendt's terms, with the collapse of the Soviet Union the fourteen successor states faced the problem of the irrelevance of their past in acting as an anchor for their future. For over a decade waves of reforms have been attempted in the name of increasing the "relevance" of national education systems for the development of those countries. During this entire period, simultaneously with the home-grown reforms efforts, the post-Soviet states have been subject to constant donor assistance (Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008) and have been directly exposed to the Bologna Process, one of the most influential transnational processes in higher education. And yet, the outcomes have been largely substandard (Crosier, Purser & Smidt, 2007; Sursock & Smidt, 2010). The lack of tangible effects of the reforms has led to a growing skepticism towards the steady recovery of the higher education systems in this region. The dissertation aims to look closer at this disparity.

While investigating system change in HE, this dissertation pays attention to a set of reforms that represent instances of transfer of externally validated educational models into national contexts. Specifically, it looks at the reforms that have been launched in accordance with the educational model promoted by the Bologna Process. Two considerations guided this choice. First, the focus on the transfer of externally validated educational models seems only natural here, if we take into account that in most states of the post-Soviet region foreign aid agencies have been strongly represented and have

been applying the ‘best practices’ from their development portfolios to address the challenges in various policy areas in this region (Lazarus, 2010). Put it otherwise, the post-Soviet states have been exposed to policy transfer and have been shaping their HE systems according to the foreign, predominantly Western HE models.

Second, the Bologna Process is one of the most significant examples of the transnational policy transfer in higher education. The Bologna Process is as important for a practical, policy perspective, as it is in a scholarly perspective as a particular, type of policy transfer. It has developed and promoted educational models that do not belong to or originate from a particular national HE system. Instead, these models represent a combination of multiple experiences that is elevated to a high level of abstraction and is geographically neutral¹. As such, they are applicable to and indeed intended to be applied to different national contexts as a neutral, perhaps even universal institutional framework (Meyer, 2000). For over a decade the Bologna Process has served as one of the most influential HE transnational processes that develops and disseminates educational models among its signatory countries and beyond (Fejes, 2008; Van Damme, 2009). As Kwiek notes, in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) the Bologna Process enabled signatory countries to tackle higher education problems that were otherwise of a strictly national character and which they had been failing to address effectively within a national conceptual policy framework (Kwiek, 2004). Indeed, for many countries, and this is especially true for the post-Soviet states, the Bologna

¹ This clarification is based on the works of Meyer, 2015 and Stone, 2004.

Process provided a readymade answer to the poorly analyzed problems of national higher education systems and to the need for a coherent reform agenda.

Georgia is one of the distinctive examples of a post-Soviet country that has undertaken the Bologna-guided reforms with enthusiasm, and re-designed the institutional framework of its higher education system in accordance with the Process's objectives. As a result, it has indeed reached institutional proximity to the Western HE systems to a higher degree than any other post-Soviet country that is part of the Bologna Process². Georgia has been declared the best Bologna pupil of all former Soviet republics (with the exception of the Baltic States). This research focuses on the example of Georgian HE reforms guided by the Bologna Process as an illuminating case in understanding the challenges in reforming the HE systems in the post-Soviet region. The reasons for this consideration is laid out in more depth below.

Why Georgia?

After disintegration of the Soviet Union, former Soviet republics underwent several waves of reforms in higher education in search for appropriate institutional arrangements to meet their national demands. In quest for solutions, practically all former Soviet Union countries turned to the Western education systems as potential models. As the Bologna Process and the idea of the common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) gained popularity in the 2000s, the Process became a central

² Russia joined the Bologna Process in 2003; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine - in 2005, Kazakhstan – in 2010, Belarus – in 2015.

reference, according to which these countries began to shape their higher education systems. However, over the course of the years, it became evident that signing Bologna Declaration did not necessarily lead to a noticeable positive effect on countries' higher education systems (see Bologna Follow Up Group, 2005; Crosier et al., 2007; Eurydice network, 2012; Rauhvargers, 2007; Rauhvargers, Deane & Pauwels, 2009; Sursock & Smidt, 2010). According to the Trends reports of the European University Association (EUA)³, by 2010, for instance, in Russia the main structures of the Bologna process were still missing at the system level. Neither the European Credit Transfer System (the ECTS) promoted as a key element of Bologna Process, nor the three cycles (the new “degree structure”) were implemented according to the Bologna principles. Only 9% of the students were enrolled in the two cycles bachelor, master programmes while the rest were studying for the specialist, which is the traditional, five-year academic programme. The doctoral education remained also implemented in two stages, as it was practiced within the Soviet Union, with the requirement for the PhD candidates to acquire “candidate” qualification and then advance to doctorate (Crosier et al., 2007; Sursock & Smidt, 2010). To mention another example, the visibility of Azerbaijan in the Trends report is low if not non-existent. Over the course of the first five years from its participation in the process (2005-2010), only two out of 33 universities have participated in the EUA data-gathering (Sursock & Smidt, 2010; UNESCO, 2011), which is indicative of the lack of interest and engagement of this country in the Process.

³ EUA Trends reports provide a regular overview of the learning structures in higher education within the EHEA

Armenia has been also delaying the progress, according to the stocktaking reports (Rauhvargers et al., 2009) that is a biennial report on the progress of the Bologna-catered reforms produced by the Bologna Follow up Group (BFUG). Overall, in the region despite the original support indicated by formally joining the Process, the changes in higher education have been taken upon with reluctance and progressed at a rather slow pace.

Georgia was the notable exception among these former Soviet countries that joined Bologna Process in 2005 and demonstrated almost immediate progress. The Bologna Process objectives became an inherent part of the new Law on Higher Education already in 2004. The Law instituted a three-cycle higher education system as put forward by the Bologna Process (Law on Higher Education, 2004), introduced procedures for the degree recognition exactly along the Bologna lines (Law on Higher Education, 2004), enabled quality assurance mechanisms as per the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance (Law on Higher Education, 2004), defined concepts of learning outcomes, qualifications and student mobility (Law on Higher Education, 2004) – all as provided by the Bologna-promoted model. In essence, the country shaped its higher education reforms around the Bologna Process and swiftly introduced all of the institutional requirements that were outlined in the Bologna action lines into the national higher education system, with the effect of considerably altering its institutional framework. The signs of the fast recovery of the HE system did not go unnoticed in the international community. The magnitude of the changes is

explicitly credited, and also strongly praised in the Bologna Process Stocktaking report of 2007:

Georgia joined the Bologna Process in 2005. Key developments since then include: adopting legislation to facilitate the implementation of Bologna reforms on degree systems, diploma supplements, student finance, accreditation procedures and institutional governance; and preparing legislation on the integration of the Centre for Academic Recognition and Mobility with the National Centre of Education Accreditation (NCEA), the introduction of new professional qualifications, and the development of higher education institutions as centres of research as well as preparation for the labor market. (Rauhvargers, 2007, p. 70).

In the Trends report of 2007 (Crosier et al., 2007), the EUA devoted a separate section to the dramatic changes that were taking place in the Georgian HE system. According to the report, the three cycle structure reflected much deliberation and dialog about the goals of the HE in the country and was connected to the challenges of employability in society. Moreover, curriculum reform was also underway, and ECTS was widely used and understood (Crosier et al., 2007). According to the same report, 50% of the HEIs included in the Trends report survey claimed that their students don't have problems with the recognition of credits after their studies abroad, and over 80% of the HEIs confirmed that they issued the Diploma Supplement to all graduating students (Crosier et al., p.74). Trends V goes even further and invites other signatory countries to use Georgia as a model to inspire their national HE reforms.

For any countries in need of renewed vigor in their approach to reform, Georgia would stand as an inspirational case study, illustrating how Bologna reforms can really be used effectively to respond to societal challenges. (Crosier et al., 2007, p. 75)

This eagerness of the international partners to praise progress in Georgia was natural, as the scope and pace of Georgian education reforms since 2003 were unique in the region. During the first several years, the state had managed to create a somewhat coherent higher education structure and a regulatory framework that closely resembled that of developed countries. None of its non-Baltic post-Soviet counterparts were able to accomplish this.

A number of factors contributed to this noticeable positive effects in the Georgian HE system. Before the 2003 revolution, Georgia was one of the fourteen struggling post-Soviet states. The country was suffering though economic hardships and omnipresent corruption. By 2002, Georgia was rated as one of the most corrupted countries by Transparency International: 124th among 133 countries (Transparency International, 2012). The country had also suffered armed conflicts and its territorial integrity was not taken for granted. Provision of public services, such as education, healthcare and public security were close to non-existent in the weakened state (Mitchell, 2009). The reforms, which were heavily subsidized by international community, hardly yielded any progress. In 2003, Georgia's total foreign debt was US \$ 1,853 million – 53% of its GDP (UNDP, 2004).

However, after the Rose Revolution in 2003 the situation changed. Among the post-Soviet states, Georgia emerged as a success story in its attempt to build an “alternative model of development in the post-Soviet space” (Saakashvili quoted in Kupatadze, 2012, p. 30). Although sometimes criticized and contested (Lazarus, 2013; Mitchell, 2009; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009), Georgian system-wide reforms distinguished the

country as a survivor within the largely stagnated, backward and reform-skeptical post-Soviet bloc. One of the main reasons that made this turnaround possible was the political will of the new pro-Western, reform-oriented government, which demonstrated determination to move closer to Europe and build a democratic state (Lazarus, 2013; UNDP, 2004). The eradication of corruption, creation of a market economy and a small government were the three dimensions emphasized by the governmental elite as important parts of the Georgia's transformation into a neoliberal state.

The anticorruption reforms were the trademark of the post-revolution government. The post-revolution government was even referred to as the "corruption crusaders" (Kupatadze, 2012, p. 29) in the post-Soviet region. The outcome was quite impressive. From one of the most corrupt states in 2002, according to the Corruption Perception Index - 124th of 133 countries – Georgia climbed to the 79th place by 2007 (Transparency International, 2007). The public sector was reformed to reflect the principles of small government. The bureaucracy was downsized by 35,000 persons and the number of ministry was reduced from 18 ministries to 13 (Stefes, 2006 as cited in Lazarus, 2010). In parallel, major shifts were made in the government setup through decentralization. For instance, the ministries delegated the service delivery and regulatory functions to the quasi-governmental agencies and outsourced services to the private sector. Finally, with the aim to attract foreign direct investments, the government lifted most of the barriers to 'make business' in Georgia. This entailed minimizing the number of permits and licenses, abolishing the anti-monopoly service,

and simplifying acquisition of the licenses. By 2006, according to the EBRD's Ease of Doing Business annual report:

Georgia was the runner-up reformer. A new licensing law cut from 909 to 159 the number of licensed activities. A one-stop shop was created for license applications, so that now businesses can submit all documents there, with no verification by other agencies required. A simplified tax code eliminated 12 of 21 taxes. And the time to register property fell by 75%, and the cost by 70% (World Bank, 2006, p.2).

By 2009, according to the Ease of Doing Business Rankings, among 181 countries Georgia was 15st (WB, 2009).

In essence, the 2003 Rose Revolution created a window of opportunity that enabled transformative changes across all policy areas. The government aimed for the fast recovery of the country and sought support from its Western allies, who willingly reciprocated. The ruling party of the United National Movement (UNM) gained strong support from the international community. Western allies recognized the possibility of a much desired case of successful development in the post-revolution Georgia, and thus in the post-Soviet region; they strengthened their support and involvement in the country's development. This support consisted of increased financial aid from the European Union (EU) institutions, as well as from the U.S.-based agencies or international organizations (Mitchell, 2010). Various doors for international cooperation opened: Georgia became part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) (Kupatadze, 2012); it became eligible for the Millennium Challenge Compact (Lazarus, 2010). In Education, it became a signatory country of the Bologna Process (Bergen Communiqué, 2005).

The presented post-revolution context would have been conducive enough to investigate Bologna-inspired HE reforms in Georgia for in a largely reform-reluctant region, this country presented a unique opportunity to observe developments in the context where local actors had willingly adopted Western educational models and maximized on the external support. However, the Georgian case gains more importance because of the lack of positive outcomes compared to the pronounced positive results in gaining proximity to the Western educational models promoted by the Bologna Process. This is the second reason why Georgia serves as a critical case, this time in explaining the factors that hinder the translation of *institutional reforms* into *actual improvements* of the HE system, be them in terms of quality, learning, employment prospects, social and economic relevance. Even though, according to the Bologna Progress measures, Georgia was a forerunner in transforming its system according to the Bologna Process objectives, the evidence collected and reviewed for this dissertation shows that the reforms have been implemented superficially and have failed to produce meaningful change in the HE system.

To illustrate the problems that persisted in the Georgian HE system despite the enthusiastically introduced reforms, several examples of achievements as indicated by the Bologna Process Stocktaking (Rauhvargers, 2007) report and the Trends V (Crosier et al., 2007) report are discussed. First, restructuring of the HE in the three-cycle system, which seemed to reflect the consensus of the academic circles as well as policy makers (Crosier et al., 2007), became in the end only a mechanical rearrangement of the pre-existing academic programmes (Glonti, 2013). Second, student financing,

mentioned in the Stocktaking report (Rauhvargers, 2007) also suffered from major inconsistency. Introduction of a student voucher scheme as a new funding mechanism/approach, which was claimed successful by external parties, in reality did not secure a sufficient funding level for the universities (Chakhaia, 2013). Third, the Bologna inspired reforms of quality assurance were viewed as a rigid state control system (Darchia, 2013).

In essence, institutional transformation of the HE system hardly contributed to the overall improvement of the HE climate in the country. This dissonance between the successful institutional redesign of the higher education system and its poor outcomes sharpens the research focus to investigate the interaction between the successful institutional transformation and lack of improvements in the HE system in the post-revolution Georgia. The dissertation examines the problem through two main questions.

Research questions and main arguments

It needs to be highlighted that the investigation of the challenges in the HE systems in the post-Soviet countries has not yet been analyzed from the point of view of disparity between the institutional design and the lack of improvement in the system due to the institutional transformation. Approaching the research topic from this angle offers a fresh and more accurate perspective on the HE system development in this region.

The main question that has been usually posed with regards to lack of development in the HE systems in general and vis-à-vis the Bologna-guided reforms in this region, is about seeking proximity of the local HE systems to the Western European educational

models and explaining the challenges that hinder this approximation. The explanations that are provided in this regard, analyze internal factors that could hamper the progress of the HE system. The internal factors that the authors usually appeal to can be summarized in two: omnipresent corruption (Osipian, 2007, 2008, 2009; Heyneman, Anderson & Nuraliyeva, 2008) and the strong Soviet legacy (Heyneman, 2007; Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008).

Neither of these arguments are particularly relevant or revealing when exploring the Georgian case since corruption was addressed during the reform and were considered as one of the uncontested successful reforms of the post-revolution government. The preservationist arguments also run thin in the case of Georgia, given that the post-revolution government had made a conscious political choice to disregard, discredit and fight the Soviet legacies. This research suggests that the spectrum of the analytical tools should be widened, or rather significantly refined. More precisely, investigating the challenges in reforming the HE systems in the post-Soviet region, in Georgia and beyond, can be better accomplished by looking in two new directions. First, we need to reconsider the internal factors that explain the challenges to HE system change. Second, we need to incorporate external factors in the analysis, in a well calibrated analytical perspective.

This dissertation intends to do both: turn the attention to external factors when explaining the dissonance between the institutional transformation and the lack of improvement in the HE system; and move beyond the two internal factors that are conventionally and traditionally applied to analyze and explain post-Soviet country

cases. The dissonance between the successful institutional transformation and its effects on the HE system should be further unpacked in two complementary directions.

First of all, the research explores the rationale behind the adoption of the reforms that were primarily concerned with the alteration of the institutional framework. It poses the following research question: *why did the post-revolution government adopt Bologna-inspired reforms to transform Georgian HE system?* To answer this question, the dissertation situates the case of HE reforms within the globalization processes that diffuses neoliberal agenda and interprets the behavior of post-revolution government from the point of view of the state at the Europe's periphery. Sociological Neo-institutionalism, world society theories, suggest that the primary motivation of the states (especially at the periphery) to adopt transnational policy models (*i.e.* Bologna-inspired educational models in this case) is to gain legitimacy at the global political and economic arena (Meyer, 2000). However, new institutions that serve as transnationally created models neglect the local (national) context. Therefore, institutional reforms only symbolically change the systems and in reality create decoupled institutions, which, in the case of Georgia, resemble their 'Western' counterparts (such as the three cycle HE structure, ECTS or quality assurance systems promoted by the Bologna Process), but serve a different purpose locally (for instance, anti-corruption instead of the educational quality improvement) (Meyer, 2000).

Based on these considerations, I argue that Georgia as a state at Europe's periphery chose to join the Bologna Process to ensure institutional proximity with the educational models that were promoted by the Process and in this way gain legitimacy in the

common European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Consequently, the Georgian HE system has indeed gained high institutional proximity to its Western prototypes, however it has failed to address the reality of its own, existing HE system as opposed to the external model, thus creating *decoupled* institutions in the system.

Second, I explore the reasons for what I term as the HE system's suspended development (defined in Chapter 2). The question is posed as follows: *What are the factors causing the suspended development of the HE system in Georgia and why is it sustained?* Essentially, at this level, the research claims, and then provides evidence for this claim, that the HE system is in the state of suspended development not only because the transnationally produced institutions do not match the Georgian HE context. While this argument is valid, it explains the puzzle only partially. Therefore, with the assumption that at the policy implementation stage local factors contribute to and maintain the state of suspended development, the research unpacks the policy implementation processes.

Combining insights from the policy implementation and policy transfer scholarship, I suggest that first, the state of suspended development is maintained because the goals of the reforms were framed in an abstract manner. For this reason, these goals came short of guiding the policy implementers and led to their divergent interpretations by different stakeholders. Second, while introducing the new institutions in the HE system, the purpose of these institutions were not clearly communicated in the Georgian HE context. Not only the reform goals were vague, but the designers of the initial reforms never made an effort to translate and interpret the purposes of the new institutions for

the implementers, and they have not assigned any mediators that could assume such a role either.

It should be underlined that it is a conscious choice of mine to situate Georgian case within the globalization processes instead of contextualizing it strictly within the post-Soviet or, perhaps a bit broader, European context. Three reasons stand behind this choice. First, policy making in the country is increasingly dependent on the transnational agents which are present elsewhere in the developing world. The footprints of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), United Nations (UN) with its programs and agencies (UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA and more) or United States Agency for International Development (USAID) stretches from African continent to East Asia and Latin America⁴. These transnational agents produce and diffuse dominant neoliberal view on economic and state development across the developing world (Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2013). Second, Bologna Process, despite the claim of the many that it is a strictly European project, undoubtedly ascribes to the neoliberal vision of economic development and caters the role of higher education to it (Kwiek, 2004; van Vught & van der Wende, 2002). The Bologna Process is a transnational process that diffuses dominant vision of HE that is governed by the market logic and global competition (Kwiek, 2004; van Vught & van der Wende, 2002). Most importantly, globalization processes are heavily ingrained in the state fiber. As Sassen claims, structuration of

⁴ <https://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work> accessed on 11/16/2015

global happens within the national boundaries (Sassen, 2007). “As the global gets partly constituted inside the national, institutional preeminence of the national brings with it a necessary participation of national states in the formation of global systems” (Sassen, 2007, p. 5). Reinforcing this argument, Kahn invites us to explore “How our lives and locales are defined by and give meaning to the global processes” (Kahn, 2014, p. 2). Hence, I claim that the national policy making is influenced by, but also is constitutive of the globalization processes and therefore, we should treat the dynamics of the national HE system development within the globalized context.

Methodology

In this research, Georgia serves as the most likely case in explaining the suspended development in the HE system of the post-Soviet country. The political landscape and the policy choices that were made in Georgia after 2003 Rose Revolution created in the country a natural laboratory to explore the interaction of the global and local circumstances and investigate the role of local actors in shaping national higher education system.

For a detailed scrutiny, two policies in the system wide reform are chosen: the quality assurance (QA) and the university autonomy. These represent the European dimensions of the HE reforms in Georgia and have gained importance in the national HE system through the Bologna Process. Also, both of these policies represent the examples of the transnational policy transfer. These policies were produced outside Georgia and were introduced in the national HE system.

This is a qualitative study and two methods, document analysis and in-depth interviews, are used to collect the data. Three groups are targeted: policy makers – the government officials that were involved in the policy design processes at the Ministry of Education and Science and at the National Centre of Education Quality Enhancement – NCEQE (previously National Education Accreditation Centre - NEAC); second, policy implementers - the higher education institutions (HEI). Out of 15 accredited public universities⁵ five are selected. Out of these, three are located in the capital and two – outside the capital, representing educational centres in the western and eastern regions of the country. Within the university representatives of the central administration - rectors (or the vice rectors) and representatives from two self-governing bodies are approached. Representatives of the quality assurance units are also interviewed. Also deans of the academic departments and academic personnel – professors and/or assistant professors are targeted. Third group consists of the non-governmental organizations (NGO) that work in the higher education sector. Individuals that are referred to as education experts are also included in the third group. As a result, 47 interviews were carried out in 2010 and 2011 years during four separate visits in Georgia, and follow up phone-interviews were carried out in 2012. Collected material was analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti.

⁵ 15 state universities accredited by 2010-12. By 2015 the number has increased to 17 (<http://eqe.ge/geo/static/89/register/heis> accessed on 11/16/2015)

Contribution

Two main contributions are proposed. First, unlike the existing literature on HE reform in post-Soviet region, this study moves beyond evaluating the reform success versus the country's capacity to replicate the Western (e.g. the Bologna-inspired) institutional design. In contrast, I problematize the policy transfer process within the neoliberal globalization process relying on the world society theory. Introduction of this theory to the study of the HE reforms allows for extending the current framework, which has been focused exclusively on domestic factors (*e.g.* corruption, Soviet legacy, etc.), and also for exploring the role of transnational processes in HE reforms in the space of the former Soviet Union. Second, the research tries to fill in the gap in the policy as well as the academic literature on understanding how the HE systems in the post-Soviet transition countries actually cope with the decoupled institutional constellations. This approach enriches the understanding of what are actual problems that these systems face.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is organized in the following manner. Chapter 1 contextualizes the higher education reforms in the post-Soviet Georgia within the overall state building effort of the post-revolution government. The chapter emphasizes that the essence of the post-revolution government's approach to transforming the country was to significantly alter the design of governmental and political institutions. It also shows that HE reforms were consistent with the government's overall choice of institutional re-design. Chapter 2 undertakes a review of the literature on HE system change and breaks it down to three main areas: HE system change in the post-Soviet region, HE system change in the CEE

countries and HE system change in accordance to the globalized neoliberal processes. The identified gap in the literature and the analytical framework for the research is also included in this chapter. On the one hand, in order to account for the exogenous factors influencing policy adoption, insights from the world society theory is incorporated into the analytical framework. On the other hand, to guide the exploratory phase of the research, elements from the policy implementation and policy transfer literature are combined. Chapter 3. describes the research methodology and data collection. Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to answering the first research question: *why did the post-revolution government adopt Bologna-inspired reforms to transform Georgian HE system?*. Empirical evidence is provided from two policy areas of the quality assurance and the university autonomy. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the second research question that inquires: *what are the factors that cause the suspended development of the HE system in Georgia and why is it maintained*. The final Chapter 7, revisits the main arguments of the research, summarizes main findings and provides conclusions. It discusses the academic contribution and policy relevance of the research and provides insights for the future research.

1 HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

In order to answer the research questions and understand why the reforms did not produce the improvement in the HE system in Georgia, the overall state-building reforms in the post-revolution government need to be explained as higher education reforms constituted a part of the overall reform strategy of the government. In this chapter, it is laid out that the main political choice of the government was to move away from Russian influence and move closer to Europe. It further elaborates that the overall reform agenda to transform the country was highly influenced by the neo-liberal understanding of the democratic and economic development. I suggest that this choice of the government was influenced by the globally popularized neoliberal views on the state development and were promoted by the transnational agents, such as foreign aid organizations active in the country. Lastly, it is established that the policy makers' approach to transform the country was to significantly alter the design of governmental and political institutions. Once the overview of the overall state building efforts is presented, I argue that the higher education reforms were consistent with the government's choice to become closer to Europe and that the government's choice of institutional re-design along the lines of neo-liberal state building was transported to the higher education system. This, in its turn defined the reform framework as well as its substance.

In light of the above mentioned, the first section of the chapter discusses the post-revolution government's political choice and the reasons behind it; main reform directions for neo-liberal state building are presented, and the main actors and sources of external influence are discussed. In the second section, higher education reforms are overviewed in light of the main findings of the first section.

1.1. THE MAIN POLITICAL AND POLICY CHOICES IN POST-REVOLUTION GEORGIA

1.1.1 Anti-Soviet/anti-Russian sentiment and pro-European aspiration

In November 2003, the Rose Revolution brought to power a pro-Western government, which pursued large-scale reforms to turn the country into a neoliberal democracy. The choice of Westernization primarily presented the choice away from Russian influence. The primary aim of the governing political elite was to present an alternative model of state development in the post-Soviet space (Kupatadze, 2012). The Georgian government had made a choice of moving away from Russia's influence and in this manner, cut the cords with the post-Soviet heritage. For the post-revolution government, the prospect of the everlasting post-Soviet stagnation was a very realistic, but at the same time, highly undesirable prospect. Hence fighting against post-Soviet heritage was a fight with the ever present Russian pressure. Repeatedly, the president Saakashvili (2004-2012 in the office) mentioned in his interviews or public speeches that Georgia's answer to the Russian pressure will be more reforms (Kupatadze, 2012). The problems of Georgia, corruption, government-controlled economy and suffocating bureaucracy were perceived as the ills of the post-Soviet era and of the modern state of

Russia. In his public addresses, the president always made it clear that the choice of the Western route was the choice against the Russian route. As Saakashvili highlighted: “Freedom from corruption and freedom from the government-controlled economy and from the tyranny of the bureaucracy are so different from principles of our neighbor (Russia)” (quoted in Kupatadze, 2012). The three areas articulated in this quote constituted the main building blocks of the neoliberal understanding of the reforms that the post-revolution government launched.

1.1.2 Building neoliberal democracy through institutional re-design

The eradication of corruption, introduction of market economy and the limited state were the three dimensions that were emphasized by the governmental elite as important parts of the state’s transformation into neoliberal state. These three dimensions were applied to the policy areas across the board, whether it was education, healthcare, police force, security or defense.

It is important to highlight that the choice of the approach to transform the country was to significantly alter the design of political and governmental institutions. The emphasis on rebuilding the state or political institutions derives from the intuitionist perspective shared and widely practiced by foreign aid organizations, which asserts that the reforms guided by the government to alter political institutions, such as the constitution and/or electoral code, will cultivate changes in the political culture of the state (Lazarus, 2010). This meant two things for the post-revolution government. First, in order to build the neoliberal state they had to build the institutions that supported the neoliberal state.

Second, the governing elite itself was to deliver democratic change, with the top-down enforcement of the necessary institutional transformation. As it was mentioned above, policy choice that the government made was applied to the policy areas across the board. Main institutional changes in key areas, such as anticorruption, reduction of public sector, market liberalization, are discussed briefly below.

Anticorruption reforms were the trademark of the post-revolution government. Kupatadze refers to them as “corruption crusaders” (Kupatadze, 2012, p.29) in the post-Soviet region. Although anticorruption reforms covered the whole public sector, in the first years of the reforms particular emphasis was put on education and the police force (Mitchell, 2013). These were identified as the main areas where Georgian citizens had direct encounter with petty corruption on a day-to-day basis, such as bribing of the police officer on the street instead of paying the fine, or selling the university degrees and buying the access to HEIs. Anticorruption reforms were large scale and dramatic. Police force was entirely changed practically overnight. Close to 15000 traffic police officers were replaced by around 2000 newly trained officers (Engvall, 2012 as cited in Rekhviashvili, 2015). In the higher education system, in order to combat the widespread corruption at the enrolment phase (Chankseliani, 2013), the unified national entrance examination (UNE) was introduced. By introducing the UNE, the government took away the authority of the HEIs to choose their student body, hence the source of manipulating the enrolment process was removed by centralizing HEI entrance examinations. These and other dramatic reforms in combating corruption

yielded positive results. Georgia, one of the most corrupt states in 2002 according to the 124th of 133 countries - climbed to the 79th place in 2007 (TI, 2007).

The public sector was reformed to reflect the principles of the limited state. First of all, the bureaucracy was downsized by 35,000 persons, because the government decreased the number of ministries from 18 to 13 (Stefes, 2006 as cited in Mitchell, 2013). Public sector reforms also included decentralization efforts. This produced major shifts in the way the government operated. The aim and the mandate of the state ministries had changed. The ministries had become policy making bodies that delegated their service delivery and regulatory functions to the quasi-governmental agencies, such as National Assessment and Examinations Centre or National Education Accreditation Centre in the HE system. This layer in the bureaucratic hierarchy did not exist before. Some of the services were also outsourced to the private sector. The effort was also made to improve quality of and efficiency in providing public services, such as issuing passport or registering the real estate. The most renowned reform in this regard was creation of the House of Justice. The House of Justice was a product of innovative approach of the government to create a possibility of public service provision in one physical premise, in one step, at one counter, with the help of one operator. This was an idea of creating 'one-stop-shop' adopted from the corporate world. This idea was further advanced to ensure convenience, simplicity and efficiency of public service provision at different regions of the country. Within three years, 14 branches of the House of Justice were opened in different regions of Georgia providing 400 public services

under one roof⁶. In 2011, the House of Justice was assessed as the most successful reform in improving public service provision in Georgia⁷. Some government agencies, inspired by this model of the service delivery, mimicked the House of Justice. One of these agencies was the National Education Accreditation Centre (NEAC) within the education system. In his interview with me, the director of the NEAC explained that, he envisioned to restructure the NEAC and combine most of the public services that concerned education under the auspices of the NEAC (R33-PA2⁸). As a result, in 2010, National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement, a legal successor of the NEAC, incorporated the services concerning higher education, whether it was degree recognition or accreditation status of the HEI (NCEQE, 2010).

