The Role of the Orthodox Church in the Politics and Democratization of Georgia and Romania

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Abstract

Orthodox Churches have played a crucial role in the politics of Georgia and Romania since the fall of Communism. While both institutions were initially weak, in the following decades of transition to democracy, their social and political influence grew tremendously. Both Orthodox Churches have exercised considerable influence over political institutions.

This study exposes the ways in which the Orthodox churches affect political institutions. In so doing, it compares the two highly similar cases of Georgia and Romania by using theories of democratisation and secularisation. While seeking to answer these questions, the study employs similarity-based comparative case-study analysis and qualitative interviewing for exploring the major similarities and differences across the two cases. The main findings are that in both countries the Orthodox churches employ their social influence directly and/or indirectly to affect political processes. This has resulted in the emergence of a complex web of overlapping competences often at conflict with democratisation, democratic accountability and the separation of politics from religion.

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Introduction

For centuries, the Church has been directly linked with national identity in the countries where Orthodox Christianity is the predominant religion. The restoration of the power and influence of the Orthodox religion is particularly noticeable after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The rise of nationalism in the beginning of the 1990s and a very slow transition from Communism towards liberal democracy, which is still in progress in most post-soviet states, served to align the interests of the churches and states**.** The development of church-state relations through these twenty-six years turned into a mix of power-relationship between the state and religious institutions. On the one hand, several interpretations of the terms secularism and democracy and, on the other hand, the sympathy of the orthodox church towards a hierarchical and authoritarian governance weakened the process of democratisation and caused difficulties in the process of secularization of the post-communist states (Anderson 2003), which also applies to Georgia and Romania.

A. Research Aim and question

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of the Orthodox Church (OC) as a religious actor in politics, especially its impact on political institutions and its effect on democratization of two post-Communist states: Georgia and Romania. The increase and decrease of the power of the Orthodox church in these states **is explained both by internal and external factors** as they emerged through history since the collapse of the Soviet Union until the contemporary times. However, the paper mainly focuses on the contemporary

situation in these two states and comparative parallels are drawn between the present and the past.

Constitutionally, both Romania and Georgia have an institutional separation between the church and the state. Moreover, none of the two countries has an official state religion. However, in both countries Orthodox Christianity is the dominant religion and the OCs are privileged institutions with a considerable political influence. The political influence of the OCs in both countries is determined by the social influence they enjoy. In both countries, the OC has the highest level of public trust among the citizens (Chitanava, 30 September 2016; Dale-Harris, 19 September 2012). However, it has also been argued that the monopoly of the church on public opinion could not have been achieved without governmental support (Ladaria, 2012: 108). Moreover, the political statements of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and an active involvement in lawmaking raises concerns about its impact on the democratic development of Georgia (Funke, 2014). Similarly, in Romania priests publicly express their political preferences thus affecting choices made by democracies (Rus, 2009:141). If in Georgia priestly involvement is only indirect, in Romania direct involvement of priests in politics is not uncommon (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 121).

In spite of the fact that the existing literature gives us certain idea concerning the role of the orthodox church in politics and democratization in Georgia and Romania, existing scholarship has not drawn comparison between these two states. However, it is important to identify similarities and differences in the ways through which the Orthodox churches exercises power over national political institutions and how the power relationship between the church and national political institutions is changing. The comparison is also important to show that relatively similar historical experiences and the strong affiliation of the orthodox church with national identity in both states could have caused the similar political approaches of the orthodox churches in Georgia and Romania.

This study aims to redress this imbalance in existing scholarship and seeks to compare the two cases are by answering the following main research question: what are the *ways* in which the Orthodox Church is affecting political institutions in Romania and Georgia and what kinds of effects does it have on the process of democratization? Sub-question: How has the church-state power-relationship shifted throughout the time?

B. Statistical Data and Literature Review

After declaring independence, the OC gained a huge power and trust from society. The legitimation of the church performance could partly be explained by public support and partly by government support, which is expressed in several forms, especially in funding. According to the Pew Research Center 2017 report, religiosity in Central and Eastern European states is aptly described as "believing and belonging, without behaving" (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017, 7). 89% of Georgian and 86% Romanian populations identify themselves as Orthodox Christians (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017, 20). However, only 21% of Romanian and 17% of Georgian citizens are practicing Christians (11). 80% of Georgians and 65% of Romanians say that "religious institutions strengthen morality" (94). Based on the Caucasus Barometer 2013 public opinion poll in Georgia, trust in the Orthodox church was 82% (CRRC 2013). Based on NDI survey question on how the society would rate the performance of the GOC, 75% rated the institution as positively in 2015, 70% in 2016 and according to the latest polls published in April 2017 the result was 58%, followed by Public Service Hall with 55% and Army with 51% (NDI 2017). However, according to the International Republican Institute (IRI) February 2017 report, 88% rate the work of the GOC positively. On the one hand, it is surprising to find such a considerable difference in the results of two organisations. On the other hand, a huge decrease in trust in April could be ascribed to the 'Cyanide Case' that took place two months before the

poll, when a priest allegedly attempted to poison the member of the higher hierarchy in Synod.

Based on the Eurobarometer Romanian national report of 2004, among the institutions enjoying the highest degree of confidence of Romanians, the ROC led with 82%, followed by the EU (74%) and the Army (72%). Based on the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) report of 2015, public faith in the church constituted 61% (Romania-Insider 2015). The Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) showed relatively similar results in the 2016 report, where only 58% trust church (IRES 2016, 13). This is huge decline in comparison to 2003, when ROC had 90% public trust (gandul.info 2016). It is significant to examine what led to the gradual decrease of public trust in the Church in Romania and quick decrease in Georgia.

For strengthening the argumentation of the thesis, there are used a number of relevant sources. According to Kakachia, GOC "played a pivotal role in national identity: society, culture, economics, and politics" (Kakachia 2014:1). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when most of the parties 'discredited themselves' because of their nationalistic rhetoric, the church "emerged as an actor on Georgian ideological market (