Deregulation, privatization and taxation reforms were all part of the market liberalization process. In order to attract foreign direct investments, the government lifted most of the barriers to ‘make business’ in Georgia. This entailed minimizing the number of permits and licenses, abolishing the anti-monopoly service, and simplifying acquisition of the licenses. Taxes were minimized from 20 to 6 and their value was also reduced (Rekhviashvili, 2015). The government lifted regulations on privatizing state assets mainly to the offshore investors. Apart from the large scale privatization of state assets, the government privatized state services. The most notable one was the

⁶ <http://psh.gov.ge/main/page/7/405> accessed on 11/16/2015

⁷ <http://psh.gov.ge/main/page/7/405> accessed on 11/16/2015

⁸ The interviews were labeled in the following manner: Respondent number - R# (as it appears in the list of interviewees in Appendix 2) and the abbreviation of the target group: PA – Public Administrator, HEI – HEI representative and LExpert – Local education expert. Data use is more fully described in Chapter 3.

privatization of primary health care. In the education sphere, the government changed the state funding mechanism according to which state funds were open for both state and private institutions (Chankseliani, 2014).

These institutional changes constituted parts of the reform of Good Governance. Together with the democratization efforts, good governance represented the two main directions of state building reforms in Georgia. These two directions were emphasized by the donor organizations and fully embraced by the United National Movement government. Democratization focused on providing and securing the division of power between the executive, judiciary and legislative branches of government, emphasized the rule of law, ensuring fair elections, strengthening civil society and in general, fostering civic engagement (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009). Good Governance emphasized the importance of reduced bureaucracy, combating corruption, and improving tax collection, service delivery and infrastructure (Mitchell, 2009). It has to be highlighted that the government made the most effort in the reforms accounting for good governance, but postponing the reforms geared towards democratization (Mitchell, 2009; Muskhelishvili, 2011). Hence institutional transformation is most visible in this area.

In more detail, the institutional change as a particular approach to reform the system is demonstrated on higher education reforms, which is the focus of this dissertation. However, before we turn to the higher education reforms, it is important to understand why the policy makers made the policy choices of first, neoliberal state building and second, approached state transformation through the alteration of political and

governmental institutions' design. For this purpose, it is important to understand who the main actors that devised these changes were, and what sources of influence were these actors exposed to. The next section addresses these questions.

1.1.3 Main actors and external influence

In the following discussion I propose that the post-revolution government as a main actor of the reforms was convinced in the supremacy of the neoliberal turn of the country primarily because of the greater influence of the transnational agents – foreign aid organizations – present in the country before and after the Rose Revolution. Moreover, policy makers' conviction that the institutional redesign was the most effective tool to transform the state was also a product of the exposure to the dominantly practiced approach of these transnational agents.

The post-revolution government was mainly comprised of the elite of the Georgian non-governmental sector that has enjoyed support of the foreign aid organizations throughout the decade of the post-Soviet period (1999-2000). Therefore, the ideas and the democratic development as portrayed by the West was not foreign for them. In its turn, the Western support and promotion of the Western route of development was made possible by the lavish financial support and intensive technical assistance of the foreign aid organizations.

The post-revolution government comprised mainly of the NGO elite of the country. It was the assertive and well established NGO representatives who brought about the Rose Revolution and then came to power. Thus after the revolution, the government was

headed by the political elite, which was a result of a decade of continual funding and support of the Georgian civil society by the Western governments and NGOs (Lazarus, 2010, 2013; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009). The government had former NGO leaders at the top governmental positions. For instance, in the first ministerial cabinet of fourteen ministers, eight had a strong non-governmental sector experience (Wheatley, 2005). The NGO and civil society representatives were taking positions at the lower levels of bureaucracy as well. Hence the perceptions and ideas that the foreign aid worked with was internalized by the UNM government.

In post-Soviet Georgia, development of the civil society was a major part of the foreign aid's policy to support democratization of the country. Hence, active international aid organizations, such as the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Western government aid were mostly channeling considerable amount of funds into the non- governmental sector of Georgia. One of the noticeable ones was the spinoff of the Open Society Foundation (OSF) in the country - Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) financed the most radical and active NGOs in the post-Soviet Georgia (Lazarus, 2010).

After the revolution, the return on this investment was mutually beneficial. On the one hand, the post-revolution government had enthusiastically adopted the neoliberal understanding of the democracy and market economy that was mainly promoted by the foreign aid (Lazarus, 2010, 2013; Mitchell, 2009). On the other hand, the post-revolution government that favored the neoliberal route of the state development

quickly gained international legitimacy as a Western-oriented developing country in the midst of the stagnated post-Soviet region (Kupatadze, 2012) and thus gained the political and financial support of the West.

More precisely, the ruling party of the UNM gained a strong support from the Western allies. For them, Georgia portrayed a successful model of sudden democratic transformation, which was absent in the post-Soviet region (Cooley & Mitchell, 2009, p. 29). Western allies recognized a long wanted successful development case in the post-revolution Georgia, hence strengthened their support and involvement in the country's development. The support was provided not only politically, but financially as well. The international aid increased significantly after the revolution and continued in the following years (Mitchell, 2009). In 2004, the EU admitted Georgia in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which is the framework of the EU's foreign policy that mainly intends to reach stability in its Eastern neighboring countries as poor governance and omnipresent corruption in this region represented a risk to the EU (Börzel et al., 2010 as cited in Kupatadze, 2012). Hence, for the EU, the change of the government created an opportunity for Georgia to proceed with the long-term process of institutional harmonization. Georgia's incorporation into the ENP and the creation of an elaborate 'Action Plan' to implement the institutional reform was the major step towards this goal. (ENP, 2004). In the same year, European Commission doubled its aid to 125 million Euros to the country for the years 2004-06 (Youngs 2006, 2008 as cited in Lazarus, 2010). At the same time, Georgia became eligible for the Millennium Challenge Compact (Lazarus, 2010), the USA foreign aid grant

administered by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). American allies also demanded institutional changes under the flagship of good governance and Georgian government responded to these demands (Lazarus, 2010). It is worth highlighting that after the revolution these funds and technical assistance were directly channeled to the government (Lazarus, 2010). This shift, in the end drained the capacity of the civil society in Georgia, however, increased effectiveness of the foreign aid to the country.

To conclude, the post-revolution government of Georgia chose an alternative political route than other states of former Soviet Union, that is, a step away from Russia and a move forward to Europe. The post-revolution government, the driving force of the transformative reforms, comprised of the former NGO elite in the country that had internalized a particular way of state building that was attuned to the neoliberal understanding of democratization and economic development promoted by the transnational agents – foreign aid organizations – actively present in Georgia. In addition, the institutional change as the primary approach to the state development was a product of a mutually reinforced belief among the transnational agents and the government elite on the supremacy of the institutional design in state building. In light of the overall discussion about the rationale behind the state building efforts of the post-revolution government of Georgia and the main findings, in the next section on institutional changes in the higher education system are presented.

1.2 HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS

Higher education reforms were part of the overall state building effort of the UNM government and were catered to their political agenda to demonstrate government's European aspiration that was fused with the neoliberal understanding of state development.

Post-revolution government pronounced reforming education sector as a priority. This was evident in the increase of governmental spending on education. State funding for education was 1% of the GDP in 1994 (Chankseliani, 2014); by 2004 it went up to 3.33% of GDP⁹. At the policy level, government's agenda was formulated in the Millennium Development Goals of Georgia as a commitment of the post-revolution government towards the international community (UNDP, 2004).

Commitment of the UNM government to the European route fused with the neoliberal aspirations was evident in the policy makers' communications with both, local and external audiences. The post-revolution government enthusiastically shared the neoliberal idea of knowledge economy and the emphasis on education as a root of economic development. According to the first Minister of Education and Science of the post-revolution government, the Georgian modernization project envisioned building the country on the premises of the knowledge economy, asserting that economic advancement of the country was only possible through educating knowledge workers

⁹ The data refers to the overall spending on education and separate data on higher education are not available. The earliest estimate on the government funding on higher education and research (in HEIs) is from 2012 and amounts to only 0.5% of the GDP.

who would be competitive on national, regional and global market (Chalaganidze, 2010). The Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, in her interview with me, complemented the minister's views adding that the focus of the policy makers was to work towards the Europeanization of the HE system. She explained that policy makers' decision was to make the Georgian HE system compatible to the Western educational systems institutionally and structurally (R38-PA7). For her as well, 'Westernization' meant to ensure competitive environment in the HE system and relevance of education to the job market and economic demands of the country (PA7-R38). This governmental rhetoric was unanimously supported in the 47 interviews that I carried out during the field work. Government officials, HEI rectors and faculty members, and local experts in their interviews adhered to the claim of Europeanization. Government communicated the same externally. It committed that Georgia was to "(e)nsure Coherence of Georgian Educational Systems with Educational Systems of Developed Countries through Improved Quality and Institutional Set-up" (UNDP, 2004, Goal 2, p.27). This last segment of the Goal 2 in the MDG Georgia indicates government's choice to achieve the goals of 'Westernization' through altering institutional makeover of the HE system. Hence, in the years of 2004-10, along the lines of the principles of Good Governance discussed in the first section, the institutional framework of the HE system was dramatically altered.

The following subsections aim to present the evidence that firstly, the HE reforms were mainly determined by the negative perception of the Soviet heritage, hence reflecting the overall political sentiment of the government to demonstrate that the new

government's choice was to move away from Soviet/Russian influence. Secondly, the higher education reforms were consistent with the government's choice to become closer to Europe. Finally, the government's choice of institutional re-design, along the lines of the neo-liberal state building, was transposed to the higher education system.

1.2.1 Negative perception of post-Soviet Heritage

The post-revolution government elite considered that the lack of transparency in the HEIs, inadequate degrees, the questionable quality of education and the omnipresent corruption in the system were attributes of the Soviet past and its lingered traditions even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moving away from anything that was labeled as Soviet was the pronounced choice of the Government of Georgia and the society at large shared this choice. There are five important features of the post-Soviet HE that are worth highlighting, as they present the main problem areas which the post revolution government decided to tackle. These were: centralized command and the financial burden of the state to subsidize HEIs; the exaggerated power of the HEI rectors; the deteriorated quality of instruction; the omnipresent corruption; and the emergence of the private sector.

Centralized command. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the HEIs remained part of the centralized state hierarchy. At the central level, higher education was managed by the Ministries of Education, Finance and Economy and the HEIs of different profile were subordinated to the line ministries, analogous to the practice during the Soviet Union (Eurasia Foundation, 2003). In spite of the central command,

HEIs enjoyed academic autonomy. At the institutional level, the decisions on the curricula, academic programmes and scientific activities rested with the institutions. Also, the university admission policy and scholarship distribution was the primary responsibility of the HEIs and were subject to competitive subject-specific entrance examinations (Lorentzen, 2000). However, HEIs lacked organizational autonomy. The rectors were appointed by the President of Georgia and HEIs remained heavily dependent on the state subsidies (Sharvashidze, 2005). As in times of planned economy, the government would still define the number of students for the particular academic year. Respective ministries approved the number of free places for particular programmes and annually paid subsidies to the HEIs (Lorentzen, 2000). Although the reality had changed and the government-defined student body did not have any link with the labor market of the country, the HEIs pressured the government to continue the practice of determining the number of students to be admitted, as a guarantee for a regular state subsidy to the HEIs based on the student number (Gvishiani & Chapman, 2002).

Exaggerated power of the rectors. Over the course of the years the interaction between the state and the HEIs exacerbated as the rectors of the public HEI gained a privileged position in the political scene of the country. Following 1994, the state gradually withdrew from the universities, while still subsidizing them. The then president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze (1992-2003 in the office) had negotiated mutually beneficial arrangements with the rectors of the main HEIs in the country (Tbilisi State University, Georgian Polytechnic Institute and State Medical University).

It was negotiated that the rectors of HEIs would maintain their authority over the HEIs, receive stable state funding and be under the political patronage of the President. In return, the rectors had to ensure the political neutrality of their student body. The rectors were the members of the Board of the Rectors, which enjoyed privileged access to the President and thus had considerable power to influence budget cuts or recommend tax increases that would allow additional financial resources be allocated to the HE system (Gvishiani & Chapman, 2002; Lorentzen, 2000). The reason for this arrangement was the government's fear of the social unrest after several years of armed conflicts and socio-economic hardships¹⁰. The youth was considered one of the main forces to threaten the political status quo and the HEIs were viewed as a major space that could nurture political neutrality. The interaction between the university/academic elite and the political elite during the Shevardnadze period can be described as a congruence of interests and negotiated respect for the university autonomy (adopted from Scott, 1995).

Over the course of the years this arrangement produced state HEIs that became closed systems, with no accountability towards the state (or wider public for that matter). The rectors were referred to as 'lords' of the HE system and governed their HEIs according

¹⁰ By 1994 the country had suffered several years of armed conflicts with the breakaway region of South Ossetia and an autonomous republic of Abkhazia (February-July 1992 and 1992-93 respectively) and had witnessed the 1992 coup d'état leading to the formation of a new government in 1992, which in turn was compromised by the 1993 civil war. New government had to cope with the new political reality and a dramatically changed demographic landscape of the country. During the wars in 1992 in South Ossetia and in 1992-93 in Abkhazia Georgia lost its territory and gained the population of 300,000 internally displaced people. This new political reality was twined with the after-war resource erosion and destabilized the capital city where former soldiers retained the arms and contributed to growing crime rate in the capital.

to their private interests, abusing their power. It was believed that they were involved in various corruption schemes even going beyond the long practiced admission favors. The often told example was about using university-owned premises to operate business enterprises that were owned by the families of rectors. Several attempts to curb their authority in late 90s and in the beginning of the 2000s suffered a fiasco. In retrospect, one of the high officials at the post-revolution Ministry of Education and Science explained the stagnation of the several reform packages facilitated by the World Bank as a result of the ever-growing power of the rectors that repeatedly sabotaged those decisions of the ministry that somehow endangered the rectors' interests (R7-HEI2).

Deteriorated quality of instruction. With the economic downturn in the country after independence, state funding for education had decreased significantly. Consequently, if by 1991, Georgia's public expenditure on education was 7% of GDP, by 1994 fell to 1% (Chankseliani, 2014). The decreased government funding negatively affected the quality of education. Apart from the deteriorated infrastructure and lack of educational resources, lack of funding resulted in exacerbation of teaching capacity. University instructors were poorly paid and lacked adequate training. The number of teaching staff with postgraduate qualifications had dropped since Soviet times, and low salaries forced instructors to seek additional income. It became a normal practice for the teaching staff to work full time at two or three HEIs, i.e. with the 450-700 academic hours per year to teach (Eurasia Foundation, 2003), which affected the quality of instruction.

Corruption. The lack of proper accountability mechanisms and close to non-existent public funding created a fertile ground for corruption and nepotism to flourish (UNDP, 2004; Westerheijden, 2008). HE entrance examinations was considered as one of the main sources of corruption. Parents of HEI applicants paid direct bribes to the academic staff who were on the selection committees of the HEIs. Alternatively, they paid for the tutoring services with the same academics. It was understood that the applicants' chances were increasing in gaining admission to an HEI if they had an opportunity to be tutored by the same faculty members who would later examine them at entrance examinations. These informal payments ranged between 100 USD and 2000 USD per applicant. It has been believed that the corrupt practices in HE sector spread more widely post 1991, as the salaries of academics dropped so dramatically that payments received through the above-described arrangements became their main source of income (Chankseliani, 2014).

Private Sector. What was differed in the post-Soviet HE system from the Soviet one was the creation of the private HE sector. The relaxed state control and the economic difficulties created a momentum for private education to emerge and a private higher education sector to flourish (Sharvashidze, 2005). The private sector existed in two forms. These were either fee-paying branches of the state universities or separate private institutions. Private universities emerging during the 1990s were mostly specialized in subjects that were in high demand such as economics, business and social sciences (Pachuashvili, 2007). The increase of private institutions in Georgia was dramatic and accounted for over 30 per cent of student enrolments. The number of

private HEIs increased from 0 in 1991 to 162 in 2000 (Sharvashidze, 2005). The education market became one of the most unregulated areas in the country as numerous private HEIs were set up in reaction to the elimination of state control (Pachuashvili, 2007). The only state scrutiny for private HEIs was a state license. HEIs had to obtain licenses to qualify as an academic institution based on qualified teaching staff, appropriate study programmes and adequate infrastructure (Gvaramadze, 2010). With minimal state-control, the actual quality of offerings in these private institutions was also questionable. It was believed that most of these HEIs were not engaged in academic work, but were selling degrees (Mitchell, 2009), thus exacerbating the corruption scene in the HE system.

Overall, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the higher education system in Georgia (similarly to the other Soviet republics) struggled with the absence of common (Soviet) guidance and failed to emerge as a functional national higher education system. The HE system was nominally centralized, although the HEIs were granted autonomy by the Law in 1992 (Law on Higher Education, 1992). The lack of public funding for higher education caused a rapid deterioration in the overall system. In the absence of central control, large numbers of private schools of questionable quality were created. State HEIs became closed systems that were detached from the state and from society altogether and largely catered to the private interests of the rectors. Corruption in admissions and certification skyrocketed and the quality of education declined. All of these problems were considered by the Government of Georgia as attributes of the

Soviet heritage. Thus, moving away from centralized policy making became a mantra for the reforms in the higher education system.

1.2.2 The Attractiveness of the European Model

In reaction to the negative experience of the Soviet past, Georgia leaned towards European models of education. Under the flagship of the Europeanization of the country, linking higher education reforms to the Bologna Process seemed only natural to policy makers. By the time policy makers were considering to join Bologna Process, the Process had gained much prominence and had become an educational enterprise of an unprecedented scope. For Georgia, it seemed both politically viable and practical to shape the higher education system according to the Bologna guidelines. The country signed the Bologna Declaration on May 20, 2005, at the ministerial conference in Bergen. Formally, the commitment of Georgia to the Bologna Process was demonstrated in the creation of a new unit in the Ministry of Education and Science that would foster integration of Georgian HE system with the European and international HE space and oversee the initiatives within the framework of the Bologna Process (GoG, Decree N37. Section 3. Subsection 10, 2005).

Becoming part of Bologna Process helped policy makers to streamline the sporadic changes that had occurred in the HE system since 1994. Namely, higher education was restructured according to the three cycles consisting of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral levels and introduced the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The credit system had already been introduced in several HEIs, but it was not

used across the HE system. With affiliation to the Bologna Process, ECTS was introduced at the system level. Also, the model of education with the four-plus-two degree structure as opposed to the previous five-year degree programmes was also introduced and was to be enforced system-wide by 1996 (Law on Higher Education, 1992; Eurasia Foundation, 2003). After joining the Bologna Process, policy makers used the opportunity to integrate the doctoral level in the HEI, removing this component from the mandate of the Academy of Science. In this manner, policy makers intended to integrate research and teaching ‘under one roof’, thus, significantly altering institutional design of the pre-revolution HE system.

Moreover, following Bologna action lines, policy makers decided to introduce certain transparency tools at the system as well as HEI level. It took over 5 years for the national qualification framework to develop, which intended to systematize the qualifications present in the HE system and make the HE system transparent internally as well as externally. The creation of the degree recognition system and establishing NARIC – National Academic Recognition Information Centre – was also a transparency tool along with the diploma supplements. The introduction of transparency tools were also the institutional solutions that intended to address the issues of irrelevant curriculum, questionable degrees and qualifications in the Georgian HE system¹¹.

¹¹ This discussion draws upon the interviews with the local education experts that have been involved in the development of the NQF, as well as the directors of the NEAC and NCEQE, also the analysis carried out by the EPPM in 2013 in five series (Zaalishvili, 2013; Darchia, 2013; Chakhaia, 2013; Bregvadze, 2013).

Georgia's affiliation to the Bologna Process also resulted in the institutionalization of the quality assurance system. Accreditation, as an external quality assurance mechanism, together with the internal quality assurance instituted new rules according to which the HEIs had to gain credibility with the state as well as with the students. Here as well, the solution to the deteriorated quality of education and the low credibility of the HEIs were addressed through the introduction of a new institution of the quality assurance in the HE system.

Long-term programs and projects funded by the donor organizations supported the policy choices that were made within the framework of the Bologna Process. For instance, in order to oversee the implementation of the Bologna guidelines, the European Commission (EC) funded the Twinning Project: the Capacity Enhancement for Implementing the Bologna Action Lines in Georgia (MES, 2009). The project aimed at developing the National Qualification Framework and at building awareness on Bologna-related initiatives within HEIs across the country. USAID funded a multi-year program: the Georgian Education Decentralization and Accreditation, which assisted newly established accreditation agency in organizational development as well as the institutionalization of the accreditation processes¹². The mandate of these projects were also circumscribed by assisting the government in designing new institutions or altering the old institutions of the existing HE system.

Overall, signing Bologna Declaration created the transformative effect in the HE

¹²See project information on the USAID funded Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP2) <http://www.equip123.net/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=435> accessed 10.03.2015

system, and significantly altered the institutional framework of the HE system. These changes were congruent with the post-revolution government's reforms in the realm of Good Governance, discussed in the first section of this chapter. Moreover, the reforms of institutional re-design within the framework of the Good Governance trespassed the Bologna-inspired reforms. Several noteworthy reforms were thus introduced to tackle corruption, introduce market-driven principles and decentralize the HE system. These are discussed in the section below.

1.2.3 Institutional re-design: anti-corruption, marketization and decentralization

Eradication of corruption, market economy and small government were the three dimensions emphasized in the state transformation efforts of the post-revolution government in all public domains, including education. In the HE system, the corruption at the HEI admissions was most visible and considered to be most detrimental for the HE system (See sub-section 1.2.1 in this chapter; also, Chankseliani, 2014; Orkodashvili, 2012). Therefore, tackling this issue was considered as primary concern of the government. Unified National Admission Examinations were introduced in the system as the ultimate anticorruption solution. Previously, the decision over student's admission rested with the HEIs. However, by 2006, it was taken away from the HEIs and was substituted by the UNE. A separate quasi governmental agency – the National Assessment and Examination Centre (NAEC) – was created to develop and administer the UNE. Based on three exams, the NAEC determined the level of success of the prospective students and granted student vouchers according to the 100%,

70% and 50% success scale. Students, who would succeed in the examinations could choose from the number of preferable educational institutions, where they would allocate their state-provided vouchers (MES, 2011, Decree N 19/N).

In addition, in order to streamline work of an anticorruption vehicle of the UNE, the policy makers introduced two additional institutional interventions. In order to avoid the possibility for the HEIs to inflate their student absorption capacity, the government delegated the responsibility of determining the number of student intake per HEI to the NEAC, another quasi governmental agency within the HE system (NEAC, 2006). The same Centre, as an accreditation body, was determining the list of the accredited HEIs that were eligible for admitting the students eligible for the state provided vouchers (NEAC, 2006).

Introducing state voucher system also known as the ‘Money follows the student’ was another novelty that dramatically altered the funding mechanisms in the HE system. ‘Money follows the student’ funding scheme corresponded to the ideals of the market economy of the neoliberal government. Reforming the HE funding system aimed to create an environment of fair competition and a chance for the students from the disadvantaged social and economic background to pursue higher education. These changes greatly affected HEIs as well, because according to the changed state funding mechanism funds were open for both state and private institutions (Chankseliani, 2014), which once again, emphasized the principle of competition and choice.

The UNE, as well as the new funding scheme were institutional solutions designed and

suggested by the World Bank mainly as an anti-corruption tool in late 90s to most of the post-Soviet countries (Chankseliani, 2014), including Georgia. The concept of the UNE was to take the decision making power over the student selection away from the HEIs and concentrate it within an independent administrative agency (somewhat analogous to the Education Testing Service – ETS in the USA – which provides testing evidence on the academic abilities of students to individual HEIs. However, its use is not mandatory). In this manner, the role of the HEI representatives in the admission process would become obsolete. UNE also targeted the dissolution of tutoring as a strong informal institution in the HE system. It was assumed that introduction of the centralized unified examinations would make tutoring practices obsolete (Chankseliani, 2013; Machabeli, Bregvadze, Andguladze, Apkhazava, Makashvili, 2011). Introduction of the new funding scheme, which operated on the premises of the market economy, aimed at maximizing the choice of the educational offerings for the students on the one hand and was believed to boost the quality of education by having public and private HEIs compete for the state funded students (Chankseliani, 2014; Machabeli et al., 2011).

Both of these interventions were part of the 60 million dollar credit of the World Bank, allocated for *The Education System Realignment and Strengthening Program*. The project was launched in 2002 with the implementation plan over the next 12 years, divided in three phases (World Bank, 2001). The first two years of the project showed little hope for its successful implementation due to the pre-revolution corruption and bureaucratization problems in the system (see the sub-section 1.2.1).

However, after the revolution, the UNM government effectively used the project to tackle problems of corruption and introduce market-like institutions in the HE system.

As part of the public sector reforms, the changes in the Ministry of Education and Science and overall institutional framework of the HE system reflected the principles of the limited state. Two complementary policy solutions can be distinguished here: consolidation and decentralization. On the one hand, redundant structures within the ministry or HEIs were eliminated and new ones introduced. For instance, in order to reflect the governmental decision to approximate systems of education and science, the Ministry of Education was reorganized and renamed to the Ministry of Education and Science (MES, 2008). Next, redundant departments were eliminated from its organizational structure, hence reducing the bureaucracy (Lomaia, 2006, as cited in Kohler & Huber, 2006). Under the umbrella of the decentralization reforms, the ministry assumed the policy making function and delegated regulatory functions down the command chain to the quasi governmental agencies. The first four quasi governmental agencies were National Assessment and Examination Centre administering the unified entrance examinations, the National Education Accreditation Centre carrying out institutional accreditation of the HEIs and the National Science Foundation and National Foundation for Humanities and Kertvelian Studies supporting research development (in 2009, these two foundations were merged). Later, three separate agencies were created for teacher professional development, education information system management and vocational education.

Institutional design of the HEIs was also significantly altered with the decentralization efforts. New principles of the HEI governance separated academic and administrative functions and established separate decision making bodies, academic council and a senate, respectively. The law instituted a rector as an elective figure and ensured student involvement in the university governance (Law on Higher Education, 2004). According to the post- revolution policy makers, these decentralization efforts aimed at dismantling centralized Soviet command that lingered in the HE system. They were also introduced to prevent the concentration of power in the rector's hands in the future (R7-HEI2). As part of the consolidation effort, an important institutional change that the HEIs encountered was integration of the research institutes within the HEI structures, hence removing them from the supervision of the Academy of Science (MES, 2008). It was believed that by bringing structural units of higher education and science together, first, it would improve the efficiency of the research institutes' management and second, would contribute to cross-fertilization of the experiences between these two structures. Introducing doctoral level of education within the HEIs was to contribute to the same goal (Bakradze, 2013).

In sum, Good Governance reforms that post-revolution government extended to the higher education system were consistent with an overall state development agenda. In HE as well, the UNM government prioritized the anti-corruption solutions by making the unified admissions examinations a cornerstone of the HE reform. The policy makers adhered to the neoliberal principles of marketization, hence introduced financial reforms based on the principles of competition and choice. Lastly,

the UNM government shared the conviction of the transnational agents of addressing the educational issues with the changes in the institutional design of the HE system. As showcased in this sub- section, the problems of corruption, issues with the rectors and even issues of the deteriorated quality of instruction were addressed by creating new institutions.

1.2.4 Contestation of the reform results

The aim of the subsections above was to situate HE reforms in the overall state building architecture. Following through the main policy choices of the post-revolution government, I have demonstrated that for policy makers building the HE system meant to build the institutional base for it. However, a few years into the reform, the salience of the results of the institutional transformation in the HE system was challenged.

Restructuring of the HE in the three cycle system was considered as a mechanical rearrangement of the academic programmes (Glonti, 2013). Integration of science and higher education was viewed as a mechanical exercise of subordinating two non-related institutions under single management (Bakradze, 2013). While introduction of the state voucher funding scheme increased transparency, the funding was considered to be insufficient to ensure stable development of the HEIs. This scheme prompted HEIs to promote only those disciplines that were on high demand. Moreover, it put state HEIs in a competitive disadvantage vis a vis private HEIs as the former operate under state-restricted tuition fee, when the latter did not. Hence, state voucher scheme negatively affected the quality of education in the state HEIs (Chakhaia, 2013).

Bologna inspired reforms of quality assurance were viewed as a rigid state control system that applied standardized assessment criteria for bachelorette, master and doctoral studies across the disciplines (Darchia, 2013). Finally, while proven to be a successful anticorruption tool, the unified admissions examination highly limited the HEIs' possibility of student selection, which defied the principles of competition and negatively affected the quality of education in the state HEIs (Zaalishvili, 2013). The discrepancies presented above remained regardless of the series of interventions within the short time-span of 2004-10 years. For instance, quality assurance system was significantly altered twice within these years (Jibladze, 2013; NEAC, 2007, 2009; NCEQE, 2010), UNE went through the series of alteration as well (Chakhaia, 2013). The financial scheme was also revised at several occasions (Chakhaia, 2013). However, the effect of these changes on the HE system has been marginal.

Seeking for the answers to the suspended development of the HE system in post-revolution Georgia, I suggest first, to further question the reasons for the choices of adopted policies and second, to explore the nature of those institutions that have been introduced in the HE system during the reforms. In the following chapter, the theoretical base is explored in order to guide the empirical research. The literature review and the analytical framework take into account the parameters of the HE reform discussed in this chapter, hence concentrate on the HE system change in transition countries from communism to democracy and the globalization processes that popularize neoliberal views on development.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This research focuses on the higher education reforms in Georgia in the transitions from post-Soviet rule to democracy. The transition process, as discussed in the previous chapter, is influenced by globalization processes that promote neoliberal understanding of state building. In the Chapter 1, I argued that the higher education reforms are consistent with the post-revolution government's choice to become closer to Europe and that the government's choice of institutional re-design along the lines of the neoliberal state building was transported to the higher education system. This, in its turn, defined the HE reform framework as well as its substance.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

With these arguments in mind, in this chapter academic literature on higher education system change is reviewed in three distinct segments. At first, the literature on higher education system change in post-Soviet region is overviewed in order to pinpoint main topics and dominant arguments that occupy the scholarly debate, on the one hand, and identify the gap in the literature, on the other hand. The scant literature that is dedicated to the HE reforms of the post-revolution Georgia is incorporated in this subsection. The next subsection overviews the literature dedicated to HE system change during the post- communist transition of the Central and Eastern European countries. Here, main topics and arguments that are present in the literature are put forward with the aim to identify those that could be relevant for explaining the Georgian HE

reforms. While first two subsections emphasize HE system change from the perspective of the transitioning country, the third subsection reviews the literature that approaches the HE system change from a broader perspective of globalization and globally promoted neoliberalization processes. Here, main topics and arguments put forward by the scholars are discussed and those arguments are highlighted that bear explanatory value to the Georgian case.

2.1.1 Changes in the HE systems in the post-Soviet region

Development of HE systems in the post-Soviet transition is barely analyzed in the higher education literature. Among the scarce accounts that are available, greater attention is devoted to the description of the corruption mechanisms in higher education. The literature is also dominated by the accounts on the Russian Federation. Another segment of the literature that is dedicated to the changes triggered by the Bologna Process is also frequently addressed in the scholarly literature dedicated to the post-Soviet region.

The body of literature that is dedicated to corruption in the post-Soviet HE system largely discusses its detrimental effects on the system development (see Osipian 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014 for the overview; Heyneman, 2007 - for comparative analysis at the HEI level; Sadigov, 2014 for the case of Azerbaijan; and Tampayeva, 2015 for the case of Kazakhstan). The authors highlight that corruption is detrimental for the HE system, because it hinders social cohesion (see accounts on Central Asia and Azerbaijan by Silova, Johnson & Heyneman, 2007; analysis of Russian HE system by Heyneman, 1997; analysis of Ukrainian HE system in

Kushnarenko & Knutson, 2014), undermines the impact of foreign aid interventions (Osipian 2008, 2014) and contributes to the overall deterioration of the HE system (Silova & Steiner-Khamisi, 2008).

The emphasis on corruption as a policy issue is not unexpected, as it remains the main challenge of the post-Soviet region. However, its importance has been exaggerated, which has led to oversimplification of the post-Soviet HE systems as topics of research or policy analysis. Even the accounts with regard to the Georgian higher education, which represents a positive case of overcoming systemic corruption, carry an implicit assumption that the HE system will develop without obstacles, once corruption is eradicated (Orkodashvili, 2012; Rostiashvili, 2011). This is one of the areas where this dissertation makes a contribution by analyzing the HE system change in Georgia focusing away from the corruption and proposing that the reform environment is much more complex in the transition country and factors, such as logic of governmental elite, exogenous pressures and global educational agenda should be taken into account while analyzing the challenges of the HE system change.

Within available resources that analyze HE system change in the countries of the post-Soviet transition, the accounts on the Russian HE system overshadows the rest of the former-Soviet states. Here, the emphasis usually is made on path dependent explanations of the HE system change, capitalizing upon the historical legacy of the Soviet Union that influences progress or lack thereof in the Russian HE systems (see Johnson, 2010; Motova and Pykkö, 2012 for the most recent accounts).

Finally, the academic accounts where we find discussion on the HE system change in the post-Soviet countries is in the literature dedicated to the Bologna Process. However, the majority of these scholarly accounts assess the different tools that the Bologna Process has offered to improve the HE system in this region (Glonti & Chitashvili, 2007; Luchinskaya & Ovchinnikova, 2011), or describe the tension between the past traditions and the modernization agenda that the Process is offering (Kovtun & Stick, 2009; Shaw, Chapman & Rumyantseva, 2012). What is missing in this segment of the literature is a critical assessment of the Bologna-guided policies. The Bologna Process is taken on board as an un-questioned commitment that the national governments have adhered to. Hence, the main question posed by the authors is regarding the level of conformity that the HE systems demonstrate with or the challenges that these systems face when implementing the Bologna-driven change. Here as well, this dissertation intends to make policy contribution by unpacking the reasons why post-Soviet country chose to adopt Bologna-guided reforms and what are the outcomes of these reforms.

Overall, the literature of the HE system change in the post-Soviet countries is scarce and what is available is circumscribed with three main themes. First, it overemphasizes the issue of corruption among the negative factors hindering development in the HE systems of the post-Soviet countries. Second, the accounts on the post-Soviet region are dominated by the scholarly articles that analyze Russian HE system, which brings forward the path dependent arguments that highlight importance of the tradition and resistance of the HEIs to absorb changes due to the legacy of the Soviet system. This diverts attention from the contextual factors that might be relevant

for the other the post-Soviet states and homogenizes the post-Soviet region around single explanatory factor. Third, when discussing the impact of the Bologna-driven changes in this region, the critical assessment of Bologna-guided reforms is missing. Instead, the emphasis is made on the level of conformity that the national HE systems achieved in the implementation of a particular Bologna objective. In this manner, the latter naively establishes the advantages of the Bologna-inspired reforms, and the former crudely simplifies the complexity of the HE system change in the post-Soviet region.

Complexity of the transition processes from communism to democracy is better explored in the HE literature that studies Central and Easter European (CEE) region. This literature is overviewed below.

2.1.2 Changes in HE systems in the CEE

It has been over a decade that the scholars have taken interest in the HE system development in the CEE region. The most common theme in the literature is Europeanization of the HE systems in this part of Europe and the role of Bologna Process in this endeavor. Majority of works stem from the common aim to address dual agenda of the CEE states' post-communist reconstruction and their EU accession. These accounts mainly comprise of country case studies, which analyze the impact of the Bologna Process and its specific goals on the national HE systems (for selected cases see Oprean, 2007; Curaj, Deca, Egron-Polak & Salmi, 2015; Deca, 2015 - for Romania; Pabian, 2009 - for Czech Republic; Kwiek, 2013, 2014 - for Poland;

Zgaga and Miklavič, 2014; Zgaga, 2002 - for Slovenia). Regional overviews are also available that organize the country cases around the EU accession phase (Kwiek, 2002, 2009) or the period of joining the Bologna Process (Dobbins, 2011; Kozma, Rébay, Óhidy, & Szolár, 2014; Tomusk, 2006, 2011).

When assessing the impact of the Bologna Process on HE systems in the CEE, on the one hand, the authors treat the Process as an opportunity for the HE systems to modernize and contribute to the CEE states' European integration (Zgaga, 2003; Pabian, 2009). On the other hand, there are Bologna-skeptics, who argue, with disappointment, that Bologna Process had a potential to act as a HE system transformer in this region, but the authors of the Process did not fully explore this opportunity (for instance, Kwiek, 2004). On a more critical note, some authors recognize strong economic underpinning behind the Europeanization rhetoric of the Bologna Process and oppose non-reflexive adoption of Bologna objectives by the national governments. Here, the relevance of Bologna-guided reforms in revamping deteriorated HE systems of the CEE countries is often questioned (Branković, Kovačević, Maassen, Stensaker & Vukasović, 2014; Tomusk, 2006, 2007, 2011).

The scholars rightly acknowledge that the harmonization processes in the non-EU-member and candidate countries differ profoundly from that of Western Europe and explore these differences (Dobbins, 2011; Hackl, 2014; Pabian, 2009). This distinction between different departure points of the Western European signatory states of the Bologna Process from the CEE signatory states is not new, however it has been usually applied to explain variable impact of the Bologna Process among the 'East' and 'West'

without contesting the universal applicability of the policy solutions promoted by the Process.

Academic work that addresses HE system change in the Western Balkan countries¹³ (WBC) is worth mentioning separately in this regard, as they contest the applicability of the Bologna Process as the policy agenda to this region. In few accounts that are available, the authors critically question whether the reform agenda suggested by the Bologna Process is appropriate for the WBC. The authors consider that the reforms supported by the Bologna Process are designed for economically affluent countries of Western Europe (Bacevic, 2014, Branković et al., 2014) and overlook the needs and the challenges of the wide spectrum of the Western Balkan states (some of which have joined the EU¹⁴, others are candidate countries¹⁵ and the rest – pre-accession states¹⁶).

This segment of the HE literature bears importance for this dissertation for two reasons. First, it is more reflexive than the post-Soviet accounts on the HE system change. The critical appraisal of the Bologna Process, as a policy choice is much more pronounced in these accounts. Second, the reviewed literature does not only concentrate on internal factors, within national contexts to explain HE change and the occurred challenges, but it also focuses on external factors.

It should also be mentioned that although authors predominantly treat the Bologna

¹³ Western Balkan Countries – WBC stand for the countries of former Yugoslavia, excluding Slovenia and including Albania

¹⁴ Croatia

¹⁵ Albania, Macedonia (FROY), Montenegro and Serbia

¹⁶ Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo

Process as a European project, few recognize the economic agenda behind it that is in line with the global neoliberal agenda (See Kwiek, 2004; Neave, 2004, 2012; Tomusk, 2007). As Neave puts it crisply, the Bologna Process triggered the transition of HE from being referred to as a part of the political system — the space where selection and formation of elites would take place — to being the part of the economic system — the place where people are massively trained for the private sector labor market (Neave, 2004). Neoliberalism and the encroachment of the market logic in higher education is discussed in more detail in the following section. However here, Kwiek's claim is worth highlighting as it bears relevance to the case of the Georgian HE reforms. He connects globalization pressures with the choices that the weak states (can) make in the (HE system) development. Guided by Mishra (Mishra, 1999 as cited in Kwiek, 2004), Kwiek asserts that new post-communist states will not survive global pressures and will succumb to global political and economic agenda (Kwiek, 2004). This claim suggests the inevitability of the situation where countries like Georgia that have no political or economic leverage at the global arena would be drawn into the globalized neoliberal pressures and cater their national agenda accordingly.

Linking state development to the global political and economic agenda leads me to the discussion on neoliberal pressures in the HE system, which is one of the guiding arguments of this research, as it was highlighted in the Chapter 1.

2.1.3 Globalization, neoliberal agenda and change in higher education systems

In this subsection, discussion on the globalization processes and the change in the HE systems intends to account for two points. First, I show that these transnational tendencies are shaped by a neoliberal understanding of state and economic development. I outline how the current academic literature understands characteristics of a neoliberal agenda and what are the implications of this agenda for the higher education. Here, marketization is identified as a dominant theme that significantly alters HE systems. Second, I discuss a growing convergence of higher education systems across the countries that is ascribed to the pervasive nature of the globalization processes in HE. This point is elaborated by presenting three main actors of globalization in HE. These are, HEIs, the State and the International Organizations. The role of the IOs is brought forward as transnational agents of globalised change spreading similar institutional design in the HE systems across the countries.

2.1.3.1 Marketization as a core theme of neoliberalism in higher education

Neoliberalism, as Harvey puts it, is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the State is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate for such practices” (Harvey, 2005, p 2). In other words, two crucial principles of neoliberalism are supremacy of a

value maximizing individual and primacy of the market in organizing intra and inter-state interactions. Hence the former advances the idea of sovereign consuming actor who is capable of making market based choices and is responsible for his/her well-being and the latter argues for the state withdrawal from the domains such as welfare, health, education and other traditionally perceived public goods. Instead, it advocates for the state to create the institutional setting that enables and ensures that the demands of the consumer citizens are supplied.

The authors that discuss marketization in higher education, consider the transposition of the market logic on the HE as a paradigm shift. As Weiler puts it mildly, this interaction is refreshed by adding a third party – the market (Weiler, 2001). However, others argue that once the market is added to the equation, it does not only refresh the state of affairs, but changes it to its core (Douglass, King & Feller, 2009; Neave, 2012). Marketization offers radically different aim of the HE than its traditional perception of a public good and significantly alters the state-university interaction. Several points need to be highlighted in this regard.

Firstly, transposing market logic to the HE introduces the conviction that the development of state as well as global development stems from the individuals who are educated to be ‘constantly reinventing entrepreneurs’ (Lynch, 2006, p. 3). Hence, the primary aim of HE is catered to providing the kind of education that fits the economic advancement. This, inevitably, emphasizes higher education’s economic dimension, which is linked to the workplace and the concept of employability. In this context, accommodation of the demands set by the job market becomes the primary aim of the

HE (Soudien, 2002). Secondly, as HE changes its aim, its role in the state architecture also transforms from a (national) public good to the tradable commodity (Lynch, 2006; Neave, 2004). As one of the services among many others, HE can be provided by variety of organizations, public or private. As any other service on the market, it is subordinated to the competitive environment and providers compete for the resources as well as the customers – the students. Emphasis on the job market changed the style and content of educational offerings. For instance, the increased emphasis is made on the transferable skills in the learning process (Jackson, 2015) and the lifelong learning schemes are popularized (Hodgson, 2000; Raggatt, Edwards & Small, 2013). Overall, the refreshing touch of the market logic brought forward the concerns with applicability and relevance of the HE and transformed the HE systems accordingly.

With the change of the aim and the role of the HE, HEIs were no longer centres of learning, but adopted traits of corporate organizations. The HEIs write their missions, develop strategic plans, define productivity targets, and efficiency and effectiveness measurements (Lynch, 2006). Commonly, the importance of the goal oriented management and performance measurement is amplified and customer satisfaction and stakeholder participation is emphasized. These and similar practices carried over from the corporate world are believed to improve the quality of the education (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Emphasis on the supply-demand relations brought forward the perception of students as customers, rather than learners. In this capacity, students gain rights to participate and contribute to the ways learning is organized whether

through student assessments or by being represented at the decision making bodies of the HEIs (Axelson & Flick, 2011; Mark, 2013; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009).

States, no longer act as providers of HE as public good but act as enablers of the institutional framework that ensure competitive environment and protection of the consumer rights. Deregulation policies and privatization are among the marketization policies that the states mostly resort to in order to enable competition.

While there is a common understanding among the scholars that market-driven changes have dramatically affected the HE aim and its development path, they diverge on the intentions and possible outcomes of the change that marketization brings to the HE. While some assume that marketization brings positive changes to the HE system and contributes to the modernization of the HEIs (Jongbloed, 2003), others reminisce to the traditional aim of the HE of the knowledge creation and claim that marketization processes emphasize non-education aims of the HE, hence not contributing to the quality of education (King, Marginson & Naidoo, 2011; Lynch, 2006). These positions are reviewed below.

An attractive marriage of efficiency, effectiveness and democracy related considerations, such as availability of choice and the social equality are usually main factors that are put forward by the supporters of the marketization policies in education (Chankseliani, 2013). As Teixeira and Dill assert, the attractiveness of the marketization stems from the belief that markets are not only adequate, but reliable steering mechanisms to minimize growing discontent towards inefficiency and

ineffectiveness of HEIs (Teixeira & Dill, 2011). Jongbloed adds that emphasizing competition and introducing performance- related reward schemes in the HEIs intends to increase awareness of the HEIs as well as students of the consequences of their financial decisions (Jongbloed, 2003). Proponents of the marketisation also argue that marketization processes improve quality of education as they encourage HEIs to pay more attention to students and to become innovative in teaching (Jongbloed, 2003; Teixeira et al., 2011).

In contrast, to the believers in marketization, opponents perceive that the market logic is detrimental to the HE quality. The main reason to this is commodification of the HE and turning it into a tradable good instead of the (national) public good (King, Marginson & Naidoo, 2011). Lynch voices a concern that academic education that is subordinated to the economic terms trivializes education that has no market value (Lynch, 2006). The authors in this camp highlight the pervasive nature of the neoliberalization, which became possible, because the issues have been framed as managerial (Lynch, 2006, 2014) or technical problems (Tomusk, 2006), which obscures the main purpose of the change that is commodification and massification of HE (Haupt, Krieger & Lange, 2011; Naidoo, 2008). These authors usually refer to the New Public Management (NPM) policies as the implementation tool of neoliberalism, which takes ‘operational focus’, in other words, treats the change in the system as a purely ‘technical problem’. For Lynch, because the neoliberal agenda is translated into the managerial terms and solutions, commercial sector’s values are encoded in the HEIs without reflection (Lynch, 2014). (Non-reflexive adaptation is what is often

documented as a reaction to the marketization pressures, which are made as necessary steps by the HEIs in order to survive.) As harsh critics put it, the emphasis on efficiency, productivity and excellence measures and institutionalization of auditing culture in HE sector are only good for self-display, but lead HEIs to the fabrication of image at the expense of substance (Ball, 2012).

Notwithstanding the differences in the assessment of the marketization effects on HE, authors predominantly converge on the opinion that marketization of HE is inevitable and the marketisation will only expand further. Hence, the HE systems are left to simply react to it the best they can. Also, uncertainty with regards to the results of the marketization processes is posed as a challenge, whether these are proponents or opponents of the neoliberal sentiments in HE (Canaan & Shumar, 2008).

What follows next is the discussion about the globalization actors that play an important role in higher education.

2.1.3.2 Main actors in globalised higher education

Now that it has been established that the globalization processes are driven by the neoliberalization discourse and carry through the neoliberal agenda of economic development, it is worthy to look at the actors that spread and maintain this global agenda. HE literature pays attention to three actors: HEIs, the state, and international organizations.

Higher Education Institutions (HEI). The authors, like King, argue that globalization has transformed HEIs into transnational units that transcend national

boundaries and pursue a life of their own. The HEIs are no longer bound to the nation-states and their individual governmental agendas (King, 2004). In this processes the agents of change are the HEIs. King, Readings and others consider that globalization as a process diminishes state sovereignty, and it is the HEIs that choose to adapt to the goals of globalized economy and abandon national goals (Altbach & Balan, 2007; King, 2004, Readings, 1996; Taylor & Miroiu, 2002). Along the lines of neoliberal claims, discussed in the previous sub-section, the authors acknowledge that the HEIs have shifted their aim to be market-oriented, operate as business organizations and, above all, have trespassed the national boundaries. HEIs have become 'transnational corporations' that produce knowledge to contribute to the innovation and technological advancement (Salmi & Altbach, 2011). The knowledge itself, has become a tradable good that is not bound to the territory or nation as opposed to public good and bound to the national territory, as traditionally believed. According to these scholars, as globalization agents, HEIs are the carriers of change. They interact among each other, as transnational organizations and address global demands. Authors acknowledge the growing homogenization in the structures and offerings in the HEIs across the states and suggest that it is a result of the transnational character of the HEIs.

This strand of literature has a couple of weaknesses. First, the authors presume that the HEIs are strong autonomous actors in the state structure with well-established national and international professional networks. This is certainly true in some of the Western European countries. However, the argument falls short in addressing a different situation in some of the CEE and former Soviet Union countries (or any other

weak state) where HEIs are economically deprived and their professional networks are no longer (or not yet) valid. Second, to borrow Hackl's distinction that she makes about research of the Europeanization in HE, the issue of globalization is *addressed* here rather than *studied* (Hackl, 2014). Put in other words, globalization processes are treated as given and its effects are observed and scrutinized. However, globalization processes, forces or content are hardly contested.

State. Another group of authors view the state as a primary actor in globalization processes driving change in HE. Authors like Eggins (2003) argue that universities are still bound to their national governmental aims, and national traditions (e.g. Eggins, 2003, Nixon, Walker & Carr, 2004). Universities are 'on duty' of the state, pursuing its national goals, which might be infused by the globalization agenda. Governments themselves have structurally adjusted their national economies to the globalized conditions, which consequently required a shift in the knowledge production that takes place in the HEIs. As the authors argue, global demands have de-territorialized knowledge production and have promoted knowledge exchange that trespasses national borders (Naidoo, 2011). In essence, what these scholars argue for is that it is through the state and its involvement, as a primary actor, in the globalization processes that allows HEIs to be part of the global knowledge production. Consequently, the higher education systems have transformed to meet the new reality of the global knowledge production, but the leading role is ascribed to the state to determine national educational policy (Deem, 2001; Delanty, 2001). This group, as well as the first describes growing patterns of convergence, but unlike the first group, they

give priority to the states, which capture globally constructed values and models in the national policies to which the HEIs also adhere (Walker & Nixon, 2004).

Similarly to the literature devoted to the importance of the HEIs in the globalization processes, one of the major weaknesses of this strand of literature is that the scholars are mainly concerned about Western European states and base the logic of their analysis on the affluent knowledge economies in the Western world. The authors discuss main challenges in the interaction of stable democratic state and the universities as autonomous actors. The assumption here is that adherence to the national policies that are infused by the global agenda will actually positively affect the HEIs, which is not necessarily true in the transition states. However, this literature lacks insights with regards to the developments in the countries of democratic transition, with the underdeveloped higher education systems.

International Organizations (IO). The third type of actor that the scholars pay attention to are IOs. Scholarly interest towards the IOs' role in the HE system development has gradually increased together with the mounting interest towards HE as a policy area that contributes to the global economic development (see Bassett & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009 for rather balanced and Hill & Kumar, 2009 for more critical review on IOs' impact on education, including HE). The authors in this fast expanding strand of the HE literature argue that in the ever globalized economy and changing world order, neither states, nor HEIs are main actors of change in HE, but rather the transnational agents – international organizations – that shape the roles

of both (Basset & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009; Yepes, 2006; Yelland, 2000; Tilak, 2002).

More importantly, the authors emphasize that IOs' have been most influential in articulating the importance of higher education in economic development (Lebeau & Sall, 2011). For instance, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) promotes education as a policy area that is to support regional economic development within the globalized knowledge economy (OECD, c2007). The idea of interconnectedness and growing competitive environment is omnipresent in OECD policy rhetoric. Along the same lines, for over a decade, UNESCO has been promoting the ideas for a "comprehensive worldwide action plan" (M.A. Rodrigues Días, representative of the UNESCO quoted in Neave, 2000, p. 51.) for the renewal of higher education in order to foster worldwide development.

The scholars acknowledge that the IOs devise globally applicable HE policies to ensure economic advancement across the board and pursue its implementation. In the developing world, IOs provide funding and technical assistance to introduce and implement those policies (Maldonado-Maldonado, 2012). Moreover, over the past decade, most visible IOs in higher education, such as World Bank, UNECSO and OECD have steadily built their research capacity and have accumulated policy and academic literature to promote neoliberal development agenda (Altbach, 2009), and also shape the policy and academic discourse (van der Wende, 2011; Lebeau & Sall, 2011).

Presented overview accounts for a paradigm shift in the overall thinking with regards to higher education from treating it as a (national) public good to the private commodity and takes the note of irreversible world-wide expansion of this paradigm. This latter point is well visible in the scholarly pieces about growing power of IOs in setting agenda for HE system development. It almost leaves an impression that authors have realized with a delay the far-fetching aim of the web of the IOs to maximize the effects of the global neoliberal economic advancement.

In summary, the body of literature that discusses the HE system change due to the influence of global processes emphasizes the new ways that the HEIs and states think when facing the challenge of relaxed national boundaries, growing competition at a global scale and acquiring new mission of economic development. The concepts of marketization and commodification of education have invaded scholarly rhetoric and permeated academic discussions. However, this body of literature is predominantly focused on the systems of established democracies of Western world, leaving the countries in the democratic transition outside of its analytical scope.

2.1.4 Gap in the literature and contribution of the dissertation

Two main findings should be reemphasized when summarizing the current literature that focuses on the HE system change in the states of the post-soviet transition. First, the discussions are usually focused on the internal factors, such as corruption or the Soviet heritage as affecting the HE system transformation. Second, the literature that covers not just the post-Soviet region but also CEE is mainly concerned with

establishing the level of conformity of the national HE systems with the Western HE systems or lack thereof as the main research topic.

I suggest that the existing arguments in the literature diminish the complexity of the policy environment in the post-Soviet region and misplace the analytical focus when studying the HE system change in this region. Hence, this strand of the HE literature holds limited explanatory value particularly for the case of Georgia, but also generally, for the HE system development in the post-Soviet countries for three main reasons. First, corruption has no explanatory value for the HE system development in Georgia, as the corruption was addressed during the reforms of the UNM Government and was one of the uncontested successful reforms of the government (See Chapter 1.). Second, preservationist arguments also cannot be attributed to the Georgian case, as the government had made a conscious political choice of disregarding, discrediting and fighting against the Soviet heritage and traditions. Their entire election and reform campaign revolved around the anti-Soviet and ant-Russian agenda (see Chapter 1.). Finally, the arguments that propose explanations with regards to the hurdles of the post-Soviet HE systems to approximate with their Western counterparts also runs thin, as institutional proximity with the West was actually established in the Georgian HE system (see Chapter 1.).

One major finding can be drawn from the literature that is dedicated to the HE system change due to the influence of globally promoted neoliberal agenda. The literature largely remains grounded in the experience of the Western democratic states and hence, represents an analytical tool for the processes that unfold in stable political environment

and developed economy. Moreover, while neoliberal argument of pervasiveness of the market logic is valid, the coercive nature of it cannot be shared entirely. As explained in Chapter 1, the post-revolution government of Georgia was the main driver of the change and, during its rule, capitalized on the neoliberal reform agenda of the transnational agents.

Having these limitations in mind, I propose that the HE system change is governed by a different logic in the post-Soviet transition countries and the Georgian HE reforms can serve as an illuminating case in this regard. In the following section, I introduce alternative analytical framework for the analysis that expands the dimensions of the policy environment of the post-Soviet state by emphasizing several factors. First, the external environment and exogenous processes have to be taken into account when analyzing the policy making processes and the policy outcomes in the post-revolution Georgia. Therefore, the dynamics of transnational policy making and transnational agents are factored in the analytical framework. Second, this dissertation suggests that adopted policies (i.e. Bologna guided policy choices) should not be treated as a priori positive development or a relevant choice, but have to be critically questioned. Hence, this research takes a step back from the HE policy implementation, which is usually the main focus of the scholarly accounts and explores the reasons why certain policies are adopted at the first place.

Finally, this research moves beyond evaluating whether or not the transitional HE system came close to the Western counterparts as the main, and the most desirable outcome of the reform. In contrast, I illustrate that the outcome of the reforms should

be conceptualized more broadly, because it is possible that the Western institutional design is adopted quite successfully in a transitional context, but still fails to yield positive changes in HE system.

While bringing together accounts from Sociological Neo-institutionalism, policy implementation and policy transfer in the analytical framework, this dissertation takes away two major arguments from the HE system change literature that was overviewed above and factors it in the analytical framework. Firstly, as Kwiek asserts new post-communist states will not be able to resist global pressures and therefore succumb to global political and economic agenda (Kwiek, 2004). This claim suggests the inevitability of the situation where countries like Georgia that have no burgeoning power at the global arena would be drawn into the globalized neoliberal pressures and cater their national agenda accordingly. Secondly, Lynch proposes that the New Public Management is an effective implementation tool of neoliberalization (Lynch, 2014). By this she wants to highlight that this paradigmatic shift in higher education is broken down to technical, managerial tasks as the means to improve efficiency and measure performance of the HEIs. In this manner, the values and principles of the neoliberalism are encoded in the managerial tasks and are absorbed by the HEIs without criticism (Lynch, 2014). This point is worth taking into account due to the nature of the reforms that took place in Georgia. The HE system transformation efforts mainly translated into the changes in the design of the political and governmental institutions, shifting the attention away from the HE substance.

2.2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: LEGITIMACY REFORMS AND DYNAMICS OF INSTITUTIONAL MISMATCH

In the previous sections, I have suggested that the existing research on HE system change in transitioning, post-Soviet states face three principal limitations. First, this research is circumscribed by the anti-corruption arguments, which are not particularly relevant or revealing when describing the Georgian case. Second, given the diversification of the HE reform strategies in post-Soviet space, the reference to the importance of the uniform Soviet legacies seems exaggerated. Third, the argument of the pervasive and coercive nature of neoliberalism does not leave the room for those instances, when the policy makers at the national level willingly and enthusiastically adhere to the neoliberal script and capitalize on it. The analytical framework elaborated below taps into the scholarly literature of political science and public policy and teases out insights that help explain suspended development of the HE system in the post-Soviet transition and addresses the shortcomings of the HE literature reviewed in the previous section.

Namely, in the analytical framework macro and micro levels of analysis are distinguished. Each level intends to answer the research questions that this dissertation is pursuing. At the macro level the research poses the question: *why post-revolution government adopted Bologna-inspired reforms to transform Georgian HE system?* With this question, the dissertation aims to understand the rationale behind the transnational policy transfer that the post-revolution government made. In doing so, the patterns of globalization processes and the behavior of the peripheral state in this

context are taken into account. Moving beyond the argument of the coercive nature of the globalised neoliberal script, this research anchors its argument in the Sociological Neo-institutionalism, specifically world society theories. The argument of institutional emulation for the purpose of political legitimacy is well elaborated here and suggests that the states and policy makers are inculturated in the neoliberal discourse and voluntarily opt for the neoliberal reforms (Meyer, 2015). The primary motivation of the states to do so is to gain legitimacy at the global political and economic arena (Meyer, 2000). The theory suggests that it is highly unlikely for globally generated institutional models to fit to the local institutional context of the peripheral, that is, transitioning states. In the process of the globalised policy adoption the local context is neglected in favor of the universally acknowledged institutions. As a result, the reformed systems consist of locally decoupled institutions, which resemble their ‘Western’ counterparts, but serve a different purpose locally (Meyer, 2000). I adopt this argument and apply it to the Georgian case proposing that the post-revolution government consciously adopted the Bologna-guided reforms in order to gain legitimacy in the global educational space. As a result, the Georgian HE system is decoupled. In its turn, as the findings of the dissertation show, decoupled institutions perpetually reproduce themselves in the system, hence suspending the system’s development.

At the micro level, I explore the mechanisms of the HE system’s suspended development. The question is posed as follows: *What are the factors causing the suspended development of the HE system in Georgia and why is it sustained?*

Essentially, at this level, the research makes a suggestion that the HE system is in the state of suspended development not only because the transnationally produced institutions do not match Georgian HE context. While this argument is valid, it explains the puzzle only partially. Therefore, with the assumption that during the policy transfer local factors contribute to and maintain the state of suspended development, the research unpacks the policy transfer process. To do so, the building blocks of policy implementation scholarship are combined with the suggestions of the policy transfer scholarship. Combination of these two strands of literature create a capacity to attend to agency of the policy as well as the policy making process. I suggest that first, the state of suspended development is maintained because the goals of the reforms were framed in an abstract manner. For this reason, these goals remained referential and came short of guiding the policy implementers. Second, while introducing the new institutions in the HE system, the purpose of these institutions were not clearly communicated in the Georgian HE context. This is to say that, not only the reform goals were vague, but the designers of the initial reforms never made efforts to translate and interpret the purposes of the new institutions to the implementers, nor they assigned any mediators that could assume such a role.

Bringing macro and micro level explanations together, the analytical framework makes it possible to account for both, process and the outcome of the reforms. Below, these levels of the analytical framework are developed in more detail.

2.2.1 Macro level – Institutional change during globalization and decoupled systems

The overarching theoretical consideration that guides this research is drawn from the world society theories that pay particular attention to the three themes relevant for the topic of this research. First, the world society theories are uniquely equipped to theorize transnational policy and institutional transfer, crucial to the Bologna-inspired reforms discussed in this dissertation (See Introduction and Chapter 1, Section 1.2.2.). Second, it pays attention to the globally spreading structural homogeneity, which is related to the nature of the state building reforms in Georgia, including the reforms in HE. As established in the Chapter 1, state building reforms in the country were based on the neoliberal understanding of economic development, which is spreading globally with the active involvement of the transnational agents, i.e. foreign aid organizations. Finally, world society theory recognizes that a special attention is paid to the higher education in the globalization processes. On the one hand, with the rise of knowledge economy and the strong discourse on knowledge societies higher education is viewed as an impetus of economic development and hence, absorbed by the states with minimal criticism. On the other hand, education as an institution has a legitimating power. As Meyer claims, education restructures populations. It creates and expands the elites and redefines the rights and the obligations of the members of the society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Krucken & Meier, 2006; Meyer, Ramirez, Frank & Schofer, 2007). The latter argument provides an explanation about the rise of the importance of HE among the transnational agents of globalization.

The main argument of this literature, that states adopt certain policies or institutions in order to gain legitimacy, stability and recourses (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), has a strong potential to explain the HE reform processes in Georgia. Having said this, it should be highlighted that the main premise of the world society theories are that the states are culturally constructed and embedded in their environment (Meyer, Boli, Thomas & Ramirez, 1997). This claim bears crucial importance when state transformation efforts are contextualized within the globalization processes. As stated before, the main policy choices are largely developed in accordance to the globally promoted neoliberal script and is transferred by the transnational agents. As mentioned, neoliberalization is considered to be universally beneficial, hence applicable to diverse national and institutional contexts (Harvey, 2005 on neoliberalization; Lynch, 2004, 2014 on neoliberalization processes in HE; Meyer, 2000). Bearing this in mind, the authors assert that during the globalised policy adoption the context is neglected in favor of the universally acknowledged institutions, therefore, the reformed systems end up being locally decoupled. One of the main manifestations of decoupling is symbolic change: adoption of symbolic frames without actual meaning (Meyer, 2000).

What HE scholars fail to attend, but the world society theory emphasizes, is the problem with this voluntary adherence to the globally promoted ideas: that it does not necessarily take the local conditions into account, rather it assumes that the global ideas are universally acceptable, hence those universally ‘fit’. Transformed landscape of the reformed system, new institutional set up usually closely resembles and is coupled with exogenous models. At the same time, it is disconnected from local contextual needs,

hence, is locally decoupled (Meyer, 2000). Moreover, in the peripheral states, the similarities between the neoliberal institutions and the local context are difficult to find. Therefore, peripheral states risk creation of the decoupled institutional frameworks. In these circumstances, the policy implementation is expected to be incomplete, uncertain, and variable from place to place (Meyer et al., 2007).

Based on the considerations of the world society theory, I put forward the argument that Georgia as a state at Europe's periphery chose to join Bologna Process in order to gain legitimacy in the European higher education arena. Hence, I expect that the HE system has reformed only symbolically. More specifically, adherence to the exogenous environment largely disregarded social processes and interests of the Georgian society thus creating decoupled institutions in the HE system.

2.2.2 Micro level – abstract goals of the HE reforms and local transfer agents

The authors of the world society theory suggest that during the symbolic change, the policy implementation is expected to be incomplete, uncertain and will vary from place to place (Meyer et al., 2007). However, the world society theory does not observe the process of policy transfer closely. The processes of policy transfer fall beyond its analytical scope. Hence, in this research, the policy makers' decision to adopt Western educational models are operationalized with the help of public policy scholarship. The analysis at micro level is dedicated to gain understanding about the reasons of incomplete and uncertain policy transfer.

These two levels of analysis are complementary. While the macro level pays attention to the structural determinants of the policy making, the micro level privileges the agency. At this level, this study attends to the internal environment and dynamics that unfold locally during the transnational policy transfer process. *Policy transfer* is conceptualized according to the Dolowitz and Marsh as a process by which “knowledge about how policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting” (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 5).

I use the policy transfer as a useful heuristic (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2012) to further explore the mechanism of decoupling at the policy level. Policy transfer is chosen for three reasons. First, as already mentioned – in the policy making process it attends to the agency (Marsh & Sharman, 2009). Second, the transfer literature examines the process (Marsh & Sharman, 2009), when the outcome of the reforms are analyzed at the macro level. As structural determinants of the transnational policy transfer are analyzed at the macro level, focus on the agency and the process provides the complete picture of the policymaking in the HE system of post-Soviet transition. Finally, according to Stone, the attention needs to be paid to the ‘soft’ forms of transfer, that is transfer of norms and knowledge and the role of actors in these processes (Stone, 2004). Again, locally decoupled institutions usually diverge from their global/transnational prototypes by purpose but closely resemble them structurally (Meyer, 2000). From the point of view

of the policy transfer, this means that the ‘hard’ transfer of the institutions is accomplished, but the soft transfer is lacking.

Overall, the insights from the policy implementation, but more so from the policy transfer literature are combined here to unpack the dynamics of the decoupled HE system. These strands of public policy literature allow for nuanced understanding of micro processes during the institutional transformation. With the focus on two explanatory factors drawn from each strand of public policy literature this research intends to (i) focus on transnational policy transfer and (ii) account for the contextual particularity of the post-Soviet transition.

During the analysis, the attention is paid to the centralized nature of policy making and the significance that the governmental institutions and policy makers had in the post-revolution Georgia. Horowitz’s observation is valuable at this instance. He notes that in transition countries the superiority of the governmental agencies is enhanced (due to the institutional flux and information asymmetries). Therefore, their behavior had a bigger impact on the society at large, than it is commonly the case in the democratic societies (Horowitz, 1989 as cited in Brinkerhoff & Crosby, 2002). As it was explained in Chapter 1, government of Georgia was the sole actor in devising reforms. The decisions were made at the Ministry of Education and Science and were communicated to the HEIs for implementation. Moreover, the public HEIs were heavily dependent on (financially) and subordinated to the MES. This accentuates the power asymmetry between the policy makers and the policy implementers. The post-revolution government developed the reform, hence it possessed main information and knowledge

base for the system transformation, and it also controlled the financial recourses. Essentially, post-revolution government assumed the leading role in reforming the HE system and engaged in the top-down policy implementation process, passing the change down to the lower levels of bureaucracy. Under these circumstances, based on the insights from Matland's work of 1995, I suggest that during the transnational policy transfer, in order to ensure consistency of the policy, it is essential to specifically articulate the goals of the reforms.

Matland (1995) explores this issue and present the benefits of having abstract or ambiguous (as opposite to precise) policy goals and the challenges that are accompanied with them. The author points out that during the top-down policy implementation, the ambiguous goals and means of the policy heighten the chance to legitimize new policies. Specifically articulated policy goals and intentions usually create resistance of stakeholders towards planned changes, but if the policy goals are formulated in an abstract way, than the public reacts to a rather vague set of assumptions or ideas of reforms and not actual policies (Matland, 1995). However, Matland also points out that if the policy goals remain referential, the matter becomes of conflicting interpretations, as it is difficult to translate abstract policy goals into the instrumental actions (Matland, 1995). Involved actors tie their own definitions of the policies and depending on the strength and the position of policy actors, different interpretations will prevail among different actors.

The matter of interpretation gains higher importance during the transnational policy transfer when the norms and the knowledge base that support the institutional transfer

are foreign to the local policy actors. According to Stone, the transfer of norms and knowledge is understood as a ‘soft’ transfer (Stone, 2004). As highlighted above, in the processes of transnational policy transfer, the importance of the transnational, global networks that influence the policy making processes is highlighted. Stone distinguishes several. These are ‘global knowledge networks’, ‘transnational advocacy networks’, ‘global public policy networks’ (Stone, 2005) and ‘global development networks’ (Stone ed. 2000). She clarifies their importance arguing that the complexity of the local context modifies the transfer of policy (or institution), which increases the need for interpretation in the process of assembling the policy domestically (Stone, 2012). While this research acknowledges the importance of the transfer agents, it diverges from Stone’s suggestion to look at the transnational actors and accentuates the role of the *local transfer agents* in the soft transfer. The work of Locke and Jacoby (1997) and insights from Acharya’s (2004) work are used to develop this concept.

Locke and Jacoby emphasize the importance of intermediary actors in the vocational education reforms after the unification of Germany (Locke & Jacoby, 1997). The authors find that professional unions and associations have been indispensable in raising awareness and creating understanding at both ends of policy implementation – policy makers and policy recipients (Locke & Jacoby, 1997). Acharya explores dynamic process of localization of foreign norms. In this process, the author brings forward the role of local actors and distinguishes passive receivers and active borrowers among them (2004).

Local transfer agent, in this analytical framework, combines Stone's idea that transfer agents ensure appropriate interpretation of new norms and knowledge during the transnational policy transfer (2004) with Locke and Jacoby's idea of intermediary actor that establishes the communication channel and the feedback mechanism within the hierarchy of the policy implementation (Locke & Jacoby, 1997), and Acharya's concept of norm localization (Acharya, 2004). *Local transfer agents* carry 'non-local' knowledge (e.g. purpose of the quality assurance system in HE), which they acquire through interaction with the policy makers (at the Ministry of Education and Science) and/or interaction with the transnational agents (being involved in projects of World Bank, UNDP or EC) and transfer it to the local policy implementers (i.e. HEI representatives).

I highlight the role of these intermediary agents during the soft transfer. Their participation, I argue, would mediate and (positively) influence the transnational transfer process. Their involvement in the transnational transfer is important because the Bologna-guided reforms are based on the norms and contain knowledge that conceptually differs from the knowledge base of the Georgian HE system. As explained in the Chapter 1, new policies aimed at abolishing the core of the post-Soviet HE system and at building a new one, based on neoliberal premises and market logic. As Stone states, interpretation in these circumstances of assembling policies is crucial (Stone, 2012). I would add that consistency in interpreting the purposes of transnationalized institutions is crucial. Put differently, local transfer agents assume the role of making careful matching between the local environment and the transnational models. In their absence, the policy transfer would be incomplete and invite multiple interpretations.

Professional unions or associations, non-profit organizations of the relevant profile and education experts, can assume the role of local transfer agents in the Georgian HE context.

To summarize, while at the macro level attention is paid to the exogenous factors and the characteristics of the global environment that affect the decisions of local actors, the micro level attends to the internal factors of policy environment. Combining macro and micro levels of analysis, this analytical framework aims to create a comprehensive understanding of the HE system change in the context of the post-Soviet transition. The framework accounts for internal and external factors and discusses policy process as well as its outcomes.

3 METHODOLOGY AND FIELD WORK

Introduction

The dissertation investigates the challenges in the HE systems in the post-Soviet country from the point of view of disparity between the institutional design and the lack of improvement in the system due to the institutional transformation. To analyze this disparity, the case study is chosen as a suitable approach (Gerring, 2007). The research focuses on the Bologna-inspired HE system change in post-revolution Georgia and develops in two complementary steps. First, it aims to understand the rationale behind the transnational policy transfer that the post-revolution government made. Second, it explores the factors that suspend the development of the HE system in Georgia. The research is focused on the higher education reforms that took place after the 2003 Rose Revolution and follows it throughout the first six years, from 2004 to 2010. Georgia serves as the most likely case in explaining the suspended development in the HE system of the post-Soviet country.

3.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE, UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY AND THE LINK BETWEEN THE TWO

The reasons for choosing Georgia as a suitable case to explore complexity of the HE system change are extensively discussed in the Introduction. Here, it should be reiterated that the political landscape and the policy choices that were made in Georgia after the 2003 Rose Revolution created a natural laboratory to explore the interaction of the global processes and local circumstances and to investigate the role of local actors in shaping national higher education system in the post-Soviet transition. More

specifically, in this research the introduction of two institutions in the HE system are examined: *quality assurance* and *university autonomy*. The authors who write about the neoliberal pressures and influences of market logic in HE, treat QA as an accountability measure that is introduced in the HE systems from the corporate world in order to measure HEI achievements (e.g. Lynch, 2004). University autonomy, in this case presents an amalgam of the Western idea of the University as an impartial knowledge generator and transmitter (Neave, 2012) and ever so increasingly popularized idea of the HEIs as autonomous, self-sustained actors on the competitive market (Lynch, 2004; Naidoo, 2008). Interaction between the QA and the university autonomy is a guiding theme in the *Evaluative State* that is governed by the market logic (Neave, 2012). Put it differently, these two institutions are carriers of the neoliberal norms, which is the main interest of this research. From the point of view of policy transfer, these institutions represent transnational constructs that have been introduced in the Georgian HE system through the transnational policy transfer. In other words, introduction of these institutions allowed to investigate the process of matching between the local environment and the transnational models of the QA and university autonomy.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODS

Two methods, document analysis and in-depth interviews, were used to collect the data.

Document analysis

Document analysis aimed to reconstruct the decision making patterns throughout 2004-2010 years in the higher education system.

In the analysis of the HE reforms – 2004-2010 – I have analyzed several types of documents. First, legal documents were analyzed. The Law on Higher Education of Georgia, adopted in 2004 and its subsequent amended versions (in the years 2007 and 2009) served as the guiding documents. These were considered the most reliable and consistent primary sources among the available documents. Subsequent amendments of the Law and the detailed account of the consequent decrees of the President or the Minister(s) of Education and Science were the main sources that allowed me to observe the development patterns in the HE system. Second, government policy papers and reports were reviewed. The annual reports of the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as National Education Accreditation Centre and other quazi-governmental agencies, such as Rustaveli National Science Foundation and National Assessment and Examinations Centre, allowed me to assess the coherence of the reform agenda. Third, the Bologna Process related accounts that reviewed the country's progress or the lack thereof in the Bologna-inspired reforms. Trend reports of the EUA, Stocktaking reports and the available reports of the large-scale educational projects, such as Twinning Project: the Capacity Enhancement for Implementing the Bologna Action Lines in Georgia, USAID funded a multi-year program: the Georgian Education Decentralization and Accreditation and Georgia for an Education System Realignment and Strengthening Program funded by the World Bank were also reviewed. Fourth, analytical accounts of local and international NGOs and donor organizations were also used. World Bank's country reports were helpful in this regard, since these followed Georgia's development since collapse of the Soviet Union. Basic statistical data from UNICEF also helped to put

together main parameters of the education system. UNDP human development reports, as well as country reports were useful in the same regard as UNICEF material. Finally, the documents produced by the HEIs, such as their statutes, strategic plans, accessible financial reports or self-assessment reports were reviewed. Most of the universities had made their bylaws and self-assessment reports available. The minutes of the meetings of the representative bodies were also publicly accessible¹⁷.

Overall, the Law on Higher Education (2004) was used as a reference document to the HE reform. The Law reflected neoliberal ideas of marketisation and decentralization and put heavy emphasis on institutional redesign, that is, the prevalence of hard policy transfer over the soft transfer. The Law, together with the accounts produced by the international donor organizations and with the documents produced in order to meet Bologna Process objectives tended to present overlapping ideas of neoliberalisation. In these manner, these documents were extremely useful in revealing main assumptions of the research and presented a good base to trace introduction of the decoupled institutions in the HE system. While the Law, IO reports and Bologna Process related accounts revealed overlapping themes that were present at both local (national) and global (transnational) level, the documents of the HEIs' revealed high level of subordination on the Law of HE. The HEIs' documents were analyzed as a second step to trace the introduction of the decoupled institutions in the HE system.

¹⁷ The full list of reviewed documents is available in Appendix 3

While the document base revealed the structural determinants of the HE system, the interviews aimed to investigate the role of local actors in the reform. More specifically, one of the main aims was to see if and in what manner the soft policy transfer took place during the reforms. Below three target groups for the interviews and the rationale behind the particular choices that I made are presented.

Target groups

Three groups of actors bear relevance to this research. First, public administrators (PA) were chosen as embodiment of the central government that determines the main policy decisions. Here, policy makers and implementers at the Ministry of Education and Science and at the National Education Accreditation Centre were targeted. Second, representatives of the higher education institutions were targeted as embodiment of actors at the lowest level of the policy implementation in the higher education system. Here, academic and non-academic representatives of the state universities were approached. Third, non-governmental sector was chosen as an important actor in the transnational policy transfer. Here, local NGO representatives, local education experts, representatives of main funding agencies in the HE were approached.

Public Administrators

The role of the policy makers at the Ministry of Education and Science in the policy formation was crucial in Georgia. The reform was centrally driven, therefore, the Ministry had the main role in devising policies. The MES was the initiator of legislative changes, and possessed main communication mechanisms to voice and enforce the

changes. Therefore, the Ministry was a starting point of the research to map main mechanisms of policy formation and the strands of communication within and outside the ministry. Approaching this target group was crucial as most of the representatives were closely involved in the policy making process and some of them personally participated in creation of the main documents, which I have used in the analysis. Interviews with these particular persons was extremely useful as they explained the rationale behind the decisions, which were translated into the different articles of the HE law or materialized in creation of e.g. quality assurance agency. At the same time, the perspective of former or current¹⁸ government officials were probed with the HEI representatives as well as the local experts in order to see whether the goals of the reforms were communicated and translated to the implementing bodies in the HE system.

By 2010, the ministry counted a little over 200 employees. The minister had 4 deputies; first deputy minister, responsible for legal/regulatory issues and public relations and the other three in charge of finance and administration, general education and higher education and science, respectively. The ministry comprised seven departments that were subordinated to the deputy ministers. Apart from the main administrative body, the ministry housed six quasigovernmental agencies, such as NEAC and National Examination Centre that were also under the supervision of the deputy ministers.

¹⁸ *current* refers to the time when the interviews were carried out – 2011-2012

Within the Ministry, I targeted the actors involved in the higher education sector. Thus, the deputy minister of higher education and science was approached, as well as the Head of Department of higher education and science, and the head of TUNING Project. The NEAC had its organizational roots at the MES, in the Department of Licensing and Accreditation. In 2006, the department was transformed into an independent agency, hence complying with the recommendation of the Bologna Process to create an independent QA agency (Berlin Communiqué, 2003; ENQA, 2005).

I considered the Centre as a crucial actor in the reform as of a policy disseminator. The representatives of two main phases in the Centre's development were interviewed. First two directors, heads of the two departments, responsible for the higher education quality assurance, and ordinary employees that have been working in the Centre during both phases were interviewed. Interviews with the directors of the Centre I aimed to observe policy continuity or the lack thereof from one representative of the top management to the other. Interviews with the middle management – heads of the departments – was intended to see, whether the policy choices of the top management were clearly communicated down to the organizational hierarchy. Centre's staff members were approached to gain understanding with regards to their interpretations of the QA as an institution and its role in the HE system.

Higher Education Institutions

The changes that were initiated in the system vividly affected state HEIs. New legal framework made most of the changes mandatory for the state HEIs. Therefore, I

decided to focus on the state sector of the higher education system. By 2010, there were 70 state recognized (accredited and/or newly licensed) HEIs in Georgia, 23 public and 47 private. 68% of accredited HEIs are located in capital - Tbilisi. There are 15 state research universities, 4 state teaching universities and 4 state colleges. As for private, there are 28 research universities, 12 teaching universities and 7 colleges (the numbers change due to the state licensing procedure). 10 out of 15 state universities are located in the capital, Tbilisi. In 2009, according to the new amendment in the Law on Higher Education higher education structure was revised and distinguished three types of education institutions: community colleges (professional education), teaching universities (offering first two cycles of education and excluding research from its scope of operation) and the universities (research oriented education institutions offering three cycles of education and developing its research capacity) (MES, 2010).

Among this mélange of the higher education institutions, I decided to focus on the five state universities. Three are in the capital and two in the eastern and western regional centres of the country aiming at creating a picture that reflects and represents overall dynamics across the state HE sector in the country.

In the choice of the universities, I tried to capture the characteristic differences between the types of the HEIs in the country. Tbilisi State University (Tbilisi), is the oldest university in the country and remains the most prestigious. It is also one of the largest universities in the country with 2000 annual student enrollment rate (NAEC, 2011). Tbilisi Medical University (Tbilisi), is also the oldest medical institute in the country with an enrollment rate of 12000 (TMU, 2010). Ilia University (Tbilisi) is the youngest

university that was created on the bases of three state teaching universities in 2005. Since then it is considered to be the fastest developing university in the country with an annual enrollment of 2000. Gogebashvili University (Telavi) is the main HEI of eastern Georgia and its academic centre. Rustaveli State University (Batumi) is located in the western part of the country in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazeti. The university was reorganized and has combined several small teaching universities in its organizational structure. The university serves as an academic centre of the Adjarian Republic.

Within these universities, I interviewed both, administrative staff as well as the representatives of the academic community relevant to the quality assurance and the university autonomy. The interviewees were approached with the aim to gain understanding of how new institutions of the QA and the university autonomy were introduced in their HEIs. Also, based on the interviews interaction patterns between the Universities and the MES, NEAC and other external actors were mapped.

Third party stakeholders

Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), representatives of the donor organizations (World Bank, EuropAid), and both local and international experts were brought together under the third group of interviewees.

In the literature, intermediate agent that determines of the transferred institution is the third, non-governmental sector (Locks & Jacoby, 1997). This was the main reason to incorporate them in the research. The first-hand information collected from the representatives of this third group was used to determine the nature of involvement of

the third party stakeholders, their channels of communication and interaction with both, universities as well as the MES and the NEAC.

In addition, these actors were important for the research in order to increase the impartiality of the collected data. These actors had considerable distance from the political overtone of the reform and as a third party, they could have more balanced perspective with regard to the reform processes. Also, they were more immune (to a greater degree than those at the ministry or at the HEIs) from potential governmental or HEI administrative pressures, therefore the actors in this group were more forward with their assessments and open in communication.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the research clarified one interesting peculiarity of the Georgian educational landscape. After the revolution, the main intellectual force of the NGOs moved to the government, thus draining the capacity of non-governmental sector. In higher education, this was particularly visible as the non-governmental capacity was weak even before the 2003 revolution. In absence of a strong institutional partner, the auxiliary role in the reform implementation process was played by the multiple projects that were being implemented in the education system throughout the years. These projects were funded by international agencies and housed under the MES. The implications of these circumstances are thoroughly discussed in Chapter 6. However, this is also important during the interviewee selection process. I chose those few local experts whose names were repeatedly mentioned by the government officials at the MES as well as university representatives. The representatives of the national offices of the

World Bank and USAID were also approached, however their input did not bear relevance in the scale of the research.

At all three levels of the policy making and implementation high turnover of the top management and fluid organizational structure, especially in the first several years of the reforms, posed a challenge to the research as far as the patterns of continuity are concerned. The participants of major initiatives launched in the first several years were hard to track, and those, involved in the reform in 2010 had only a vague understanding of the previous developments. In order to minimize this shortcoming caused by lack of institutional memory, I interviewed the actors who wore “multiple hats” between 2004 and 2010. These were the actors, who had firsthand experience at some point in time in the reform, but once they had moved away from the ministry, still remained involved/employed the higher education system. These were two types of actors. On the one hand, these were former government officials employed by the universities in the later years of the system development and thus remained current in their assessments. On the other hand, these were the actors who were involved in the first stages of system development and later on had moved up the career ladder and worked in the Parliament or dispersed in other governmental structures, therefore could reflect upon the HE reforms from the “above” perspective. The experts, involved in multiple committees and projects at different points in time were also interviewed. For instance, the first deputy minister in higher education and science subsequently became the head of an academic department in one of the universities was chosen for an interview. In addition, the first head of legislative department of the ministry, currently a member of

the parliamentary committee of Education and Science was interviewed. For a qualitative study with a small sample including the actors involved in the higher education reforms at different point in time with different mandates was also advantageous as these interviewees had multidimensional perspective on the reforms and were able to assess introduced policies from the point of view of a policy maker and a policy beneficiary.

Interview guide

The interview guide¹⁹ was developed according to the analytical framework discussed in the previous chapter. The interview guide had two kind of questions. First, descriptive questions (“which?” questions) and second, explanatory question (“how?” and “why?” questions). First aimed to extract accurate information in order to bridge the gaps in the six-year HE reform processes that was missing in the analyzed documents. Based on the combination of document analysis and collected data from the interviews the outcomes of quality assurance and university autonomy policies were assessed. Second type of questions was seeking for interpretation of the concepts and processes by the interviewees.

Interview guide consisted of three sections that accounted for following: general state of affairs in HE system, specific reforms in quality assurance system, and specific reforms in University Autonomy. The general section referred to the overall HE reform, mainly aiming to generate information on understanding of what were the goals of the systemic

¹⁹ See Appendix 1 for the Interview Guide

reforms. The questions were tailored to the different levels that the target groups represented, central (MES, NEAC), middle (NGOs), bottom (Universities). Some respondents were asked questions from all three sections, others – only two sections, according to their expertise. All of the interviewees were asked to comment on both quality assurance as well as university autonomy.

During the field work, the guide was modified. After first three interviews, several questions deemed ineffective and those were filtered. Other questions were refined in process. It also became apparent that the questions, aiming at the same topic were formulated differently for different interviewees. This depended on their current position, which target group they represented. Some interviewees needed more explanation and annotation of the topic than others. Topics that had political undertone (such as dismissal of the TSU rector or director of NEAC) were carefully framed to minimize possibility of receiving “politically favorable” answer from the participants.

3.3 FIELD WORK AND DATA ANALYSIS

It is important to mention, that in 2007-2008 years, I worked at the General Education Decentralization and Accreditation (GEDA) project as an accreditation team leader in Georgia. This was the large-scale technical assistance of the educational reform funded by the USAID. The project intended to enhance the management and professional capacity of newly created NEAC and facilitate creation of Education Resource Centres, new structural units within the decentralized secondary education system. On the one hand, this served as an advantage during the fieldwork as I managed to gain access to

the political elite through my previous professional ties, ,also insuring considerable openness of the political elite during the interviews.

On the other hand, I recognized the disadvantages of my prior affiliation to the NEAC. My familiarity with the higher education system from within could affect my impartiality as a researcher and develop a personal bias towards the developments in the system. These circumstances demanded extra prudence on my behalf during the data collection and the data analysis. I posed clarification questions on those subject matters and issues that I had a strong position. I also tried to distance myself from my previous work experience when interviewing my former colleagues. During these interviews, naturally, the interviewees would tend not to elaborate on the specific topics or events in which I was involved with the assumption that I already had an understanding of the matter. In these occasions I had to creatively navigate the answers with the phrases “as you very well remember”, or “you know better than me” and collect extensive explanations from the informants. Overall, during the fieldwork the fine balance between the overinterpretation and impartiality was attained.

In addition, in years 2013-2014, I accepted an offer to head the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement. For two years, I observed and experienced the processes, which I, as a researcher, had chosen to investigate. Working within the higher education system helped me gain a better and more in-depth understanding of the HE reform processes. After leaving the organization, I approached the collected research material with caution, being aware that recent experience could lead to overinterpretation of the processes.

Interviewee availability, interviewing process, limitations

Forty face-to-face interviews were collected mainly during three visits in 2010-2011 in Georgia and the follow up phone interviews in 2012. The pool of interviewees comprised of all three groups discussed earlier in this chapter. Representatives of top and middle management of the Ministry, top and middle management representatives of the NEAC and of the five universities were interviewed. As planned, third party representatives were also approached.

Although it was highly desirable to interview the ministers of education, it was practically impossible to do so. I had planned to interview the first and the very recent ministers; however, none of them was reachable. In a compromise, I interviewed two deputy ministers of higher education and science, who worked directly with the first and the most recent ministers.

All of the interviews were conducted in Georgian language. Large portion of the interviews were recorded – 30. The interviews with the poor recording quality were transcribed word-to-word. The interviews that were of a high quality were fed into the ATLASTi software as audio files during the analysis and only the quotes that were consequently used in the thesis, were transcribed. The rest of the interviewees did not wish to be recorded, and several even mentioned that they would be more “honest” if they were not recorded. In these cases, extensive notes were taken during the interviews. Collected data was analyzed by the ATLASTi. The interviews were coded in two steps. First, by topical coding where main themes that the interviewees deemed important were noted down and a rather extensive list with the corresponding quotes was created.

Later on, these themes were submerged into larger topics. Analytical clusters were identified in the second phase of data analysis. Results of the analysis is discussed in the two empirical chapters of the thesis.

4 REFORMS FOR EXTERNAL LEGITIMACY: QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Introduction

In this chapter, which focuses on the quality assurance system, I examine six years (from 2004 to 2010) of the Bologna-guided reforms to answer the research question: *why did the post-revolution government adopt the Bologna-inspired reforms to transform Georgian HE system?* I argue that the policy makers introduced the QA as an institution in order to gain legitimacy at the global HE arena, represented by the EHEA. As a result, the QA system has been locally decoupled. That is to say, that the framework of the QA system in the Georgian HE setting resembles the Bologna-promoted QA structures, but the system fails to assume the accountability for improvement of HE as promoted by the Bologna Process.

As explained in the analytical framework (Chapter 2), this argument builds upon the Sociological Neo-institutionalism, world society theory suggesting that the countries adopt transnationally promoted institutions primarily to gain legitimacy at the global political scene rather than to address domestic problems (Drori et al., 2006, Meyer et al., 1997). However, since the transnational institutions do not match the local context, they will inevitably be locally decoupled and only symbolically resemble their global institutional prototypes (Meyer, 2000).

The analysis builds on the contextual clarifications presented in Chapter 1. First, the HE reforms were part of the overall state building efforts of the UNM government. They

were catered to the government's political agenda to demonstrate the European aspirations that was fused with the neoliberal understanding of state development. Most importantly, the government extended their approach of institutional building into HE sector as well. Second, the eradication of corruption, market economy and small government were the main three dimensions emphasized in the state transformation efforts. Element of all of them were also introduced within the HE reforms. This analysis allows to make a claim that the development of the QA system was an institutional reform, which primarily addressed the corruption in the system and only symbolically accounted for the Bologna-promoted purposes of QA, which are accountability and/or improvement. While the QA in Georgia diverges from its Bologna-promoted purpose, its structure coincides with the structure of the Bologna-promoted QA model.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is devoted to the conceptual clarifications with regard to the purpose of the QA as an institution as well as the main elements of its structure. Second section analyzes the institutionalization of the QA system and discusses the external and internal QA mechanisms separately. Finally the main findings are interpreted in light of the main argument about a global model that is locally decoupled.

4.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

In this section the two main purposes of the QA as presented in the academic and policy literature are discussed. These are, accountability and improvement. The structure of the QA is examined and its four main elements are identified. These are, quality

assurance administrative body, self-assessment, peer-review and the official decision. These distinctions guide the analysis of decoupling of QA as an institution.

The fast expanding literature on quality assurance in higher education highlights two purposes of a QA system. On the one hand, QA is an improvement mechanism. QA processes provide opportunities for improvement and change in the HEIs. QA is a good tool to build self-awareness within higher education institutions, which in turn, can be a good source of an improved decision-making. On the other hand, QA is an accountability measure. QA processes are designed to evaluate and audit the HEIs in order to ensure their compliance with standards and rules and then communicate the information to external stakeholders, whether it is a state or the society (Brown, 2004; King, 2007; Power, 1994, 1997 as cited in Brennan & Shah, 2000).

However, there is no consensus over the issue whether these two purposes can be reconciled in a single QA system or whether one contradicts the other. Usually, QA systems are criticized for being predominantly used as an accountability measure and lacking the role of improvement (Power, 1997, King, 2007). In a thorough analysis of the QA system in the United Kingdom (UK) starting from 1992, Brown concludes that it is challenging for a single QA system to house both of these purposes, because they have different purposes and pursue different goals (Brown, 2004; McGhee, 2003; Middlehurst & Woodhouse, 1995). In analyzing external QA in the European Higher Education Area, Hopbach concludes that the QA agencies in the Bologna signatory countries often combine the two purposes of improvement and accountability. He suggests that in the cases where QA combines both purposes, one normally dominates the

other (Hopbach, 2012). That is to say, the purposes of accountability and improvement are not equally represented in the HE systems. Guided by the discussion above, while analyzing the QA system adoption in the Georgian HE system interaction of these two purposes of QA are taken into account.

While there are diverging opinions about the interaction of the two purposes of the QA system, there is unanimous agreement among the same authors that the structure of the QA system comprises of four building elements. The first element is an administrative body that is responsible for the coordination and administration of quality assurance activities. The second element is a self-assessment process that HEIs periodically undertake based on the standards and procedures set out by the regulatory body. The third element is an external peer evaluation that is based on HEIs' self-assessment. The peer evaluation would include a site visit, discussions with academics, administrative staff and students. The findings of the peer evaluation would be included in the assessment report that provides HEIs with the recommendations suggesting the paths of improvement. Finally, the report is usually followed by an official decision regarding accreditation or the equivalent quality seal. This four-element QA model was initially introduced in the USA, further developed in the Canadian higher education system (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). The same four-element model of the QA was proposed by the Bologna process (ENQA, 2005) as well.

The QA systems usually differ according to the degree of government's involvement in the system. In the countries with the higher degree of university autonomy, the QA systems are a result of a bottom up effort that usually emphasizes the improvement

purpose of QA system. This type of QA systems are observed for instance, in the USA, UK and Germany (Brennan and Shah, 2000; O'Brien 2009). For the countries with the centralized HE system, as in the former socialist block, with curbed university autonomy, QA systems are created by the central government with a strongly defined purpose of accountability. For instance, in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Lithuania the QA systems are created by the respective ministries that are responsible for the higher education and QA agencies are state regulatory agencies (see Hungarian National Assembly, 2011; ACCR, 2015; SKVC, 2015, respectively).

Considering the above mentioned conceptual clarifications, this chapter assesses whether the QA system is decoupled. The analysis is presented in the light of the QA system's two main purposes. First purpose is accountability, defined as a tool to build awareness with regard to the HEI externally, towards the government and the society. The second purpose is improvement, defined as a self-awareness tool for the HEI. These purposes of the QA are considered as generic purposes that are promoted by the Bologna Process. The analysis establishes whether these purposes, separately or in combination, were discussed by policy makers when creating the QA system in Georgian HE. At the instance when purpose of the QA diverges from that of the Bologna Process, the rationale behind the policy makers' choice is analyzed. In the same manner, the structure of the QA system is also discussed in juxtaposition to the four-element model of the QA: regulatory body, self-assessment process, peer assessment, final official decision.

4.2 SETTING UP THE QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISM: ANTI-CORRUPTION AS THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE QA

Collected data revealed that the development of the QA system was affected by two main considerations of the post-revolution government. Internally, policy makers needed to tackle the system wide corruption that hindered the development of the HE system. Therefore, policy makers were seeking anti-corruption measures to remedy the system-wide problem. Externally, policy makers aimed at meeting the commitments that they made by joining the Bologna Process. Establishing the four-element model of the QA system was one of the objectives of the Bologna Process highlighted in 2003 (Berlin Communiqué, 2003).

4.2.1 External Quality Assurance versus Accreditation

Document analysis and the interviews show that prior to the quality assurance, policy makers as well as the HEI representatives learned about the accreditation process. To introduce accreditation as a state control mechanism was a non-realized plan of the pre-revolution government. The Presidential Decree N 418 dated 1998 (Decree N418, 1998) described the mandate of the *accreditation council* and approved its constituent members and their mandate, however the decree was never enforced. The idea of accreditation was put back on the policy agenda only after the 2003 Rose Revolution and change of the government. Hence, with a substantial delay, the first institutional accreditation process was launched in October 2004 and the 1998 presidential decree served as a legal base to this process. In order to fit the new reality, after the revolution, the decree was substantially amended in October, 2004 according to which the

institutional and programme accreditation were distinguished and a mandate of the accreditation council as a decision making body for both procedures was elaborated in detail (Decree N418 1998, Amendment N470, 2004). In the Law on Higher Education of December 2004, the purpose of accreditation is elaborated in detail as a primary state control mechanism. Accreditation process was considered as a certain form of quality evaluation, initiated and carried out by state in order to confirm the correspondence of an HEI with the minimal requirements of the quality of higher education, which in its turn, were set by the state (Law on Higher Education, 2004, Section 10; Bologna Process National Report – Georgia, 2005; NEAC, 2006).

In general, for both parties involved – the state and the HEIs – accreditation overshadowed the concept of quality assurance. During the field work, interviewees could hardly distinguish between the QA and accreditation and tended to use these terms interchangeably. Moreover, accreditation was used interchangeably with the institutional accreditation, which was the only state assessment process in the first 4 years of the reform. Several factors contributed to this confusion. For HEIs, the accreditation process was a state scrutiny that determined the main parameters of their operation, because four conditions were attached to the accreditation. First, only accredited HEIs had the right to issue state recognized diplomas. Second, the accreditation process determined the list of eligible state and private HEIs to participate in the Unified National Admission Exam system. Third, the accreditation procedure also calculated and approved the maximum number of student intake that HEIs were eligible

to have. Fourth, only accredited HEIs were eligible to the state funding²⁰ (Law on Higher Education, 2004, Section 65, Bologna Process National Report – Georgia, 2005; NEAC, 2006). Naturally, for the HEI representatives, these conditions elevated the importance of accreditation process.

In order to understand the rationale of policy makers in introducing accreditation first and only afterwards institutionalize the QA, the importance of the anti-corruption reforms needs to be re-emphasized. As described in the Chapter 1, corruption engulfed every level of the state apparatus (Nodia, 2002, p. 420). It had penetrated every level of bureaucracy and every policy field; hence eradication of corruption was the number one priority of those in power (Kupatadze, 2012; UNDP, 2000; World Bank, 2012). In the higher education sector, corruption was flourishing in the form of small and large scale bribery (ranging from a bottle of brandy to get a desirable grade to several thousands of USD to pass university entrance exams) and nepotism (using personal ties either to be hired at the HEI or to be accepted at the HEI) in the system, institutional and individual levels. Hence, policy makers considering corruption as a number one problem and aligned their policy decisions in the HE system with their greater anti-corruption effort. In their interviews, without exception, government officials, HEI representatives and independent experts identified corruption as a main problem that the government had to fight with and perceived state accreditation as the main mechanism to address the

²⁰ State funding here is referred to the new funding scheme of ‘money follows student’ voucher system that the MES introduced with the help of the World Bank. The state released the funding to the eligible students that successfully passed the Unified National Admission Exams. The scheme is described in detail in Chapter 1.

issue. From the point of view of policy makers, launching the accreditation process as a state scrutiny was part of their larger anti-corruption effort that was viewed as a number one priority of the post-revolution government. Two key figures at the QA agency - the first and the second directors - heading the centre in 2006-09 and 2009-11 respectively, repeatedly identified corruption as a main threat to the HE system during the interviews with me. For both of them, the main purpose of the QA centre was to act as an anti-corruption device that would prevent fraudulent HEIs to enter the higher education space (R32 - PA1; R33 - PA2).

It should also be taken into account that the policy makers had understood that the window of opportunity to make drastic changes was open only for a short period. Hence, they needed to make the best use of it. Hence, the mode of making change with the accelerated effort in the short time was set as the working tone of the post-revolution government. One of the interviewees confirmed:

There was this kind of political atmosphere that things had to be done now or never. ... The state wanted to have things done as soon as possible (R10-HEI2).

In these circumstances, as the corruption was framed as a root cause of most ills of the HE system, policy makers were searching for immediate remedies to address the issue. One of the key policy makers explained that the anti-corruption measure that could be introduced in the shortest period of time was the Unified National Entrance Exams (R7 - HEI2).

After the revolution, in 2004 it was only two of us sitting in the ministry – Kakha (K.A. Lomaia, Minister of Education and Science) and me. It was decided that the unified national exams could be done the fastest. At that time there was still some

money left from the World Bank for this (initiative) and so it was decided that the exams would be introduced in two years. This was discussed with Maia Miminoshvili²¹ (head of the National Assessment and Examinations Centre) and she confirmed that this was possible (R7-HEI2).

Once this decision was made, the whole HE system that was in the making was catered around this policy initiative, including accreditation. When revisiting the reasons for carrying out (institutional) accreditation in 2004, the first head of the QA agency treated this decision as given and was content with it.

Had we not started the accreditation process in 2004, then we would not be able to launch the unified exams as planned. This process (accreditation) was entirely subordinated to the process of the unified exams (R32-PA1).

The concept behind the Unified National Entrance Exams as primarily anti-corruption solution was to take away the decision making power over the student selection from the HEIs and concentrate it with an independent administrative agency (somewhat analogous to the Education Testing Service – ETS in the USA). In this way, the main source of corruption in the HE system, which was at the HEI admissions, would be eliminated. The reason why accreditation became so urgently important in this situation was that in order to complete the process of unified exams, the ministry had to compose a list of eligible HEIs and to define their maximum capacity of the student intake. Since the statistics were unreliable and the HEIs had a poor reputation to be trusted, the institutional accreditation came as an adequate solution to resolve this issue. While anti-corruption was viewed by policy makers as a temporary purpose of the institutional accreditation, it defined the accreditation process in the next four years. Discovering fraudulent HEIs and eliminating them remained a primary purpose of the process. In

²¹ The head of the National Assessment and Examinations Center

retrospect, one of the policymakers confirmed that out of the two aims that the accreditation process was designed for, it managed to achieve only one:

[T]here were two aims. First was to decrease the number of the HEIs, [...] and this was termed as accreditation. However, there was not supposed to be the actual aim of accreditation. The real aim (of accreditation) was and for the HEIs to be able, to develop their programme and human resources base on the standards that the HEIs would develop themselves. But the latter never happened (R10-HEI2).

The former deputy minister, the first director of the NEAC, as well as the representatives of the HEIs considered that the main reason to introduce the accreditation process in the HE system in 2004, was to “put the [HE] system in some shape” (R38-PA7). As they explained, after years and years of negligence, the system had gone astray and the government did not have any real mechanisms to streamline the process, hence accreditation was the solution to this challenge (R32-PA1, R38-PA7).

In this neglected chaos, the government officials that were interviewed for this analysis, identified two main problems that accreditation was targeting. First, the HE system was overpopulated with private HEIs. According to the Head of Higher Education Harmonization and International integration Department of the MES, institutional accreditation was a remedy to this problem:

One of our big problems was the fact that the (private) HEIs were multiplying rapidly, but the quality (of teaching) in these HEIs was low. In order to somehow overcome this problem, the institutional accreditation was launched (R41-PA10).

The reason for the growing number of the private HEIs was in the dysfunctional licensing procedure that was carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science before the 2003 revolution. In the post-Soviet period in Georgia, the relaxed state

control and economic difficulties created a momentum for private education to emerge and a private higher education sector to flourish (Sharvashidze, 2005). The private sector existed in two forms. These were either fee-paying branches of the state universities or separate private institutions. The private HEIs outnumbered state HEIs. In 2004 there were 218 private and 35 state institutions (28 HEIs and 5 branches of the state universities situated outside the capital) in Georgia (NEAC, 2006). The state exercised only minimal control over private HEIs, which was through the state licensing. The Ministry of Education and Science was issuing the license as a state seal that authorized private HEIs to function and grant a state recognized diploma. The licenses were permanent and were issued based on the recommendations that were submitted to the minister of education by the licensing council that operated within the ministry of education (Law on Higher Education, 2004). This state validation procedure was another ring in a corruption chain, which led to the overpopulation of private HEIs of questionable character that were residing in the premises of secondary schools, daycare centres and even garages (NEAC, 2006). Most of the private HIEs were believed to serve as diploma mills. In absence of the effective state scrutiny, these HEIs were multiplying, contributing to the omnipresent corruption.

Second problem that the interviewees identified was that the situation in state HEIs was also alarming. With the minimal state control, the quality of teaching in these HEIs was unclear. The situation had deteriorated and corruption was flourishing. However, the extent of the damage was hard to determine with outdated statistics and no assessment tools at hand. As the former deputy minister in retrospect explained:

One of the problems that HE was facing was no state control over the (HE) institutions. There were public HEIs. There were private HEIs. Public HEIs also had the fee-paying sectors. All they had to do was to receive the state license and their quality of teaching was not assessed afterwards (R38-PA7).

Although in rather general terms, the former MES employee communicated that the policy makers were faced with the absence of basic information regarding the state of HE system:

At the first phase (of the reform), we had to find out, what existed there in the system and validate them (HEIs) in some manner and distinguish them from those that did not exist (fraudulent HEIs)(R10-HEI2).

Hence, diagnostics of the status quo of the HE system was a task in itself and policy makers saw the accreditation process as an appropriate measure to overcome this information gap. This task unarguably implied that the accreditation process was to reveal the fraudulent HEIs and remove them from the system. As a result, in the first round of accreditation, carried out in 2004-05 years, the number of institutions was reduced from 227 to 110 (NEAC 2006). The licenses were revoked for those HEIs that failed the institutional accreditation process. In the second round, by 2006-07 academic year, the number of the accredited HEIs was further decreased to the total of 43 (NEAC, 2006, 2007).

Overall, policy makers and those directly involved in the QA processes in 2004-2006, in their interviews, hold the common view that there were two main aims that accreditation process served in the post-revolution HE system in Georgia. First, it aimed to address institutional aspects of the corruption and second, it aimed to introduce common assessment criteria according to which the HE space would be systematized.

Hence, institutional accreditation was primarily introduced as a main state control mechanism which would remove the dysfunctional and fraudulent HEIs from the national higher education space and the curb creation of the new ones at the same time.

While institutional accreditation served an important purpose in the overall anti-corruption effort of the MES, the concept of the QA was introduced in the HE system primarily to meet the Bologna Process commitment. QA in the law was articulated only after the first accreditation process was announced and launched as a preceding process that would ensure the smooth implementation of the national unified entrance examinations. While this decision was made, institutional accreditation as a state assessment tool was factored in the preparation phase of the new Law on Higher Education, which was approved by the Parliament in December 2004. Simultaneously, the decision to join the Bologna Process was already made and the preliminary work with the Bologna Secretariat was underway. In this light, when in December 2004 Georgia submitted a National Report of the new member country to the Bologna Process, the ministry articulated that accreditation as a process that already existed in the system and that the new Law on HE would create legal ground for introducing the QA system. The QA system would combine internal and external quality assessment mechanisms (National Report 2005). In its 2006 annual report, newly created National Education Accreditation Centre brought the QA system together in a retrospect, specifically terming institutional accreditation as an external QA mechanism (NEAC, 2006). Moreover, in the Law as well as in the national country reports of the Bologna Process of 2005 and 2007 and the annual report of the 2006, the NEAC requirements of

the four-element model are met and clearly articulated (Law on Higher Education 2004, National Report 2005, 2007; NEAC, 2006). By and large, through the explanations and clarifications provided in these official documents, the policy makers demonstrated the institutional proximity of the HE QA system to the diffused idea of the QA as promoted by the Bologna Process.

The analysis above allows for the following findings. First, in creation of the quality assurance system, accreditation process overshadowed the idea of the QA. Consequently, accreditation became a dominant experience among implementers as well as the HEIs and for both parties it accentuated the feature of governmental control rather than improvement or accountability. Second, the governmental control in itself was influenced by the anti-corruption agenda of policy makers, thus modifying the accreditation's purpose to address anti-corruption. Hence, the choice between the two purposes of QA - accountability or improvement – was not relevant at the policy adoption phase. Third, the accreditation process was linked to the QA to fulfill one of the recommendations of the Bologna Process. This is why QA appears later in the Law of 2004, as well as subsequent documents, such as the Bologna country reports of 2005, 2007 and the annual report of the NEAC.

Based on these findings it can be concluded that, as introduced in the HE system, QA is decoupled from its declared purpose of accountability and is modeled to fit the purpose of the anti-corruption. Neither was the QA was considered as a mechanism to improve the HE system, but mainly it was introduced to accommodate the Bologna Process commitments. The discussion above also provides evidence that the structure of the QA

was catered according to the four-element model, as promoted by the Bologna Process, hence bringing together the QA system where its anti-corruption purpose is decoupled from its structural model.

In more detail, the evidence on the decoupled institutional setting of the QA is explored in the following sections where development of the quality assurance agency and internal quality assurance mechanisms in the HEIs are further discussed.

4.2.2 Creation of the QA agency

In creation of a quality assurance agency external and internal factors converged. Externally, this was conditioned by the commitments of the Bologna Process. Considerable independence of the QA agency from the state and the HEIs was articulated in the European Standards and Guidelines of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA (ENQA, 2005). In order to fulfill this obligation, the Ministry of Education and Science committed to create an independent QA agency by the year 2006. This commitment was articulated in the Law on Higher Education (Law on Higher Education 2004, Bologna Process country report, 2005). Internally, creation of the regulatory agency within the “arms’ length” of the ministry was part of the decentralization reforms that the post-revolution government was pursuing (Lomaia, 2005, see also Chapter 1 for the description of decentralization efforts). The main reason to decentralize was efficiency of the decision making and overall operation of the bureaucracy. The idea of small government with outsourced services and delegated decision-making power seemed appealing to the post-revolution

government. As a result, in 2006 National Education Accreditation Centre (NEAC) was created as a quasi-governmental agency. The main mandate of the organization was to develop and carry out institutional accreditation of the HEIs, both public and private (Ministry of Education and Science, 2006, Decree N222). Although seemingly, the conditions that were set externally with regards to the QA agency were satisfied by the creation of a separate organization, the disparity between the actual structure of the Centre and its purpose was rather visible.

One of the main requirements of the QA agency that Bologna Process had put forward was the autonomy of the organization. According to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders (ENQA, 2005, Standard 3.6).

While the NEAC was to be considered an independent organization, a close reading of the Law and respective bylaws shows that the Ministry of Education and Science did not provide organizational or decision making autonomy to the Centre. The ministry was a main actor in almost all major organizational processes at the Centre. For instance, head of the Centre was suggested by the MES for the appointment to the prime minister, but the candidate for this position was presented to the prime minister by the MES (Law on Higher Education, 2004, Section 7, d). In a similar vein, the accreditation council was created by the decree of the president, however the candidates for the council members were provided by the MES (Law on Higher Education, 2004). Most importantly, the

decision making body for the institutional accreditation, which was supposed to be an impartial body, was chaired by the deputy minister of education. The ministry approved the statute of the Centre (Law on Higher Education, 2004. Section 7, z.). Moreover, the ministry approved the statute regulating the HE accreditation process and defined the fees for the institutional and programme accreditation (Law on Higher Education, 2004, Section 7, o and v).

As it follows from the description above, the Centre was an organization that was created separately from the MES, but remained in a dependent relation with it. For the policy makers, the main purpose of the QA was the state control, and therefore the NEAC was treated as an administrative body, with the well defined anti-corruption profile, to carry out the state control. Hence, the autonomy of the QA agency, as required by the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ENQA, 2005), were compromised.

The autonomy of the NEAC was restrained even to a higher degree in its regular interaction with the MES. The boundaries between the MES and the NEAC that were set by the legal framework were blurred in reality. NEAC was considered as a part of the ministry's tools to institute a new structure of the HE. This view was shared by both policy makers as well as the first two directors of the NEAC (in the years of 2006-2010). My interviews with the policy makers and the head of the NEAC revealed that the processes of the institutional accreditation, including the set of criteria, procedure or dates, were being discussed and decided with the team effort, at the ministry, and then were handed over to the NEAC for implementation (R7-HEI2, R32-PA1). The

subordinate interaction between the NEAC and the ministry was strengthened after 2008, when the whole educational system was gradually centralized²². The HEIs as well considered the NEAC as a “messenger of the ministry” (R6-HEI1). All of the interviewed HEI representatives considered the Centre as part of the MES. They did not distinguish between the policies that were led by the MES and the policies that were led by the NEAC. There was commonly shared perception that these two actors operated in unison. In essence, as part of the HE system, NEAC was highly dependent and influenced by the Ministry of Education and Science and was not an impartial autonomous organization, but a state controller that interacted with the HEIs on behalf of the ministry.

The attempts to decrease the tension resulted from the promotion of an external model in the local context were not successful. For instance, in 2008, newly appointed head of the NEAC launched major institutional changes in order to move away from the purpose of the state control. He intended to address several issues, but the problem with the state licensing, as he explained, was the most alarming. The state licensing remained the function of the Ministry of Education and Science after the institutional accreditation was introduced in the system (discussed in Chapter 1). In practice, this meant that the institutions, which failed to undergo the accreditation process, could easily be re-established, receive a state license and operate alongside the accredited institutions. The

²² In 2011, the law was amended, according to which the first deputy minister of education and science could simultaneously head the quasi-governmental agency (Law on HE, amendment 2011). Thus, the NCEQE was officially subordinated to the MES (NCEQE, 2011).

head of the Centre was concerned that the licensing procedure enabled the HEIs of questionable quality to re-enter the higher education space:

By 2008, there were 42 accredited HEIs, but there were over 100 licensed institutions that continued student intake and were issuing state recognized diplomas (R39-PA 8).

This redundancy in the system actually suggested that the QA mechanism, as an institutional measure that was introduced to remove the fraudulent HEIs from the HE space, had not eliminated the problem entirely. Hence, the statements of the former deputy ministers, as well as of the head of the NEAC considering that one of the major achievements of the external QA was to downsize the number of the HEIs (from over 200 to 42) was not accurate or at best only partially (R32-PA1, R33-PA2, R38-PA7, R41-LExpert 1).

In order to eliminate the redundancy between institutional accreditation and licensing, the elements of both procedures were combined in a single new procedure - authorization (R39-PA 8; NCEQE, 2010). Authorization was a mandatory procedure for all HEIs to operate and grant state recognized qualification. Hence, it acted as a license to carry out educational activities, but not only for private, but also for public HEIs. Authorization also incorporated the state recognized degree granting power, which was previously attached to the institutional accreditation (Law on Quality Assurance of Education, 2010).

In addition to this major institutional re-design, other changes were also introduced. First, the subject-specific benchmarks for three regulated professions of pedagogy,

medicine and law were developed for upcoming programme accreditation. Second, authorization and programme accreditation processes were reviewed in the light of the shift from input-based assessment towards the mission-based and outcome oriented assessment. Third, the NEAC was reorganized and re-established as the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) to reflect the desire of the new management to change the organizational profile of the centre from the controller towards the quality promoter (R39-PA 8).

As much difference these changes made to the director of the Centre and those who worked with him, the HEIs did not see big difference between the institutional accreditation and the authorization processes. The main complaint of the HEI representatives towards the external QA procedure, whether it was the institutional accreditation or authorization, was excessive bureaucracy and red tape. One of the professors could not hide her frustration with the “ridiculous requirements” that were put forward in the accreditation standards and the internal QA unit of the university was demanding an unquestionable adherence to them (R43 - LExpert3). Those who were less vocal confirmed the same by pointing out that everything that the accreditation centre required of them was available on their web-site as well as in the documented minutes of their meetings at the university (R 23-HEI4). The head of the quality assurance unit in one of the HEIs stated:

Universities have learned very well how to be congruent with the documents. They meet all [state] requirements (R 12-HEI2).

At all of these instances, the evidence supports the claim that the external QA encouraged compliance rather than improvement, although the director of the centre had intended for the organization to be a supporter of the HEIs and actually believed that it was truly so.

In sum, ideally an independent QA system would be one of the guarantors of academic autonomy (Estermann et al., 2011). Except, in the Georgian context, independent NEAC maintained subordinate relations with the MES and assumed the role of a state regulatory agency. This was reproduced over the course of the following years, regardless the attempts of the policy makers to bring structure and the purpose of the NEAC closer.

Decoupling process of the QA system was strengthened by the universities' behavior. While external quality assurance promoted compliance, the HEIs reciprocated and complied. Internal quality assurance mechanisms that were developed in every public HEI played the key role in achieving this result.

4.2.3 Internal QA: an administrative add-on to the university life

The Law on Higher Education obligated public HEIs to create QA units within the institutions with the aim to regularly assess the quality of teaching, research and fostering professional development of academic personnel, and increase transparency (Law on Higher Education, 2004). In addition, these units were responsible for assisting the HEI in carrying out the self-assessment and preparing the institution for the accreditation process (Law on Higher Education, 2004). As many described in the

interviews, QA units started to organize university life and brought in the elements of accountability to the HEIs where the authority of the professors had never been questioned. The local expert, who acted as a first head of the QA unit in one of the largest state universities shared some insights from her experience where she considered the interventions of the QA unit to leave a positive mark on the university life:

When the QA units were created [in the HEIs], professors realized that someone actually reviews whatever they write. Previously, when we were writing annual reports, we had cases, that they [professors] were submitting the same document repeatedly. They were only changing the cover page. That is because there was no one to read it. QA units brought certain level of accountability (R44-Local Expert 2).

The QA units at the institutions brought an important development. An initial function of the QA units was to systematize everyday operation of the HEIs: as the QA staff discovered that there were no course syllabi available, they created templates and held workshops for the academic staff to explain its purpose and practical use. Since there was no protocol to calculate credit hours per course, this was also a job of the QA representatives (R11-HEI2, R44-LExpert 2). The chancellor of one of the state universities was quite impressed with the work that the QA unit had done in the university, but also cautiously noted that the importance of the QA was blown out of proportion:

Quality assurance so powerfully entered academic work, that it overshadowed all other institutions and took upon more functions that it was supposed to have. ... if there was a demand on the data, which did not exist in the HEI, they would start generating these data. Because there was a (state) demand to have programme syllabi and those were nonexistent, quality assurance (unit) would

create these syllabi. And at some point quality assurance unit grew into a monster, which produced everything itself (R11-HEI2).

However, HEIs had started to develop internal QA processes under the overwhelming standardization effort of the NEAC. As the collected evidence shows, policy makers continued to introduce system-wide policies that would standardize and closely regulate HEI life. Through the standards and criteria of the institutional accreditation, the academic offerings were to be comparable within the country as well as outside. Thus, the academic life was reorganized according to the three-cycles; programme offerings were calculated in credit/hours, according to the ECTS; in curriculum development the focus was made on learning outcomes. Importantly, these standardized efforts were all articulated in the accreditation criteria and the HEIs were assessed accordingly. The criteria of institutional accreditation were detailed and prescriptive, such as number of computers in the HEI according to their student body, or the define faculty-student ratio, defined space in sq. meters per student, and alike (p. 32, NEAC 2006). These criteria applied to all HEIs, regardless of their profile, whether it was medical institution, social sciences or polytechnics.

Since the institutional accreditation and later, authorization were mandatory procedures for the state HEIs, which was directly linked to the financial sustainability of the HEIs, state HEIs standardized their academic lives. Under these circumstances, the QA units in the HEIs were considered as the focal points of university-level standardization. These units acted as the NEAC's policy enforcement units in the HEIs and the faculty treated their requirements with reluctance. One of the faculty members of the Batumi State University pointed out that the QA units were hardly incorporated in

the HEI organizational culture. “Quality assurance unit has become a unit on its own, detached from the faculty” (R 27- HEI5). The head of quality assurance unit at Tbilisi State University further reinforced this point: “Higher education institutions and quality assurance units exist in parallel dimensions” (R 6-HEI1).

During the field work, both HEI faculty and the QA staff repeatedly voiced the mutual frustration with each other. The academic staff was unhappy and even felt offended with the fact that a newly created unit in the university demanded they change the ways they have taught previously. The demands that the QA units had set before them were intrusive and the professors mostly ignored them. At the same time, the QA unit representatives felt empowered with the mandate that the law had granted them and quite enthusiastically believing that the QA role was the most crucial at that point of the university’s life expected that their efforts would be understood, welcomed and valued. When several pioneers of the ‘QA movement’ during the reforms recalled their first encounter with the academic personnel they could not hide their frustration.

...I very well remember the speech of one of the well-known professors on the TV show, when he exclaimed that he would not let anyone teach him what to do (HE Expert 2).

One of the first heads of the QA unit at the Tbilisi State University recalled:

...professors kept ignoring me; told me they had no idea there was a meeting that no one had told them about it. I explained – “but I had sent you an email, I have posted the notification on the board.” But no, he needed a personal call, and then he might’ve showed up! (R41, LExpert1).

This pattern of asymmetric interaction created by the resistance from the HEI faculty and the expectations of the QA units to be embraced by the HEIs prevented the internal

QA mechanisms to assist HEIs in development and prevented the QA units from becoming a generic part of the HEIs. With very few exceptions, the new organizational unit of quality assurance never became a part of the university but remained an administrative add-on to the university life.

Throughout the years, the internal QA had a function of a systematizer, organizer of an academic as well as the administrative parts of the university life. It was created as a reaction to the external QA and as a main counterpart of the externally imposed prescriptive mechanism, QA staff were perceived as the agents of compliance.

Conclusion: Locally decoupled QA system

This chapter explored the rationale of the policy makers behind the choice of introducing the QA mechanisms in the Georgian HE system. The evidence allows us to draw a conclusion that policy makers chose to introduce the Bologna-promoted QA model in the HE system for the political reasons to gain legitimacy at the European level. In accordance with the world society theory argument, this type of policy adoption caused a symbolic change only and resulted in a locally decoupled QA system. The decoupling was manifested in several instances.

First, at the system level, for the policy makers internal challenges of the HE had a high priority. The post-revolution government saw omnipresent corruption in the HE system as a primary enemy of the system's development. Hence, most of its political and policy efforts were directed against corruption or towards prevention of the future possibilities of corrupt actions. Corruption as the number one problem of the system overshadowed

other policy concerns. For this very reason, in creation of the quality assurance system, accreditation process, as a tool to address systemic corruption, overshadowed the idea of the QA. Consequently, the choice between the two Bologna-promoted purposes of QA - accountability or improvement – was not relevant at the policy adoption phase. Second, at the organizational level, when the QA agency was created, it absorbed the anti-corruption function and the main purpose of state control. The NEAC was highly dependent and influenced by the Ministry of Education and Science, and it was not an impartial autonomous agency, but a state controller that interacted with the HEIs on behalf of the ministry. Third, at the HEI level, internal QA assurance was institutionalized as a mirror image of the external QA, encouraging compliance.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that, as QA was introduced into the HE system, it was decoupled from the Bologna-promoted QA model and modeled to fit the purpose of the anti-corruption policy agenda. In the next chapter, the case of university autonomy is analyzed in the same manner to answer the same research question: *why did the post-revolution government adopt the Bologna-inspired reforms to transform Georgian HE system?*

5 UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY: CENTRALIZED DECENTRALIZATION

Introduction

As elaborated at the beginning, the main argument this thesis puts forth is that in the post-revolution Georgia, the policy makers adopted the Bologna-inspired reforms in order to gain legitimacy at the global educational arena. As showcased in Chapter 1, transnational policy solutions largely focus on the institutional changes within the HE system. However, this research argues that institutions that are adopted from foreign models often become locally decoupled. In case of Georgia, transnationally developed institutions adopted in the area of HE policy, only mimic the Bologna-promoted models with their similar structures at the setup. When examined closer, however, the institutions serve different purposes in the local context. Hence, the institutional transformation in Georgia could only symbolically improve the HE system. Using the example of *university autonomy* this chapter aims to answer the first research question *why did the post-revolution government adopt the Bologna-inspired reforms to transform Georgian HE system?* Hence, this analysis aims to broaden the understanding of the rationale behind the policy makers' decision to introduce university autonomy to the Georgian HE system.

Analogous to the previous chapter dedicated to analyzing decoupled institutions of the quality assurance reforms, this analysis also covers the first six years of the HE reforms in the country (2004- 2010). The analytical framework is derived from the Sociological Neo-institutionalism, particularly, the world society theory that argues that the states

decide to transfer the transnationally promoted models of education domestically in order to seek legitimacy at the global educational arena. While doing so, the states overlook whether these transnational educational models match/suit the local context (Drori et al., 2006; Meyer et al., 1997). Following the line of argument of the world society theory, Georgia as a state at the Europe's periphery, would choose to join Bologna Process in order to gain legitimacy at the European higher education arena. The quest for legitimacy does not necessarily aim to address the issues that exist domestically in higher education, but intends to create a framework that is easily recognizable to and acknowledged by the Western European actors. Consequently, the Georgian HE system would create educational institutions in accordance with the Bologna Process objectives, thus creating locally decoupled institutions, which only symbolically meet the external expectations, but serve a different purpose domestically (Meyer, 1997).

The evidence collected with regard to university autonomy confirms the conclusions that were reached in the previous chapter on the analysis of the QA reform. Namely, the reforms dedicated to the introduction of university autonomy produced decoupled institutions. The evidence suggests that the structural elements of the university autonomy framework were aligned with the Bologna-promoted model of autonomy. However, the purpose of the autonomy in the HE system in Georgia does not fit with the original purpose of 'impartiality with accountability' promoted by the Bologna Process. Rather, it was catered to the decentralization policy agenda of the post-revolution government. Therefore, the analysis of the university autonomy strengthens the

argument that the post-revolution government of Georgia, reformed the HE system according to the Bologna models in order to gain external legitimacy in the EHEA, hence leading to the creation of a decoupled HE system.

In order to assess whether university autonomy was decoupled, first, the analysis compares the main purpose of university autonomy in Georgia with that promoted by the Bologna Process. Second, based on the EUA University Autonomy Tool, the three-dimensional autonomy model is developed and the structure of the university autonomy in Georgia is compared to it. The first section of this chapter examines the purpose and the structure of the university autonomy. The second section explores the rationale behind the institutionalization of the university autonomy in the HE system of Georgia. This section is divided into three sub-sections discussing organizational autonomy, academic autonomy and financial autonomy respectively. The final section brings the main findings with regard to the university autonomy together.

5.1 UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY – CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is no one precise definition or understanding of university autonomy. However, scholars unanimously treat university autonomy as an ultimate principle of the HE governance and acknowledge that the university autonomy is multidimensional and this is maintained in all of its interpretations (see Bladh, 2007; Henkel, 2007; Neave, 2006). The EUA shies away from providing a definition, but describes university autonomy as the relation between the state and the HEIs and the degree of control that the state exercises towards the HEIs (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009; Estermann et al., 2011). At

the policy level, with the rise of importance of the Bologna Process the attention grew to the university autonomy within the signatory countries. Within the EHEA, work of the European University Association also gained prominence. EUA joined the Bologna Process in 2001 as a consultative member (Prague Communiqué, 2001) and put the university autonomy at the policy agenda at the earlier stage of development of the Bologna Process. More importantly, over the course of the years, the association has developed the *university autonomy tool* that identifies four main dimensions of autonomy. The tool takes into account the multiple voices that discuss university autonomy and reconciles them in main elements of each dimension in a coherent manner. These four dimensions are: organizational autonomy, financial autonomy, staffing autonomy, academic autonomy (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009, Estermann et al., 2011). Combination of these dimensions comprehensively describes the relation between the state and the HEIs and the degree of control that the state exercises towards the HEIs.

This analysis is based on the dimensions of the University Autonomy Tool of the EUA. However, preliminary analysis of the Law on Higher Education of Georgia did not allow applying all four dimensions to the Georgian case. In the Law, organizational autonomy is substantially presented as the main state priority (Law on Higher Education 2004, Article 2, Section b), and less attention is paid to the academic and financial autonomy. However, staffing autonomy, which is a separate dimension of the University Autonomy Tool is hardly addressed in the Law. In order to address this empirical complication, elements of the staffing autonomy were integrated with the organizational autonomy

hence treating the prior as an important, but a composite part of the latter. As a result, the analysis is based on three dimensions of the university that are defined in accordance to the University Autonomy Tool. The *organizational autonomy* refers to the ability and the authority of a HEI to determine its own goals, appoint its governing body, choose and employ its faculty and staff (Estermann et al., 2011). The *financial autonomy* refers to the capacity of the HEI to acquire and allocate funding, to set tuition fees, and to own and manage buildings/infrastructure (Estermann et al., 2011). Academic autonomy is also defined according to the EUA, *academic autonomy* is a capacity to define the academic profile, to introduce degree programmes, to define the structure and content of degree programmes, (...) and the extent of control over student admissions (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009, p. 32). In the next section three dimensions of the university autonomy are analyzed to understand what were the reasons behind the policy makers' decision to provide university autonomy and what was the outcome.

5.2 UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY AS PART OF THE HE SYSTEM DECENTRALIZATION

In this section, the process of introducing the university autonomy in the HE system in the first six years of the reform is overviewed. The main purpose of the university autonomy in the system is discussed and the structural elements of the university autonomy - identified. In this manner, it is assessed whether the university autonomy as an institution is decoupled. Also, the reasons of the policy makers to introduce the concept and policies with regard to the university autonomy are explored in order to

establish whether the university autonomy was introduced for the educational or legitimacy reasons.

Throughout the reforms, university autonomy was never perceived as an important dimension. It was part of decentralization reforms of the government. In its turn, decentralization fell under the reforms of good governance and combined the neoliberal sentiments about autonomous actorhood with the practical considerations of the government to decrease the financial burden of the state and to increase the responsibility of the state institutions in certain areas. In line with their neoliberal convictions, for the post-revolution government, HE was one of the policy areas that was to reside outside the state realm. This was confirmed by one of the policy makers when he was explaining the rationale behind their actions:

Ultimately, the aim was for the higher education to become self-regulated policy domain. (R10-HEI2)

In this light, below main developments with regard to three dimensions of autonomy are overviewed. During the field work it was challenging to purposes of three dimensions separately. Instead, firstly the purpose of the university autonomy as of a generic principle of HE governance was explored. Secondly, the perceptions of the policy makers concerning separate dimensions of the university autonomy were collected and analyzed how much they were aligned with the articulated purpose of university autonomy. Further, main elements of the structure of each dimension were assessed. The sets of variables for each dimension of the autonomy developed by the EUA in the University Autonomy Tool was used to guide the assessment. However, these indicators

were not strictly applied to the analysis as measuring the level of university autonomy falls beyond the scope of this analysis.

Similarly to the analysis of the QA system in the Chapter 4, the launching point of this analysis is the Law on Higher Education of Georgia that was adopted in 2004. Findings in the Law are supplemented with the secondary literature on the higher education reforms in Georgia. These mainly represent the reports and the analysis of the international and transnational organizations, such as UNDP, World Bank and USAID. Interviews help to shed the light on the rationale that the policy makers had when putting together the reform regarding the university autonomy.

5.2.1 Organizational Autonomy: decentralization under supervision

Organizational autonomy is part of the autonomy definition in the Law of Higher Education. “Autonomy – freedom of the HEI and its main units to independently decide and implement its academic, financial and economic, and administrative activities” (Law on Higher Education 2004, Article 2, Section b). Thus the Law provided the freedom for HEIs to carry out administrative activities. Further, the Law provided building principles for the HEI to function as an independent body. It introduced principles of HEI governance with the separated academic and administrative functions and established separate decision making bodies, the academic council and a senate, respectively. The law instituted a rector as an elective figure and ensured student involvement in university governance (Law on Higher Education, 2004). The Law’s content thus fully repeating the building elements of organizational autonomy proposed

by the Bologna Process and reinforced by the EUA reports (Haug & Tauch, 2001; Reichert & Tauch, 2003).

This perception was also strengthened by the positive assessment of the international actors, such as UNDP that singled out changes in the university governance as a successful example of educational reforms to fit the purpose of democratization.

The supreme decision-making bodies of the universities, the Academic and Representative Councils are elected by all professors on the basis of direct and equal elections. One third of the members of the Representative Council are students. The University Strategic Plan, curricula, principles of selection of academic personnel and other academic and administrative issues are made openly by the elected representatives. Like the Board of Trustees, this is intended to help democratize university life (UNDP, 2008, p. 43).

Thus, we can conclude that the structure for organizational autonomy of the HEIs, as promoted by the Bologna Process, was provided to the HEIs by the law.

However, the structural components of the organizational autonomy were not necessarily linked to the purpose of the organizational autonomy, even though it is affirmed in the UNDP quote, provided above. Although the law established the HEIs as autonomous governing actors, at the same time, it provided a rigid legal framework that had to guide this autonomous action. The organizational set up, division of functions between decision making bodies, quota for the student representation in the decision making bodies, the election rules of decision making bodies and an executive head (rector) were defined in the law to the point of procedural nuances. In other words, there was a contradiction between the statement about the organizational autonomy of the HEI and the level of detail to which the same autonomy was regulated.

A good example of this contradictory set-up is the provisions that guide the rector's elections. For instance, the sub-section 2 of the Section 22 reads: "academic council elects the rector with secret ballot, with the majority of vote with the term that is defined by the statute of the HEI that should not exceed the term of the council itself." (Law on Higher Education, 2004, Chapter 4, Section 22, sub-section 2). Sub-section 3 goes into greater detail: "the academic council announces the call for applications no later than 1 month before the registration and no later than 3 months before the elections ... carried out in accordance to the principles of transparency, impartiality and competition" (Law on Higher Education, 2004, Chapter 4, Section 22, sub-section 3). 4th sub-section defines that a candidate can serve only for two terms and 5th sub-section defines circumstances under which the head of administration can be elected as a rector. 6th sub-section establishes that the academic council has to assess the action plan that the candidate will present. Overall, the state has granted the autonomy to the HEIs, but at the same time, it maintained the leverage by centrally defining the main elements, participants, type of documents, dates, circumstances of the elections. These provisions in the Law affected the state HEIs thus taking the possibility to exercise self-governance away from the HEIs. This faculty member could not hide the concern that detailed provisions in the Law only changed the organizational makeover of the HEIs, however took away the leverage from the HEIs and maintained the centralized command.

Adoption of a very detailed higher education law, which defines how the dean should be elected, what should be the framework of the faculty [academic department], etc. ... this is a major issue! First of all, it constrains the autonomy of the university. But secondly, it constrains the capacity of participation in the

decision making [in the HEI]. Even if these are centralized [at the HEI level] decisions (R3-HEI1).

In this manner, the possibility for the HEIs to learn the independent decision-making, hence exercise their autonomy, was lost. Another respondent, the head of the QA unit of one of the HEIs shared the sentiment regarding inflexibility of the HEI governance system. She understood that the ministry had a preventive approach in the system-building and catered their policy decisions for the corrupted actors and free-riders to benefit from it:

You know how it is? They have taken the worst-case scenario of how the HEI can act and avoid things. And then they have designed [the system] so that this [kind of action] becomes impossible (R12-HEI2).

To a great extent, these perceptions were accurate. As it is discussed below, the policy makers were driven by two main reasons in their approach to provide organizational autonomy to the HEIs, which I term as *decentralization under supervision*. Organizational autonomy reforms fell under the government's rhetoric to create small and efficient government through de-regulation and decentralization. Along the lines of the neoliberal aspirations, new government meant to promote competitive environment where self-governing autonomous actors would strive for the recourses that were made available by the state or private actors²³. Thus, reorganization of the state HEIs were a product of decentralization of the HE system.

The head of the law department at the Ministry of Education and Science (of 2004) was well aware that the HE system that they had put together in 2004 did not leave much

²³ More fully public service reforms are discussed in the Chapter 1.

room for independent action. She very clearly explained the aspirations and the rationale of the policy making team's decision to decentralize under supervision:

The system that was designed was quite rigid and applied to all universities. ... We had to create a system that had never existed before. Professors did not have enough information on how universities were governed abroad. ... In absence of previous experience of [and awareness with regard to] the civic responsibility, there was a fear, that [HEIs] would not be able to bear this responsibility, unless the law regulated the process of the reform implementation. (R42 - PA11)

During the initial policy design phase, policy makers faced the dilemma that neither democratic institutions nor democratic action were in place, thus they decided to introduce the democratic institutions but accompany those with the authoritative means to 'educate' HE community. This confirms the finding of the QA system analysis that the new government was well aware that the window of opportunity for the system's transformation was open for only limited amount of time. Therefore, many of the principles that the policy makers found necessary for the system to develop in a healthy manner, were overshadowed by the practical circumstances of the time brevity. Former minister of education (in the office in February-December, 2009) did not find it surprising that the principle of autonomy was compromised.

Autonomy was not a priority in the first years of the reform. On the contrary, it was suspended, because the priority was to transform the system in a short time. (R37-PA6)

This reason was coupled with a great mistrust of the policy makers in the capacity of the HEI community for positive development. This was well manifested in the 'problem of rectors', as most of the interviewed policy makers referred to it. As one of the main figures at the after-revolution ministry of education explained, pre-revolution HE

system had an unresolved problem of the state university rectors. They had privileged position in the HE system and governed the HEIs according to their private interests. The rectors were under the personal patronage of the President Shevardnadze (in the office from 1995 to 2003). Over the course of the years the state HEIs became closed systems that did not practice any accountability measures towards state (or wider public for that matter). It was believed that they were involved in various corruption schemes even going beyond long practiced admission favors. Often told example was about using university-owned premises to operate business enterprises that were owned by their families. Several attempts to curb their authority in late 90's and in the beginning of 2000's suffered fiasco. In a retrospect, the stagnation of the several reform packages facilitated by the World Bank or USAID were explained through the ever-growing power of the rectors that repeatedly sabotaged those decisions of the ministry of education that somehow endangered their interests. For instance, the same respondent recalled that the unified national entrance exams were actually planned in 2000, but were never realized because of the opposition of the rectors (R7-HEI2).

The power flux after 2003 revolution created the window of opportunity to confront the rectors. One of the policy makers clarified:

Well, what was our aim? The universities were closed systems, but they were to become the kind of systems that would not allow for the internal conflicts to emerge. I mean, the conflict would not implode but explode. And it worked. Separation of the management system into the rector and the head of administration – this worked. Everybody knows everything. (R7-HEI2)

The problem of corrupt rectors was framed as political threat to the legitimacy of the new government thus to the political stability of the country. In the interviews policy

making team members described that the rectors' had created political hubs in their HEIs and could manipulate the student body against the government. Therefore, it was important to remove the political underpinning from the HEI. As the former minister termed it, the HEIs needed to be free from the ideology and this was accomplished by the new government 7-HEI2).

Put in other words, at the system level the awareness of what was happening within the universities and therefore, what were the cross-cutting challenges of the HE system as a whole, did not exist before the revolution. Number one problem that was identified by the policy makers was to shake this 'feudal dominions' of the rectors and subsequently, turn the HEIs into manageable units.

In summary, decentralization with supervision was justified because of the time brevity and institutional fragility of the newly built system. What can also be lured out from these discussions above is that with the rhetoric of autonomy, post-revolution government curbed the independence of the state universities. By instituting rigid regulations of autonomous action, indirectly the Ministry of Education and Science gained the authority over the state HEIs, which it did not have before the revolution. While emulating to the neoliberal script, policy makers feared to lose gained control over the HEIs, which became possible during the institutional flux brought by the revolution.

The mistrust in the HEI community not to abuse the decentralized system remained high even after dismissal of the corrupt rectors and after introduction of the rigid

regulatory framework. Already during the transition phase, both ministry as well as the HEIs compromised the principles of the organizational autonomy.

Local expert that was involved in the reorganization of one of the state universities pointed out that legal framework and the reality in the HEIs were decoupled.

De Jure you have everything (in order). Councils hold meetings. They raise hands (vote). someone's for and someone's against. You have all documented in minutes... but (...) on paper everything is fine, but the reality is different. (R44-LExpert 2)

The election process had been repeatedly contested by involvement of the MES. In 2005, the state HEIs had to start reorganization process according to the provisions in the new Law, which stipulated that by 2007 all the state HEIs had to reorganize according to the provisions in the Law, create representative decision-making bodies and elect the rector (Law on Higher Education 2004, Chapter 14). In the process, those rectors that held the positions before the revolution, were dismissed and the Minister of Education and Science appointed interim rectors. Within one month after the appointments, first elections took place. In all five state universities, included in this analysis interim rectors were the only candidates to the position of an executive head of the HEI and subsequently, were elected by the academic council. Therefore, in contrast to the former deputy minister's statement that the rector's elections increased the autonomy of the universities (R38-PA7), HEI representatives thought otherwise. One of the policy makers and currently, the faculty member of a state university shared his observations that what was provided by the law, was overridden by the government itself.

The rectors of the universities are (meant to be) elective bodies. In reality, state still partakes in it. For instance at Georgian Technical University (as well in others). Therefore, (HEIs) are not actually independent. They depend on 1. funding, 2. political weather, 3. rectors that are (at first) appointed (by the ministry) – later get elected (by the academic council) ...the process is not political but is influenced by the politicians. For instance, last year, to fire one rector (provides the name) met high resistance, because he had a strong lobby (from the politicians). (R10-HEI2)

The same perception is confirmed in different ways by the representatives of other HEIs. The expectation that the state would informally intervene and override the legislative framework that it had instituted was confirmed for many.

It matters not whether de jure (the HEIs) are autonomous. The rector is not elected by the university. (R3-HEI1)

One of the local experts that was actively involved in the reforms was not hiding her disappointment with the way the processes were developing.

The rectors were appointed, still. (and those that were appointed) were then ‘elected’. And these (appointed rectors) were the only candidates in all of the state HEIs, except the technical university. There were two. So, what autonomy are you talking about? (R44-LExpert2)

It was believed that these dismissals or new appointments were not initiated from within the universities, but from the outside. This created mistrust among the faculty as well as the representatives of non-governmental sector towards the ministry’s genuine intentions to decentralize the higher education system and ‘set the universities free’ (R7-HEI 2, R43-LExpert 1, R44-LExpert2). In essence, the fact that government compromised the principles that were instituted by the government itself, compromised the building blocks of organizational autonomy and university autonomy in general.

Rectors' elections are not the only point that can be challenged in the reforms of the organizational autonomy. As mentioned in the section earlier, the division of functions within the HEI in the academic and administrative one was devised to address the possible problem of accumulating the power in the hands of the rector. However, this separation of functions was also short lived. Local expert shared the developments of late 2009:

Take for instance the news of the last 4 days regarding the stolen books at the university. They are fighting the rector with the argument that he 'stole' these books and that procurement procedures were also breached. Sorry, but in the law the functions of the head of administration and the rector are separated. All these financial and procurement issues are in the domain of the head of administration. Then, why are you using these issues against the rector? It seems that in the society, in media, among the law enforcers, this division of the functions that is present in the Law (on HE), does not exist. Well, that is because in reality, these functions were never divided. The head of administration was envisioned to be at the same level as the rector. But now, it is still the rector that is at the top of the strict hierarchy. Thus, of course it is the rector that is held responsible! (R44-LExpert2)

The comment of the interviewee points to the discrepancy between the legal framework and implementation. She showcased how fragile institutional setting became a futile ground for the misinterpretations of the division of power within the HEI. The distinction needs to be made here that the discussion above referred to the state intrusion at the top level decision making processes. This once again confirms the rationale of the policy makers to decentralize with supervision, whether it was formal or informal.

The intrusion was less at the lower levels of the HEI hierarchy and the HEIs had more room to exercise their autonomy in designing staff employment policies. This area was

an exception to the overregulation discussed above. The provisions in the law in this regard were limited to the statement that the public universities are free to employ their own staff and develop their own personnel policy (Law on Higher Education 2004, Section 1). This general statement allowed for some flexibility and gave way to the bottom up actions as opposed to the dominantly practiced top down approach of the reform. This provision envisioned large-scale reorganization in the HEIs and aimed to introduce an element of competition within the academic community (R1-HEI 1; R38 - PA7). However, by the time when the provision was introduced, the ministry had a vague idea of how to actually proceed with the changes in HEIs. The idea of competition was crystallized by the representatives of one of the universities.

The competition was first introduced at two faculties, mine (IR) and the Law. When we met with the ministry, they did not have a clear idea of what was meant under the open competition. ... When they saw what was happening on our faculty, they decided to introduce the same process across the HEIs (R2-HEI2).

Consequently, the ministry standardized this practice across the HEIs and academic staff was hired on a contractual basis, which is revisited every three years. This change was assessed positively by the policy makers as the first attempt to design objective selection criteria and fair conditions within the HEIs (R43-LExpert 1; R8-HEI 2; R15-HEI 3). According to the proponents of the employment policy reforms, introduction of these principles were necessary to shake the status quo of the prominent professors that were employed for life tenure, but were not active in research and in most instances, their teaching quality was also low. It was also assumed that these changes would curve the way up the academic career ladder to the young researchers that were either kept out of the system or were in the HEI but were in a disadvantaged positions (R2-HEI2).

However, it has to be mentioned that the ministry's decision to standardize employment processes as well confirms the initial finding that the policy sought for the efficient policy solutions to avoid deviations and gain time.

Moreover, for the academic community, changes in the employment policies brought the feeling of instability and disregard. The concerns were also raised that these competitive environment threatened academic morale and depleted social cohesion of the academic community. One of the local experts, being herself a faculty member found this situation extremely disturbing:

In our case (case of the faculty), it turned out that it is the administration that is running the show. It hires academic personnel for three years and they should comply with whatever it (administration) desires and command. Therefore, there is no institutional ownership, social cohesion, ethical standards... academic community no longer functions. The institution is in ruins. This is just a building. I mean that the HEIs are just buildings that is inhabited by the state-hired bureaucracy. And this bureaucracy in turn hires academic personnel so that I, for instance could teach psychology. (R45-LExpert3)

The inclination toward increased regulation of the HEIs were apparent in the interviews. Former deputy minister explained that if there were certain deviations in the newly created higher education system, those were usually addressed by issuance of additional decrees (R42-PA11). Former head of the national quality assurance agency justified central government's close supervision of the HEIs with a sentiment that if guidance is not provided by the state, then the universities look like 'abandoned children' (R33-PA2).

This view of the former head of the QA agency was reinforced by the inertness and compliance of the most HEIs. As discussed earlier (pp.13-14) governing bodies never

actually became decision-making units at the universities. The division of power hardly materialized and the university remained an oligarchy where the authority of the rector was supreme. With constant intrusion of the MES in the election processes of rectors in the state universities the illusion among the HEI representatives that the state actually intended to withdraw vanished. HEIS adhered to the centralized rule of the MES. Local expert noted that the HEIs do not exercise their autonomy and compromise their primary mission of being a space of critical thinking.

I have not seen yet the HEI that would criticize a single statement of the ministry. ... 6 years have passed since 2004 - none! Now, I am posting a question: in which country, where the HEIs are granted autonomy and ... the state puts effort in the development of its academic potential - the HEIs remain silent? (R45-LExpert3).

In essence, the HE system was established with the formally decentralized HEI structure that lacked organizational autonomy. Taking policy makers formulated the legislative framework in a preventative manner to avoid errors in the fragile system at the expense of actual organizational autonomy.

To summarize, the organizational autonomy is locally decoupled as its main purpose was to breach the oligarchy of the rectors in the state HEIs. This was accomplished with decentralization of the HEI's organizational structure. Hence, the purpose of the organizational autonomy did not match the Bologna Process prototype. However, the main structural elements of the organizational autonomy were present in the system. As in the instance of the QA, when transnational pressure was accommodated by labeling the anti-corruption mechanism of the accreditation as the QA; in case of the university autonomy, decentralization mechanisms were labeled as (organizational) autonomy. For

the policy makers, decentralization was a measure to minimize the risk of accumulating the power in the rector's hands. Therefore, it was not the autonomy, but the closely supervised decentralization of the university life.

Overall, the decentralization efforts in the HE system and the reorganization processes that took place within the HEIs are overly emphasized in the reform. Efforts of institutional design overshadow considerations of the policy makers in comparison to the academic or financial autonomy. As a result, other dimensions of the university autonomy are less elaborate in the higher education law, especially academic autonomy.

5.2.2 Academic Autonomy

In this section attention is paid to the ability of the HEI to manage its own academic content and their capacity to decide on number of students and the admission criteria (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009; Estermann et al., 2011). In the higher education law of 2004, a definition of university autonomy combined the elements of academic autonomy together with organizational and financial autonomy. According to the law, the state ensured “freedom of an HEI to determine independently its strategy, methodology and contents of teaching and research” (Law on Higher Education 2004, Section 1). This statement did not include the student admission, introduction of academic programmes and language of instruction, which are part of the EUA's definition of academic autonomy (Estermann et al., 2011). However, only very few respondents considered any of these last three components as part of the academic freedom. Therefore, with very few exceptions, respondents were convinced that

academic freedom was insured by the state. For instance, one of the policy makers considered that since the HEIs could manage their own teaching plans, it already provided considerable academic autonomy to the institution.

If we look into the law of Soviet times, it will become clear that the academic [teaching] plan was developed by the ministry. Now this is no longer the case. The ministry set the universities free (R7-HEI2).

Here as well, the argument of the interviewee is framed within the framework of decentralization policy. The decision that the ministry was no longer in control of the academic plans of the HEIs was a step forward in the decentralization process. The discussion with the policy makers did not go further than this regarding the academic autonomy as they considered it premature to be concerned with this matter at the point of system transformation. In other words, at first, the system had to be created and only afterwards the matters of academic autonomy could be addressed. Policy makers were disproportionately concerned with and focused on the institutional problems of the HE system. As discussed in the previous section, problems such as corrupt rectors were considered of the high priority thus the need to build a transparent, efficient and accountable HE system was also emphasized. This was complimented by the extremely poor conditions within the HEIs. The academic programmes lacked structure, the courses were redundant, programme offerings were outdated and many of the programmes simply had no counterpart on the international education space. As respondents explained, the academic offerings were catered to the individual professors, their availability and expertise which, to the least, compromised coherence of the academic programmes (R44-LExpert 2; R1-HEI1; R5-HEI1). Faced with this challenge,

policy makers deemed most important to bring coherence to the academic life. One of the policy makers shared his assessment of the situation in the HEIs by 2004:

It was not important for the universities how teaching or research was developing within the institution. In fact, state also did not demand much. Thus, no one asked for, for instance course content. Secondly, it was vague, how learning was recognized. There was no measure of it. Although I think that the number of credits is a superficial measure to grant a degree, it is still better than nothing. One department claimed one thing and the other one claimed completely different. (R10-HEI2)

Policy solution to address the issues of poor education quality was creation of the quality assurance system. In the Chapter 4, the rationale behind the QA system reforms is explained in detail. Nevertheless, several points need to be re-emphasized. QA system in Georgia was set up according to the basic recommendations of ENQA. External QA was provided by the independent body – NEAC, the QA process was guided by the QA criteria, HEIs' self-assessment as well as the peer-review was based on these criteria. Finally, HEIs began to develop internal QA processes. Ideally, independent QA system would be one of the guarantors of the academic autonomy (Estermann et al., 2011). Except, in the Georgian context, independent NEAC maintained subordinate relations with the MES and assumed the role of a state regulatory agency. As the collected evidence shows, policy makers continued to introduce system-wide policies that would standardize and closely regulate HEI life. Quality assurance system became a tool to create a level playing field among the HEIs. One of the former deputy ministers explained that through QA it became possible to move from the outdated teaching practice to the student-centered learning.

The primary aim (of the QA) is to reorganize teaching planning process. So that the student's work load and the professor's work load were somehow balanced in the course. Creation of internal QA units improved teaching processes in the HEIs. i.e. what should be the number of credits for a course? how should the (course) components be distributed? – these all are controlled by the QA (R38 - PA 7).

Through the standards and criteria of the institutional accreditation, the policy makers aimed to create the situation where academic programmes would be comparable within the country as well as outside. In order to standardize, the policy makers used the standardization tools of the Bologna Process. Thus, the academic life was reorganized according to the three-cycles; programme offerings were calculated in credit/hours, in accordance to the European Credit Transfer System; in curriculum development the focus was made on learning outcomes. These tools were articulated in the accreditation criteria and the HEIs were assessed according to their conformance to those. In this manner, QA system as a state standardization tool, suspended academic autonomy.

As it was already discussed in Chapter 4, internal quality assurance units at the HEIs acted as enforcement units of the National Education Accreditation Centre (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.). The law on higher education obliged public HEIs to create QA units within the institutions. According to the law, QA units aimed to regularly assess the quality of teaching, research and foster professional development of academic personnel. QA units also had to increase transparency of the HEI's operations. In addition, these units were to assist the HEI in self-assessment process and prepare it for the external review (Law on Higher Education, 2004). As many describe in their interviews, QA units started to organize the university life and brought in the elements of accountability to the HEIs where the authority of the professors were never

questioned. Local expert that acted as a first head of the QA unit in one of the largest state universities shared some insights from her experience where she considered the interventions of the QA unit to leave a positive mark on the university life:

When the QA units (in the HEIs) were created, professors realized that someone actually reviews whatever they write. Previously, when we were writing annual reports, we had cases, that they (professors) were submitting the same document repeatedly. They were only changing the cover page. That's because there was no one to read it. QA units brought certain level of accountability (R44-LExpert 2).

On the downside of it, together with certain level of organization and certainty, QA units encouraged conformance. As explained in the Chapter 4, institutional accreditation and later, authorization were mandatory procedures for the state HEIs to gain degree awarding power and be eligible for the state grant for the student voucher. Most of the state HEIs, to minimize the level of deviation from these state requirements standardized most of the academic life. For instance, in most of the state HEIs, the outline of the syllabus were standardized across the HEI. So were the assessment methods; for instance, in one of the HEIs all midterm evaluations were carried out through centralized mid-term tests (R43-LExpert 1). Hence, standardization of the academic life became perverse. First, the ministry was prone to overregulated academic life and secondly, HEIs tend to apply more rigid requirements internally.

Growing centralization and constant intrusion of the government, particularly of the Ministry of Education and Science in the HEI's life aggravated the few but vocal members of the academic community, which took these actions of the government as an offence on the academic freedom. For instance, a local expert and a long-term faculty of one of the state universities considered it unacceptable that state has stripped HEIs

from its autonomous rights and viewed it as the main offence on the ultimate mission of the university as a knowledge generator.

The (system is being) centralized not because there is no (human) recourse that (would take responsibility for autonomous action), but for the university as a space for critical thinking to seize to exist! ... The government should stop intervening in the university! It should not think that if the university has a critical perspective towards the government that thus universities are the spaces that compromise their political rule (R45 – LExpert 3).

Although other respondents did not express themselves so dramatically, majority of them viewed negatively standardization of the academic life and considered them often irrelevant (R2-HEI1; R12-HEI2; R31-HEI5).

Another component of the academic autonomy is the HEI's ability to decide upon the number of students and on selection criteria of students. The first has important implications for the HEI's profile and finances. The second contributes to ensuring quality and matching student interest with the programmes offered (Estermann et al., 2011). In the both instances, HEIs' decision making power is close to nonexistent.

Previously, the decision over student's admission resided with the HEIs. However, in 2004 it was taken away from the HEIs as the main source of corruption and was substituted by a unified national entrance examination. As described in Chapter 1 in full, the admissions process was managed by the National Examination Centre. Based on three exams, the centre determined the level of success of the prospective students and granted student vouchers according to the 100%, 70% and 50% success scale. Students that had succeeded in the national entrance exams could choose from the number of preferable educational institutions, where they would allocate their state-provided

vouchers (MES, Decree N 19/N, 2011). In the first years of the reform, HEIs were not allowed to introduce additional admission criteria either. Moreover, the number of students was also decided according to a formula that was developed by the National Education Accreditation Centre. The same Centre, as a part of the institutional accreditation process would determine the number of students that the particular HEI could admit (NEAC, 2006). The HEIs were only free to allocate the number of students to different departments according to their own internal preferences. These restrictions greatly affected the academic autonomy of the HEIs. One of the faculty members of newly established university complained that the university had no mechanisms to choose students. It is the contrary, the students choose the HEI.

The university cannot choose a student, hence the university cannot control the quality, because the (quality is defined) through money-follows-student scheme (R10 - HEI2).

The unified exams, as explained in Chapter 4, were designed to abolish corruption at the admission phase. The exams were also designed to create equal opportunity for the students of different social and economic backgrounds. Thus, accommodation of the HEIs' quality concerns was not prioritized²⁴.

To conclude, the evidence provided in this section shows that for policy makers academic autonomy was part of their decentralization effort, but defined as an individual freedom of the professors to define content of their courses. Even structural

²⁴ Only in 2011, the HEIs' plea for the state to relax the strict student admission mechanism was accommodated by introducing fourth, elective examination in the scheme. According to this scheme, examination centre provided a list of possible disciplines, in which it would hold an exam and the HEIs could assign one of them to the degree program that they wanted (MES, Decree N19/N; 4. 2011).

elements are not fully aligned with the ones identified by the EUA. While the elements such as the student admission, introduction of academic programmes and language of instruction are out of realm of the academic autonomy.

Policy makers' efforts were focused on decentralization as a main tool of institutional transformation of the HEIs, thus leaving academic autonomy outside of the sphere of their interest. Ever increasing standardization, which caused the discontent of the academic community was also justified with the ministry's conviction that the institutional framework of the HE system was so fragile that provision of considerable amount of autonomy would compromise the development of the system.

5.2.3 Financial Autonomy

Financial autonomy is certainly the area where the links to the other dimensions of autonomy are the most obvious. The ability or inability of universities to decide on tuition fees has implications for student admissions, state regulations on salaries for academic staff of the public institutions impinge on staffing autonomy and the capacity to independently disperse university funds directly impacts the ability to implement a defined strategy (Estermann et al, 2009). In the University Autonomy Tool, financial autonomy is defined as *capacity of the HEI to acquire and allocate funding, to set tuition fees, and to own and manage buildings/infrastructure* (EUA, 2011). Put it differently, the purpose of the financial autonomy is to provide the mechanism of financial stability and independence to the HEI in order to pursue academic freedom.

The perspective of preserving or granting academic freedom to the HEIs through financial stability and independence was not apparent in the discussions with the policy makers. As the policy makers pointed out in their interviews, autonomy per se was not a priority of the HE reforms (R37-PA6). Nevertheless, financial autonomy was included in the definition of the HEI autonomy in the Law on Higher Education (Law on Higher Education, 2004, Chapter 2) and previously centralized financial control was decentralized (Law on Higher Education 2004, Chapter 26), which should be considered as an integral part of the financial autonomy.

In further analysis, several system level factors need to be taken into account. As the policy makers considered, financial decentralization together with the financial transparency were part of the decentralization reforms that were both supported domestically and recommended by the international community. Domestically, it was driven by practical considerations of efficiency. Over the course of the years of post-Soviet transition, the country had suffered significant resource erosion and maintaining higher education institutions under the state-subsidy was a tremendous burden especially under the budget constraints that the ministry was facing. One of the former deputy ministers explained that the state was moving towards minimizing its financial responsibilities with the HEIs and at the same time, boost competitive environment among them. This would, in the end, reveal the survivors and increase the quality of education (R39 -PA8). Externally, the Ministry of Education and Science was fulfilling the commitment that the country had made in 2004 to the UN articulated in the Millennium Development Goals Georgia (MDG Georgia). According to the MDG

Georgia “[t]he main objectives of tertiary education reform should include the *full autonomy*²⁵ of tertiary institutions, the establishment of a competitive climate for public and private institutions, the eradication of the state order tradition...” (UNDP, 2004, p. 31-32). These considerations implied changes in the funding scheme of higher education that in turn had implications for the commitment of the government to the financial autonomy to the HEIs.

In brief, to overcome scarcity of state funds, policy makers introduced the concept of revenue diversification, pressuring HEIs to diversify their funding portfolios through introducing tuition fees, attracting grants, donations and other nonpublic revenues. To support the transition from state-subsidized operation to the more independent one, the state made several revenue sources available on competitive bases. In order to support research in the HEIs, state made funds available for the research. For this purpose, new semi-governmental agencies of Georgian National Science Foundation and Foundation of Kartvelian Studies, Humanities and Social Sciences²⁶ were created. Most importantly, instead of state subsidized higher education, the funding scheme was changed into per capita funding, known as “money follows student” scheme. Those students, with the high scores at the national unified entrance exams were eligible for the state grant, which they could allocate at the HEI and the academic programme of their choice. Both research grants and student voucher grants were available for public as well as private institutions (Law on Higher Education, 2004). Apart from the per capita funding, the

²⁵ my emphasis.

²⁶ in 2010 two organizations were merged into Georgian National Science Foundation (GNSF).

state financed state HEIs through direct budgetary lump sum allocations and through earmarked allocations for infrastructure development and research (Machabeli et al., 2011; UNDP, 2008).

For the state HEIs, tuition fees accounted for 75% of total income. Only about a fifth was offset by state-funded merit and needs-based grants. By the year 2009, about 25% of state HEI income came from direct state allocations (18% in the form of lump sum funding and 7% from other forms of state support). Including the student merit based vouchers and other funding schemes, state funded 42% of the costs of state HEIs (Machabeli et al., 2011)²⁷. Overall, Georgian HE system went from the state-funded to the private funding scheme, where only 25 % of the HEI's budget comprised of direct state allocations and for the rest they were in competition with other public as well as private HEIs. It is true that the state was a major funding source thus increasing state HEIs' dependency on the state and hindering its financial autonomy.

With the efforts of financial decentralization the HEIs' budgets were no longer subject to the approval of the ministry. According to the law, HEIs could create and approve their budgets. HEIs were free to manage their finances, but had to make their budgets publicly available (Law on Higher Education, 2004, Chapter 26. NEAC, 2007). According to the Law, another component of financial autonomy was to decentralize the

²⁷ In a comparative perspective, taking the university system as a whole, in 2009, the state funded 35% of the costs of the HE system, which is about half of the average OECD public expenditure (67% in 2008) on tertiary education institutions (Machabeli et al, 2011)

budgeting process to the departments within the universities²⁸. While the law gave greater autonomy formally to the academic departments, financial decentralization was not practiced by the universities. The departments remained dependent on the central university budget allocations (R20-HEI4; R4-HEI1; R28-HEI5). During the interviews, the deans and rectors of the HEIs did voice concerns regarding the level of decentralization within the HEIs and themselves thought that departments were not yet ready to accept the responsibility of budgeting themselves (R1 - HEI1).

However, the constraints were higher than the benefits of the decentralized system. Once the tuition fees were institutionalized, it was also decided that the state was to calculate the cost of the academic programmes across the state HEIs. The decision was made because of the time and financial efficiency. As one of the interviewee explained, there was no time to actually calculate real costs of programmes which is why the ministry set the standard ceiling for all academic programmes under which the HEIs could maneuver. The ceiling of 2250 GEL (840 Euro) was set for every programme. The student grant of 100% comprised the same amount. Many HEIs disagreed with this policy choice.

In addition, state HEIs were subject to the legal provisions of the public law under supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science. This means that certain restrictions applied. For instance, the salary ceilings for the HEI's staff could not accede the salary of the ministry's employees, which obviously, made it difficult to attract

²⁸ The distribution of budgetary funds within the HEI is a controversial issue since it involved the governance relationships between central administration representing the HEI as a whole and individual units within the HEI (See Geiger, 2004).

qualified staff to the HEIs. One of the HEI representatives complained about this disadvantageous situation that the state HEIs in comparison to the private HEIs:

These organizations (HEIs) have no right to pay their staff higher salary than to the staff at the ministry. it is also difficult to attract professors, this is also restricted by a certain rule about hiring and firing of the academic personnel. (R10-HEI2)

In addition, HEIs were subject to the inflexible state procurement policies and also were not able to keep the surplus, but had to return it to the state budget.

The third component that needs attention is the level of financial transparency. Financial transparency was a main state priority again, falling under the anti-corruption reforms. After the revolution, in the country, separate entity of financial police was created to address the gaps in the financial operations of both public and private organizations. State HEIs were subject of the same scrutiny. They were reporting on the quarterly bases to the State Revenue Office and were submitting annual financial reports to the ministry of education as well. However, HEIs were rarely providing internal transparency. This is how one of the faculty members describes the situation:

I have been a member of a faculty board for three years. It has been three years that I am requesting a financial report from the faculty. [...] I have not seen that report. ... and I receive a ridiculous response from one of the administrators that this information will be made available [internally] only after the financial declaration has been submitted to the revenue office. My answer to this is: 'The declaration is submitted [to the Revenue Office] by 15th of each month, and if the date of today is 20th, than it [the declaration] has been submitted already. Let me see the report'. The response is: 'We don't have it'. (R45 - LExpert 3).

To summarize, the purpose of the financial autonomy as of a guarantor of the HEI to maintain academic freedom was absent among the policy makers. The main

considerations for the financial autonomy was of efficiency; the state meant to elevate financial burden from the state budget and transfer it to the HEIs. Financial decentralization together with the financial transparency were part of the decentralization reforms that overwhelmed the transition phase of the reforms from 2004 to 2007. In essence, the purpose of financial autonomy was not resembling its original purpose proposed by the EUA (2001, 2003, 2011). However, some structural elements were created in the system although scarcity of recourses keeps HEIs dependent on the state funding. Thus, financial autonomy is also decoupled.

Conclusion

The case of university autonomy in the HE system in Georgia allows for a conclusion that policy makers introduced university autonomy in the HE for gaining legitimacy. This created a decoupled institution that only symbolically bear a resemblance to its Bologna-promoted prototype. University autonomy as a principle of the university governance was never part of the policy discussions. University autonomy was a product of the decentralization efforts, which fitted within the overall framework of the UNM Government's Good Governance reforms.

Within the dimensions of university autonomy introduced in Georgia, considerable attention is devoted to organizational autonomy, while financial autonomy is less considered and academic autonomy is practically neglected. This again underlines the policy maker's choice to concentrate on the decentralization efforts and confirms that the government's preferred policy instrument for achieving change was institutional (re)design.

In more specific terms, while legally ensuring university autonomy as the main principle of HE governance, university autonomy has been compromised with the standardization and overregulation efforts of the government. In order to have a system-wide effect, the Ministry of Education and Science set up a detailed regulatory framework to guide the universities into the autonomous action. With the aim to create the level playing field for all HEIs in the system, policy makers standardized the academic life through the quality assurance requirements, hence suspending the academic autonomy on the HEIs.

Moreover, for the policy makers, decentralization was a measure to minimize the risk of accumulating power in the rector's hands. Therefore, it was not autonomy, but a closely supervised decentralization of the university life. With the rhetoric of autonomy, post-revolution government curbed the independence of the state universities that they enjoyed before the revolution. By instituting rigid regulations of autonomous action, the Ministry of Education and Science indirectly gained the authority over the state HEIs, which it did not have before the revolution. In other words, while emulating to the neoliberal principles of the autonomous actorhood, the policy makers feared to lose control over the HEIs, which they gained during the institutional flux brought by the revolution. Promoting participatory decision making, power sharing mechanisms and the principles of representative governance in the HEIs, the policy makers created the institutional base to ensure governmental influence in the HEI governance.

Finally, this analysis of university autonomy provides a distinct example of the tensions between a transnationally pursued purpose of the institution and the considerations of the local policy makers. . The local conditions and policy maker's perceptions regarding the challenges of the Georgian HE system come in almost complete contradiction with the principles of university autonomy, as proposed by the Bologna Process, but are symbolically reconciled at the institutional level. Essentially, university autonomy "speaks" of autonomy, but demands compliance.

Next chapter aims to understand how the process of reconciliation of contradicting purposes takes place within these institutions. The analysis is based mainly on the transnational policy transfer scholarship and assumes that two factors contribute for

these institutions not to collapse and incorporate themselves in the national HE system of Georgia. First, it is the abstract goals of the HE reform and second is the absence of the local transfer agents in the process of the policy transfer.

6 POLICY TRANSFER: ABSTRACT GOALS AND ABSENT LOCAL TRANSFER AGENTS

Introduction

The previous two chapters explored the rationale of the policy makers behind the choices of introducing the QA and university autonomy in the Georgian HE system. It was concluded that the policy makers transferred both institutions of QA and university autonomy into the Georgian HE system to gain legitimacy at the European higher education space. While establishing that the main motive of the post-revolution government was to move closer to Europe, it was also reaffirmed that the main approach used by the policy makers to transform the HE system was to significantly alter its institutional design. In accordance with the argument of the world society theory, this type of policy transfer only symbolically changed the HE system in Georgia and produced locally decoupled institutions of the QA and university autonomy. In its turn, as the findings of the previous two chapters show, decoupled institutions perpetually reproduce themselves in the system, hence suspending the HE system's development.

Based on the findings of the previous chapters, the current chapter intends to explore the mechanisms of the suspended development. I pose the question: *What are the factors causing the suspended development of the HE system in Georgia and why is it sustained?* The analytical framework combines insights from the policy transfer and policy implementation literature. Drawing from the collected empirical evidence and from the insights from the policy transfer and policy implementation literature, I

suggest that the state of suspended development can be explained by two factors. First, I suggest that the goals of the Bologna-inspired reforms were framed in an abstract manner. For this reason, these goals remained referential and came short of guiding the policy implementers. Second, while introducing the new institutions in the HE system, the policy makers did not clearly communicate the purposes of these institutions within the Georgian HE context. This is to say that, not only the reform goals were abstract, but the designers of the initial reforms never made efforts to translate and interpret the purposes of the new institutions to the implementers, nor they assigned any mediators that could assume such a role.

The point of departure for this analysis is that the Bologna-inspired reforms are a case of transnational policy transfer. This, according to the policy transfer literature , means that the policy implementation is about gaining institutional coherence through appropriate match of the hard and soft transfer (Stone, 2004). First understood as a transfer of institutions, structures and rule, and the latter, as norms and the knowledge base supporting these hard transfer (Stone, 2004). This assumes that the norms and the knowledge base that support the institutional transfer are foreign to the local policy actors, therefore, highlights the importance of the soft transfer. In the Georgian HE context, the policy actors did not have prior knowledge to introduce institutions of QA or university autonomy in the national HE system. The local policy actors were acquiring the knowledge of what these institutions represented while the institutions were being created. In this chapter, while unpacking the mechanism of suspended development of the HE system, apart from the transnational nature of the policy

transfer, attention is paid to the centralized nature of policy making and the significance that the governmental institutions and policy makers had in the post-revolution Georgia²⁹. As it was explained in Chapter 1, the post-revolution government was the sole actor in devising state-building reforms, including higher education, and assumed the sole ownership in transforming the system.

Taking the abovementioned considerations into account, I analyzed whether the goals of the reforms and policies of the QA and university autonomy were clear and specific enough to guide the policy implementers. Based on Matland's suggestions, specific goals ensure stability and consistency of the policy as they minimize the risk of multiple interpretation of the purpose of introduced institutions (Matland, 1995). Second, taking into account that the 'soft' policy transfer (Stone, 2004), i.e. the norms and the knowledge base corresponding to the transferred institutions is lacking. Combining propositions of several authors studying transfer and policy learning (Ahcarya, 2004, Locke and Jacoby, 1997, Stone, 2004), the analysis assumes that the role of the local transfer agents is important to interpret and translate the purpose of the policy transfer (Stone, 2004) as they increase the 'match' of transnational institutions with the local context. In addition, the empirical findings of this dissertation suggest a possible third factor that played a role in the case of Georgia.

²⁹ As explained in the analytical framework (Chapter 2), Horowitz's observations is valuable at this instance. He notes that in transition countries the superiority of the governmental agencies is enhanced (due to the institutional flux and information asymmetries). Therefore, their behavior had a bigger impact on the society at large, than it is commonly the case in the democratic societies (Horowitz, 1989 in Brinkerhoff et. al. 2002).

In this chapter, in the first two sections explore the effect of the two factors on the institutional transformation of HE system. In the final section, mechanism of the suspended development is explained.

6.1 SPECIFIC GOALS FOR COHERENT POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

According to the collected evidence, the goals of the introduced Bologna-inspired reforms in general as well as concerning QA and university autonomy were never specified to the policy implementers – HEI representatives. The goals remained abstract for them throughout the 2004-2010 period, which I argue, contributed to the suspended development of the HE system.

Abstract goals for policy expediency. As reiterated throughout the dissertation, the main goal of the HE reforms in Georgia were to create a higher education system that would be compatible with the European higher education system and be competitive on the global education market. These two messages were clearly and explicitly stated in the ministry's official documents (MES 2007, 2008; Law on Higher Education, 2004; UNDP, 2004,) and confirmed in the interviews with the public officials (R38-PA 7, R39-PA8, R41-PA10). These goals were part of the new government's rhetoric to become a fast developing and modern society with ties to Europe. This perspective was quite appealing to and enthusiastically shared by the Georgian society as well. As Matland argues, abstract goals are usually used by the policy makers in order to gain wider acceptance of the public with regards their policy change. Vagueness of the policy goals makes the ordinary citizen support the policy

maker not on the specific action lines of the policy, but rather the intensions of the policy makers. This, usually decreases public resistance and allows for swift policy inception phase (Matland, 1995).

In their explanations, the initial designers of the policy confirmed Matland's statement. According to them, at the beginning of the HE system's transformation, keeping the goals of the reform somewhat broad and abstract was intentional in order to gain momentum for the system's transformation. As extensively discussed in the previous two chapters, at the inception phase of the reforms, in early 2004, for the policy makers it was essential to remain flexible and introduce changes almost immediately. The first leadership at the Ministry of Education and Science introduced a policy shortcut and decided to avoid writing a strategic document in order to accelerate the pace of the HE system's reorganization. One of the policy makers recalled:

From our past experience, we knew that it [discussion] would take dreadful forms if we had produced a strategic document. ... Therefore, it was our conscious decision not to write anything. This had a positive effect, because we could make things happen fast. For instance, we passed the education bill quite fast. (R7-HEI2)

In Georgia, keeping goals of the reform abstract was one of the ways to move fast forward, minimizing the level of disagreement upon the governmental decisions from the 'outside' that is, Georgian society. The local experts that were occasionally involved at the task forces in the first phase of the reforms emphasized that the minister and the few persons around him made the decisions with the least involvement of those who could somehow undermine the course of HE reform that was pursued. The description

below by one of the higher education experts describes the spirit that policy makers worked with:

You know what was the main reason of my disagreement with Lomaia³⁰? – He could not tolerate the criticism. ... ‘We cannot crawl over the cliff, we have to leap over it’ – I remember these words very well. These were repeated in my presence number of times, when I was suggesting [them] to slow down and pull the brakes. (R44-LExpert 2)

In essence, policy makers were seeking the ways of the fast recovery, hence compromised the consensus with regards to the goals of the reforms over the flexibility in policy making. One of the former ministers of education told me:

There was no strategic document about the education reform. The only thing I have seen of that kind was Mr. G’s [government official] power point presentation at some meeting (R37-PA6)

As mentioned above, Matland explains further that policy makers, under the time constraints and with highly centralized decision making power, look for policy shortcuts and tend to keep the goals of the policies abstract in order to quickly gain legitimacy of the policy. More detailed the policy is, higher the resistance of stakeholders to accept it (Matland, 1995). This applies to the Georgian policy makers’ behavior at the initial stage of the policy design. In essence, the abstract goals helped policy makers to gain a momentum, legitimize their policies and move forward with their idea to change the core of the HE system. As it was mentioned already, the main goals of the HE reforms was to become competitive at the global level and to eradicate corruption at the national level.

³⁰ A. Lomaia - the Minister of Education and Science, 2004-08.

The HEI representatives, similar to the representatives of the ministry, emphasized the importance of the international dimension in higher education broadly linking it to the Europe.

I think, it was important for Georgian HE to be integrated with the European HE system (R16-HEI3),

or mentioning the Bologna Process as the main drive of the reform:

As I recall, the Bologna Process was the flag to integrate with the common European education system (R4-HEI1).

Others emphasized the importance of student oriented education and their competitiveness at the global market:

The 2004 reform envisioned to raise the students that would be competitive on the international market (R28-HEI5);

The reform aimed to create student oriented education. Previously, we had professor-centered education (R1-HEI1)

There were many that listed all of the above and many more:

The first was ... to deal with corruption in education system. Second was to create certain quality standards for the universities in order to increase the quality. Student mobility was also a priority. ... the goals was also to create transparent financial system for the HEIs. Increase in university independence and in transparency in HEI governance. And also increase involvement of people. That was it. (R10-HEI2)

The respondents that have worked at the ministry at different points in time, starting from 2004 were consistent with their answer that the goal of the HE reforms was for the Georgian HE system to gain certain level of recognition at the international arena. In essence, the goals of the initial policy designers was accomplished. The goals of the

reforms were abstract and seemed appealing to the wider public, hence were positively received. The former deputy minister explained:

The main idea was for the Georgian higher education system to be institutionally, structurally and by the way of conduct compatible with the world's and specifically, European higher education practices(R38-PA7).

The statement of the staff member at department of the HE harmonization and international integration at the ministry directly linked the reform agenda to the Bologna Process:

The goals of higher education reform were identical to the Bologna guidelines. ... this is, of course quality education, international integration of our HE system, change of university management [meaning governance] and insurance of autonomy and academic freedom, etc. Almost everything that was in Bologna, was taken into account. (R41-PA10).

What is noteworthy in the Georgian case and is not explained by Matland's suggestions about the mechanisms of policy change is that the abstract goals of global competitiveness and Europeanization never crystallized in Georgia. The main goals of the reform remained abstract after the inception phase. While the ministry and the policy making team changed several times during the first six years of the reform, the policy goals remained the same, but never crystallized. In 2007, when the transition phase of the reforms was announced to be successfully completed, the second phase of system consolidation were guided by the same goals of modernization, this time sealed with the document "2007-11 Strategic Directions of Georgian Education System" (MES, 2007). The appealing messages of better quality education had very little substance

behind it. Interestingly, the policy makers themselves were not able to specify the goals of the HE reforms.

I suggest, the fact that there was no guiding document to guide the HE community and the policy makers through the reform strengthened this ambiguous atmosphere. This, I suggest increased the risk for multiple interpretations of the policy goals, especially after the initial designers of the reforms left the MES. One of the early leaders, who earlier, during the interview explained to me the benefits of the not having a binding policy document, in a retrospect admitted that their conscious decision not to create a strategic document gained some negative effects:

As there was no strategic document, and only several people had it all [reform ideas] in their heads, there are constantly problems regarding what has to be done next. (R7-HEI2)

Successive policy makers' team at the MES adopted practice of not having the explicit national strategy and employed it as a guarantee of flexibility of the government. The deputy minister (in the office 2008-2012) did not see the need of the national document at all:

No, there is no strategic document and there should not be one, because there is the Bologna [Process]. (R39-PA8).

The purpose of quality assurance as well as university autonomy were compromised, as demonstrated in the chapters 4 and 5. One example should be brought here for the illustration. Although improvement of the quality of education was a declared priority of the government (Law on Higher Education, 2004), none of the faculty members could define what was the meaning of a better quality. However, their understanding of the

quality in education was formulated in accordance to the newly created QA mechanisms in the system and what it represented. In her interview, the local education expert was shared the results of her survey regarding quality assurance system in the country:

What is quality? – Quality here is understood as congruence with state requirements, full stop. This is what one of the interviewees told us.(R44 - LExpert 2)

The perception of the faculty member at one of the HEIs serves well to exemplify the same state of affairs in realm of university autonomy. As he pointed out, the changes that were proposed by the policy makers were absorbed by the faculty merely because they did not understand what the new institutions of participatory decision making and division of power meant.

This division of power [among academic council and university senate] is not well thought through. But this was met with enthusiasm by some professors. They were exclaiming – well this is very good! I asked them, why was it good and their answer was that power-sharing was good in general. (R3-HEI 1)

In the overview above, it is demonstrated that aims of the HE reforms were abstract throughout the first six years. Two issues are observed. First, the abstract policy goals that were created for the purpose of policy expediency were carried through the next years. Based on the extensive explanations in Chapters 4 and 5, it can be inferred that policy makers ‘inserted’ the meaning to the newly introduced institutions according to their policy preferences. Second, HEI community ascribed to the abstract goals of the reforms and operated with the meanings that policy makers had produced. This finding is exemplified in the quotes above and is anchored in the findings of previous two chapters.

This last finding brings forward the importance of the soft transfer, that is the transfer of the norms and knowledge that underlie transferred institutions. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the role of the local transfer agents is explored in this regard. The next section addresses this point of the analysis.

6.2 INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL TRANSFER AGENTS

This research argues that the local transfer agents are crucial for the transnational policy transfer to succeed. Success in this context is understood as a fruitful interpretation of the purpose of the transitional institutions to fit the local context. In conjunction with the first factor, discussed above. If the goals of the reform, or of the policy are abstract, the role of the local transfer agents is indispensable. In this section, specific Georgian policy landscape is analyzed to conclude that the post-revolution government has eliminated possible third-party actors in its interaction with the HEIs. This outcome, I argue also contributes to suspended development of the Georgian HE system.

Revolution brought to power the revolutionary government, who had envisioned building a modern society. In doing so, government gradually dismissed as its counterparts the civil society as well as the HEIs. This polarized the HE space into State – the ministry and non-State actors, that is, the rest of the stakeholders. Non-State actors were marginalized, dismissed or stripped off the decision making power. John W. Meyer, in his brief report for Georgian Education Decentralization and Accreditation

Project (GEDA)³¹ drew attention to a particular attitude of the post-revolution policy makers towards the society of Georgia. Policy makers envisioned to remake Georgian society and remake its civil society along with it, rather than involving them in the reform processes (Meyer, 2006). One of the authors of the 2004 reforms in higher education argued that the main reason not to create a strategic document was to avoid futile discussion around it.

We had experienced that it would have severe consequences if we had had a strategic document [...] because this would raise a debate, and Georgians do not know how to hold the discussion. (R7, HEI2).

The dominant belief of the governing elite was that the weak and backward society could not contribute to the system building. The quote above suggests that the policy maker is convinced that the HEIs' and non-governmental organizations' involvement in the policy-shaping process would bear marginal importance and it could potentially 'misguide' the route that they, as visionaries, had chosen. The consensus that would have to be sought with the participating stakeholders would take time that those at the top, could not afford. Two main actors in the society, academic elite and non-governmental organizations, both were dismissed by the Ministry as their potential partners. This, consequently divided the HE space into two – those, who were creating the main directions, and those who had to act upon it. This interaction was characterized by the information asymmetry and lack of formal avenues for participation. The specifics of the Georgian policy landscape is explored below.

³¹ GEDA was a large-scale USAID funded project in 2006-08 project to provide assistance to Georgia to decentralize its educational system, and to produce a system of accreditation for educational programs at all levels.

6.2.1 Non-State actors of the reform

Discredited Academic Elite. The role of academic elite, as of credible counterpart in the reform was largely disregarded by the new government. First, at the ministry the academic staff was regarded to be deeply involved in the corruption. Thus, the reform was not launched in cooperation with them but rather against them, or at least without them. In essence, their exclusion from the reform making process was intentional.

Who was the part of the universities? On the one hand, there were people involved in the corruption. For instance, [those] involved in the tutoring business with the guarantees from their part that his/her student would successfully go through the entrance exams (R38-PA7).

Moreover, the first task of the reform was to fight against the representatives of the academic elite, who was part of the corruption machinery. Once the anticorruption measures were taken, the corrupted rectors were fired and the national entrance exams were introduced, the reform turned to addressing the issues of education quality. Nevertheless, in this process the academic elite was still not a partner, but a target group, because their qualifications as well as the teaching methodology was outdated.

They [professors] were absolutely non-qualified and incompetent. In this case I am talking about their disciplinary competencies as well. The philologist is not always good in philology and the historian is not always a good historian. In general, the professional competence of a professor, i.e. that he/she has to teach and think of teaching methodology – this was news for them. (Local Expert 2).

In addition, the academic elite turned out to be conservative and reluctant to change.

'How dare you demand from me to write a syllabus?' ... I remember one of the well-known professors expressed himself in one of the talk-shows on Imedi [TV channel] (Local Expert 1).

Due to the very attitude that they were “feuds” within their disciplines and they were not to be challenged in any manner, the professors were disregarding those requirements that were not directed specifically to them:

I meet a professor and he/she tells me: ‘no one has notified me about anything.’ I respond: ‘I wrote you an e-mail. ...if you did not open it, the [same] information is on the web-site. If you did not check the web-site, it is posted on the notice-board in front of the dean’s office. However, you did not read it.’ In other words, he/she has an expectation that he has to be phoned personally (Local Expert 2).

It was also perceived that the aging population of the scholars had only marginal ability to acquire new knowledge.

Overall, their competences as of professors, i.e. that they have to teach, [...] and teaching methods, was news for them; that the professor has to think of an adequate method of student assessment, was news; that the professor has to write his/her own academic course/programme, was news. We essentially, started from zero (Local expert, 2011).

Professional capacity of academics was also questioned:

Most of the academic staff does nothing but plagiarism. They copy something from the internet, translate it [in Georgian] and present it as their own teaching method. (expert/professor, TSU, 2010).

Apart from the ‘old school’ representatives of the academic elite, the new generation of scholars have also been skeptically assessed. They were considered to be lacking the motivation to initiate change from the bottom (local experts, 2010). Faculty members were also criticized for lack of critical viewpoint:

Up until now, I have not seen a state university which would criticize at least one statement of the ministry (R44-LExpert 2).

While interviewed government officials and educational experts regarded the representatives of the ‘old school’ as incompetent, the same respondents regarded the new generation in the academe to be lacking the motivation to initiate change from the bottom.

We introduced in the law what are the learning outcomes. This was enough for them [university faculty] not to define the learning outcomes in their programmes. Because the law did not require it from them (R43-LExpert 1).

These observations or rather convictions have greatly influenced a nature of the reform process and formation of the new higher education landscape. HEIs were spectators of the reform: the reform did not happen with the HEIs, but happened to them. Exclusionary policy of the ministry deprived the university representatives from the sense of ownership and marginalized professionals. Consensus over the goals of the reform was never sought (See Section 5.1.).

Weakened Non-Governmental Sector. During the field work, a reoccurring theme that the interviewees were bringing up was the challenge of transmitting new knowledge, the dissemination of new information in the HEI network so that it could reach academic community at different levels of the HEI hierarchy. Over 15 years, after collapse of the Soviet Union, the non-governmental sector was commissioned to act as a knowledge transmitter in the country. NGOs acted as capacity builders in the different aspects of social life. The “old” intellectual elite, that no longer had an academic or scientific arena to pursue and had lost the financial security that accompanied their positions, reinvented themselves as an important part of the society through the non-governmental sector (Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009). In time of 2003 the NGO

sector was a hub of alternative intelligentsia, which in the end acted as a backbone of the Rose Revolution. After the successful change of state-power, a major part of the non-governmental sector moved to the governmental sector, which in turn drained the civil society of the vital resources. Hence, the role of a transmission belt that the NGO representatives were playing in the country had weakened. Ironically, the representatives of the new government became skeptical towards the (remains) of the non-governmental sector, hence underutilizing already scarce resources that the civil society had to offer. The second deputy minister clarified: “I am against NGOs. They are oriented on process or on grants and nothing else.” (R 39-PA8)

As it has been discussed extensively in Chapter 1, the international assistance that was channeled through the non-governmental sector in the country, after revolution shifted towards the newly formed government, hence depriving the NGOs main financial resource (independent from state funding) to remain self-sustainable.

The best resources of the NGOs moved to the government, which weakened the non-governmental sector. However, there are some NGOs that can still implement some projects. It is noteworthy that international organizations started to cooperate with the government, which is something they were not doing before, or rather they were doing it with less enthusiasm at least, because of lack of trust in them (government). This weakened the role of NGOs. It is great when there are lot of NGOs in the country, but... Therefore, the role of transmitters was taken up by the various projects. (R38-PA7)

As the former deputy minister explained, in the absence of organized actors from the outside of the ministry, three large-scale projects took upon a role of a mediator between the ministry and HEIs. The first large scale three-year project was Georgian Education Decentralization and Accreditation project (GEDA). GEDA was funded by the USAID

and was designed to address two main directions of the education system in Georgia: decentralization of the system (mainly general education) and establish a quality control mechanism for both higher and general education. Within its scope of operation the project provided technical assistance to the NEAC and organized number of trainings and meetings with the HEI representatives aimed at discussing and explaining to them the state accreditation process, procedures and standards. At the first phase of the reform, in the years of 2006-07, this project had covered large audience of HEI representatives and had systematic working relations with the NEAC staff.

The EU funded other two large-scale projects: TUNING and Twinning. Both of these projects were to facilitate the approximation of the Georgian HE system to the common European Higher Education Area. These projects had their own mandate and within their scopes had awareness building components. Nevertheless, large number of trainings, round tables and conferences had not contributed to the building of understanding of system-wide changes launched by the Ministry but mostly served as information transmitters to the HEIs.

Organized interest groups. University associations or other interest groups (labor unions, professional associations) that could be creditable counterparts of the State were in infancy. Previously, in the Soviet Union the labor unions were quite strong, but largely carried an ideological function (reference). In the time of the post-Soviet neglect, these institutions lost their importance and were dysfunctional. After the 2003, the labor unions have remained weak. The same was true regarding professional associations. The two professional associations that are somewhat visible in the higher

education are of lawyers – Georgia BAR Association, and of healthcare (name of association(s)). Lastly, the associations of the universities or other type of lobby groups are also in infancy. The first association of the universities became functional only in 2009, therefore this institution was also not a vocal participant and a mediator in the policy implementation process.

As I have presented in the paragraphs above, non-governmental organizations were never considered by the Ministry as their potential partners. Individual actors were also viewed skeptically. The Ministry doubted their professional capacities as well as their adherence to the same visions as the statutory designers (interview quotes). Thus, the avenues of the third party participation in the policy implementation process were considered only for the purposes of one-way communication from the Ministry to the HEIs.

NEAC as a transfer agent. In absence of the local transfer agents outside of the MES, NEAC as the messenger of the ministry assumed this role of a mediator. NEAC later re-named as a National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) plaid the role of a policy transmitter at the beginning of the reform. It was quite active in the years of 2005-07 when the preparation of the accreditation process was under way. Later on, in 2009, when the centre developed the mission-based accreditation concept, it created a platform where HEIs could participate. However, as a quasigovernmental organization the centre never stopped being a carrier of the Ministry's interests and thus adhered to the top-down approach, as the main policy implementation instrument. The

Centre was largely communicating the Ministry's decisions or intentions to the HEIs, and hardly leaving a space for a dialogue.

After 2006, this tendency gradually changed and the ministry became detached from the higher education institutions. By 2008, higher education related matters were concentrated at the NEAC. The Centre became a primary contact and the source of information for the higher education institutions (R4- HEI3, R5-HEI4, R45-LExpert 3). By 2010, the only cooperation platform that was provided for a large group of higher education institutions was the Centre's initiative to hold public hearings concerning the new standards for upcoming programme accreditation (R45-LExpert 3, R36-PA 4, R37-PA 5). This avenue was scarcely used by the universities to lobby their own interests. The main purpose of the meetings was rather the dissemination of information on behalf of the NEAC (R45-LExpert 3, R37-PA 5).

Essentially, policy makers eliminated possible partners in the dialogue as it was considered as an obstacle on their way towards the fast recovery of the country. With this approach the ministry had downsized a small pool of the professionals that it could collaborate with. Over the course of the six years, this attitude remained unchanged (although the ministers have been replaced four times). Therefore, Georgian HE system changed in the unique environment where the multidimensional policy space was reduced to the two-dimensional interaction of the ministry and higher education institutions. This leaves us to the conclusion that the local transfer agents were absent from the transnational policy transfer scene, which inevitably prevented the coherent soft transfer. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this section, I put forward the

assumption that with the abstract goals of the reform and absence of the policy transfer agents, the new institutional framework of the Georgian HE system lacks substance.

Nevertheless, there is one more piece to the puzzle that could explain main communication mechanism of the state with the HEIs to ensure smooth implementation of the reforms. The next section proposes that the policy makers chose the Law of Higher Education as the most efficient mediator in the HE system.

6.3 OVERREGULATION

Emphasis on the overregulation of the HE system stems from the findings of this research that rigid regulatory framework was the hallmark of the governmental reforms (Chapters 4 and 5 elaborate on this topic). As pointed out in the previous two chapters, the reforms of QA and university autonomy were accompanied by the rigid regulatory framework. QA encouraged compliance by simply not leaving room for flexibility and development to the HEIs. With regards to the university autonomy, the Law on Higher Education was almost a step-by-step manual to guide HEIs everyday operation.

As policy makers clarified it, they had to find the way to ensure that institutional transformation of the system would happen in the short timeframe and reach system-wide effect. Essentially, this was another policy shortcut that the policy makers used to institutionalize new system and, at the same time, minimize possible deviance from it. Hence, I conclude that the legal framework was used as the most efficient mediator between the government and the HE community. I argue that lack of conceptual clarity,

in absence of local transfer agents, was compensated by overregulation. This argument is explored below.

Law for the transition phase. The first years of the reform – 2004-07 were declared as the transition phase. In order to guide the HEIs in the process of institutional transformation, the ministry chose to communicate specific steps of this makeover through the detailed legal framework that it created. The new law defined a new framework of the higher education and committed to the student-oriented education system. It emphasized the importance of international dimension and of the structural proximity to the European educational space. The law also induced transparency and promoted supremacy of HEI autonomy. In addition, the Law enabled creation of decentralized education system, represented by the network of quasigovernmental agencies that would oversee teacher capacity development, education quality, data collection and analysis and tertiary³² education entrance examinations. Transitional decrees broke down each of the components of the new framework into instructions for the HEIs.

In regards to the HEI autonomy this translated into three main aspects: introduce elections of the HEI rectors, decentralize rector's decision making power with introducing the participatory decision making bodies and grant autonomy to the academic departments within the HEI (Law on Higher Education, 2004). To streamline

³² The term “tertiary” is used to combine post-secondary education, including vocational education and higher education.

the process, the election procedure was defined in the law, as well as the elections of the members of the representative councils.

There was a [minister's] decree 'The rule to carry out the first rector's election'. It read, that the call was to be announced N number of days prior to the elections, so that those who wanted to participate could apply; that ... these are the ones [eligible candidates] that have the right to participate and others – don't. This all was spelled out in the rule. (R42-PA11)

The law also instructed on the elections of the deans of academic departments, elections of members of the departmental councils, and their scope of work (Law on Higher Education, 2004).

Regarding quality assurance, this translated to the pallet of regulations and instructions according to three main components of the QA system: internal quality assurance, external quality validation and peer review. The creation of internal quality assurance units was mandatory for the public HEIs. The Law required to create a central QA unit as part of the HEI administration, also to create the QA units within the academic departments. According to the size of the department, the QA units were to have a certain number of the QA representatives. The scope of work was also defined by the law (Law on Higher Education, 2004). NEAC regulated the accreditation process. Accreditation criteria became a part of the decree on accreditation and the interpretations of the criteria were included in the subsequent by-laws (Law on HE, 2004, 2007 amendment). Selection criteria of the peer-reviewers, the scope of their work, as well as the composition of the accreditation council and its mandate was also defined in the by-laws (Law on Higher Education, 2004, amendment, 2009).

The ministry's rationale behind the overregulation at the first phase of the reform is easy to understand. The policy makers and the statutory designers were well aware that the system, which they were enforcing, had no precedent in Georgia. Constrained with the political priority to produce tangible results rapidly, policy makers considered it necessary to introduce coercive mechanisms at first to ensure system-wide transformation and planned to relax the regulatory framework, once the main parameters of the new HE system were in place. However, the approach to institutionalize changes through the prescriptive legislative framework became the *modus operandi* of the ministry in the later years.

Prescriptive Law as a policy solution. Those directly involved in the agenda setting and reform implementation considered that at the inception phase, the HE system was too fragile to institute decentralization at its full force, but planned to deregulate gradually. One of the policy makers was analyzing their rationale in retrospect:

Originally, what we had in mind was that accreditation had to be carried out by independent organization(s) that would be accredited in its turn by an international body. The state aimed for the higher education to become a self-governing system. (R10-HEI2)

Colleague also confirmed that NEAC, after the transition phase was complete, the NEAC would turn into a regulatory body that would accredit the independent accreditation bodies:

... it was also meant that after some time, accreditation would not be a state initiative, but public/grass-root initiative and the state would only control these accreditation agencies. (R7-HEI2)

In support to these plans, the Law on Higher Education included a passage that allowed HEIs to create a private QA agency. however, it would not have a decision making power, but would submit its reviews to the NEAC for the final decisions (Law on Higher Education 2004, Section63). After the inception phase was over, these plans never materialized. The introduction of a detailed rule in the law for the elections of the representative bodies and the executive head of the HEI carried the same purpose. It was to guide the first instance of the elections and later be moved to the realm of the HEI management.

But this [‘The rule of first rector’s election’] was only for the first occasion. Following elections were to be regulated by the university statute, which were to be created by the university representative councils. (R42-PA11)

Introducing a prescriptive law was supposed to act as a demonstration to the HEI representatives of how the new system was to operate.

The system that was designed was quite rigid and applied to all universities. ... We had to create a system that had never existed before. Professors did not have enough information on how the universities were governed abroad. ... In absence of previous experience [and awareness] of civic responsibility, there was a fear, that [professors] would not be able to take this responsibility, if the law did not regulate the process of reform implementation. (R42-PA11)

However, the law remained prescriptive throughout the first six years and the plan for the ministry to slowly withdraw never materialized. In 2008, seven amendments - the highest number of amendments was registered in the HE law. Most of them were geared towards centralization. One of the fine examples of this was the minister’s decree that made the examination/test as a mandatory category of student assessment across the disciplines (R45-LExpert3, R5-HEI1).

Policy makers feared that if the HEIs were given more flexibility and time to act upon the general provisions in the law, there would again risk to replicate the previous power relations within the HEIs. Former head of the Law Department and the MES shared her concern:

If we had let the HEI to generate rules on election of deans, we were risking that the Rector would simply, again, appoint a dean that he/she considered right for the position. And soon we would create another Metreveli³³ (R42-PA11).

However, institutionalization of the new norms and rules that would, supposedly, improve the HE system through legislative coercion was received by the HEIs as the state imposition.

One has to have participants to have a participatory planning. I can't blame the ministry much, but the universities; i.e. there is no one to give up the authority and no one to take over the initiative. (R6-HEI1)

The frustration of professors for not having an avenue to participate demonstrates the reversed effect of 'imposed liberation'.

I don't understand, if in the whole English-speaking world [HEIs] have academic programme committee, financial committee, research and development committee, where admin-staff partakes together with the core academic personnel. How come in Georgia, it is only the minister that knows everything?! ... and no one else does. (R45-LExpert 3)

The coercive mechanism dwarfed the potential effect of the new institutions. For those, more tolerant to the change, overregulation was unnecessary and only hindered the natural reorganization of the HEIs:

³³ R, Metreveli was extremely corrupted rector of Tbilisi State University that was dismissed after the revolution.

In our country many things happen like this: we saw something on the web-site, or some standard. Then we copied this standard. We did not even think, what's their meaning, or how should they be adopted to our institutional context. And then we ask for some documents, and forms... which eventually becomes just a formality. ... for instance 'please, provide the programme description in this particular template' "; or 'we inform you that the template has been modified and now you should provide [programme description] in another form' – these are really not needed. (R 11-HEI2)

Overall, legislative coercion created a level playing ground for the HEIs, and created a rigid system that communicates one dominant interpretation of the new institution in the HE system.

With the absence of the transfer agents in the system, resulted only into the hard transfer of the institutions. Hence, academic community passively resisted the change or complied with it superficially.

Conclusion

In order to understand the mechanism of the suspended development of the HE system in Georgia, this chapter explored the factors that could cause the suspended development. The analysis also proposes an interpretation of why the suspended development is sustained in Georgian HE system.

The chapter concluded that two factors – abstract goals of the HE reform and absence of the local transfer agents hold strong explanatory value in this regard. The presence of the first conceals the system within transnationally acknowledged framework of Europeanization and mercerization, while the absence of the second prevents the

transferred institutions to be localized. The combination of these two factors would lead to multiple interpretations of the transferred institutions.

In the case of Georgia, a third complementary factor, which was identified in the research process, possibly broadens the explanation. An overly detailed legal framework was used as the most efficient mediator between the government and the HE community providing one dominant interpretation of the new institutional framework, which invited superficial compliance. These three factors reinforce each other and perpetuate the system that lacks substance and encourage compliance. This state of affairs, I argue, suspends the development of the HE system.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation problematized the outcomes of the Bologna-inspired reforms in the post-revolution Georgia. In my analysis, the institutional transformation of the HE system hardly contributed to the overall improvement of the higher education in the country and explored the reasons of this dissonance.

The problem was approached from the point of view of two complementary perspectives. Applying the lens of the first perspective, I emphasized the importance of the external factors. Specifically, I suggested that the policy choices of local policy makers were affected by the globalization agenda through the transitional processes. In turn, this has influenced the policy outcomes. With this perspective, the present study sheds light on the rationales behind the choice of transnational policy transfer that the post-revolution government made. This quest was guided by the insights from the world society theory and the concept of decoupled institutions (Drori et al., 2006, Meyer, 1997).

As the results of my research show, Georgia as a state at Europe's periphery consciously adopted the Bologna-guided reforms for the primary purpose of gaining legitimacy at the European level. As a result, I argue that the Georgian HE system gained high institutional proximity to its Western prototypes, however failed to address the national contextual needs and created decoupled institutions in the system. On the theoretical level, as the findings of the dissertation show, decoupled institutions perpetually reproduce themselves and suspend the system's development.

Further on, the research explored the mechanisms of the Georgian HE system's suspended development with an assumption that local factors hold high explanatory value in the process of transnational policy transfer, which is what Bologna-inspired reforms represent. Within this perspective, the emphasis was made on the necessity to localize transferred institutions. This phase was guided by the scholarship of transnational policy transfer and policy implementation. In this light, I suggested that two factors – namely the presence of abstract policy goals during the HE reforms and the absence of the local transfer agents – sustain the HE system in the suspended development. In addition to these factors, I identified a complementary, third factor that perpetuates the phase of the suspended development: the government introduced an overly detailed legal framework in order to efficiently institutionalize change in the HE system. As a prescriptive mechanism, this law created a dominant interpretation of the new institutional framework that reinforced the authority of the decoupled institutions in the system.

The analysis allows for several specific findings. First, the changes in higher education system were geared towards institutional design. Confirming the argument of the world society theory, introduced institutions only symbolically resembled the Bologna-promoted prototypes, but served different purpose at the national level. In other words, the transnationally transferred institutions were locally decoupled.

More specifically, quality assurance (QA), as an institution, only symbolically accounted for the Bologna-promoted purposes of accountability and institutional improvement. Instead, it addressed the problem of corruption in the HE system. The main purpose of

QA was to remove fraudulent HEIs from the national HE space. While the purpose of QA as instituted in Georgian HE system diverged from its Bologna-promoted purpose, its structure coincided with the structure of the Bologna-promoted model.

With regards to the university autonomy, the reforms also produced decoupled institutions. The purpose of the autonomy in the HE system in Georgia did not correspond with the original purpose of ‘impartiality with accountability’ promoted by the Bologna Process. Rather, the purpose of university autonomy was addressed by the decentralization policy of the post-revolution government. Hence, decentralization was understood by these actors as a measure to minimize the risk of accumulating power in the rector’s hands. Therefore, institutionalization of the university autonomy translated into a closely supervised decentralization of the university life. Although the evidence suggests that the purpose the university autonomy in Georgia diverged from the Bologna-promoted prototype, its structural elements were aligned with the Bologna-promoted model of university autonomy.

Second, although the institutional proximity of QA and university autonomy to their Bologna-promoted models was ensured, the institutions lacked substance and invited compliance through overregulation.

In my analysis, these processes add up to a situation of *suspended development*. As I argue, the state of *suspended development* occurred due to three main contributing factors. First factor was the presence of the abstract goals that conceals the HE system within transnationally acknowledged framework of Europeanization and marketization.

In this vein, the policy makers intentionally operated with the abstract goals to expedite the HE reforms. However, they compromised on creating consensus and common understanding of the purpose of transnationally promoted institutions of the QA and university autonomy.

Second, while new institutions were introduced into the system, ‘soft’ transfer did not take place as the policy actors (NGOs, professional associations, education experts), who could assume the roles of local transfer agents, were marginalized by the post-revolution government. In other words, the knowledge base that defines the purpose of the institutions was not interpreted and transmitted to the local policy implementers (HEIs). Instead, the institutions were introduced through ‘hard’ transfer, lacking substance.

Third, new institutions gained more authority as the policy makers introduced an overly detailed legal framework to efficiently institutionalize change in the HE system. This policy shortcut provided single dominant interpretation of the new institutional framework, deemed appropriate to the policy makers. Hence, the hollowness of the institutions were maintained, preventing the system to develop further.

The empirical and theoretical findings of this dissertation project contribute to scholarly thinking in HE policy studies in two interrelated fields: in the HE area studies of the post-Soviet region, and in policy transfer literature related to the specific case of post-Soviet states. First, contrary to the propositions made by the available literature on HE system change in post-Soviet region, this study is innovative in that it moved beyond

evaluations of the reform success versus the country's capacity to replicate the Western (e.g. the Bologna-inspired) institutional design. In contrast, it mobilized the theoretical toolbox of the world society theory, in order to shed light on the transnational policy transfer process within the neoliberal globalization process,. Using this theoretical framing refined the current scholarship on the HE reforms, which has been so far preoccupied exclusively with the domestic factors (such as corruption and other post-Soviet legacies). Applying this framework allowed, in addition, also for illuminating the ambiguous role of the transnational processes in the HE reforms in the former Soviet Union. In the context of HE studies, these had so far remained underexplored. Second, the research addressed the gap in the policy as well as the academic literature on policy transfer in the case of decoupled institutional constellations. On this front, findings from the Georgian case help shed light on the processes that are at play in transitioning societies coping with similar institutional frameworks.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE

Part I: On the Introduced Changes in HE system

- What are/were the main goals/directions of ongoing HE reform? (2004 onwards).
 - Have these goals changed over the course of the years?
- Is there a strategic document according to which the reform is progressing?
 - If yes:
 - Who participated in development of it?
 - Is it made available/accessible?
- How would you assess overall progress of the reform? What would you point out as noteworthy – positive and/or negative manner?

Part II: Quality Assurance

Block 1 – HE system level

- What would you say is the purpose of quality assurance to be introduced in HE system of Georgia?
- What were the steps of introducing QA?
 - What is the main principle of accreditation process? why is it carried out?
 - What is the aim and responsibilities of Accreditation Centre?
- What type of changes do you see in the HE system after the introduction of QA? What is your assessment?

Block 2 – Institutional level/Universities

- What would you say is the role of QA units in the University?
- How do you interact with the Accreditation Centre?
- What has changed within the University since introduction of QA system? Your assessment

Part III: University Autonomy

Block 1 – System level

- What is the purpose of granting autonomy to HEIs i.e. what would it improve in case of Georgian HEIs?
- How was it understood by the universities/by the ministry?
- What type of changes do you see in the university after you were granted autonomy?

Block 2 – Institutional level

- How is autonomy demonstrated in your university?
 - Financial autonomy/academic autonomy/Institutional autonomy?
- What is the mandate of the senate/academic council?
 - How are decisions made?
- How have these changes affected overall life of the university?

Block 3 - Unit level/faculty

- What has changed at the faculty/department compared to what it was before the reform?
 - What are overall responsibilities at faculty level?
 - How is financial/academic/institutional autonomy demonstrated?

Part IV

- What are other topics of importance that we have not touched upon in our conversation?

APPENDIX 2. LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

N	Name	Position	Organization	Code
1	Giorgi Khubua	Rector (2006-2010)	Tbilisi State University	HEI 1
2	Alexander Shengelaia	Academic Council member; Assistant Professor	Tbilisi State University	HEI 1
3	Ghia Jorjoliani	Senate member; Professor	Tbilisi State University	HEI 1
4	Ramaz Bochorishvili	Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences. Dean	Tbilisi State University	HEI 1
5	Irina Darchia	Quality Assurance unit, Head	Tbilisi State University	HEI 1
6	Nino Javakhishvili	Professor, faculty of Societal Sciences	Tbilisi State University	HEI 1
7	Gigi Tevzadze	Rector	Ilia University	HEI 2
8	Guram Kipiani	Academic Council member; Professor	Ilia University	HEI 2
9	Emzar Jgerenaia	Senate member;	Ilia University	HEI 2
10	Simon Janashia	Assistant Professor	Ilia University	HEI 2
11	David Afrasidze	School of Graduate Studies. Dean	Ilia University	HEI 2
12	Ketevan Gurchiani	Quality Assurance Unit, Head; Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research	Ilia University	HEI 2
13	Sergo Ratiani	Chancellor (Head of Administration)	Ilia University	HEI 2
14	Giorgi Gotsiridze	Rector	I. Gogebashvili University	HEI 3
15	Ia Jimshitashvili	Ac. Council Member	I. Gogebashvili University	HEI 3
15	Nino Kakhashvili	Assistant Professor	I. Gogebashvili University	HEI 3
16	Malkhaz Tsirekidze	Senate member;	I. Gogebashvili University	HEI 3
17	Diana Mchedlishvili	Quality Assurance unit, Head	I. Gogebashvili University	HEI 3
18	Hamlet Razmadze	Chancellor (Head of Administration)	I. Gogebashvili University	HEI 3
19	Rima Beriashvili	Vice Rector	State Medical University	HEI 4
20	Nino Vepkhvadze	Academic Council member; Professor	State Medical University	HEI 4
21	Nino Lobjanidze	Senate member; QA specialist	State Medical University	HEI 4
22	Tinatin Chiqovani	Faculty of Medicine; Dean	State Medical University	HEI 4
23	Irina Kvachadze	Quality Assurance Unit, Head; Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research	State Medical University	HEI 4
24	Nelly Kakulia	Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Rehabilitation	State Medical University	HEI 4
25	Shorena Maxachadze	Vice Rector	Batumi State University	HEI 5
26	Marina Qoridze	Academic Council member; Head of Department of Biology	Batumi State University	HEI 5
27	Nino Rokva	Senate member; Associate professor	Batumi State University	HEI 5

28	Lela Tavdgiridze	Professor	Batumi State University	HEI 5
29	Lela Turmanidze	Quality Assurance Unit, Head; Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Research	Batumi State University	HEI 5
30	Irakli Katsadze	Acting Chancellor. Head of Financial and economic development dept.	Batumi State University	HEI 5
31	Anzor Beridze	Department of Mathematics and Applied Sciences	Batumi State University	HEI 5
32	Nino Chubinidze	Head of NEAC (2006-09)	NEAC	PA1
33	David Kereselidze	Head of NEAC (2009-10)	NEAC/NCEQE	PA2
34	Marina Jvania	Head of Ed. Programme Development Unit	NEAC/NCEQE	PA3
35	Rezo Khoperia	Deputy head of Accreditation and Authorization	NEAC/NCEQE	PA4
36	Maka Kordzadze	Coordinator of educational programme development	NEAC/NCEQE	PA5
37	Ghia Nodia	Minister of MES (2008-09)	MES	PA6
38	Bela Tsipuria	Deputy Minister of HE & Research (2004-08)	MES	PA7
39	Nodar Surguladze	Deputy Minister of HE & Research (2008-12)	MES	PA8
40	Nugzar Chitaia	HE development Dept. Head	MES	PA9
41	Lela Maisuradze	HE Harmonization & international integration Dept. Head	MES	PA10
42	Chiora Taqtaqishvili	Former head of legal dept/member of parliamentary ed. Committee	MES/Parliament	PA11
43	Lali Bakradze	Local Expert	MES/Freelancer	LExpert1
44	Lika Glonti	Local Expert/TWNING programme coordinator/Head of Accreditation Council	Freelancer/NEAC/TWNING	LExpert2
45	Marine Chitashvili	Local HE expert/Centre for Social Sciences, Director	SCC	LExpert3
46	Mzia Mikeladze	Local HE expert	International School of Economics in TSU/Caucasian University	LExpert4

APPENDIX 3. LIST OF REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

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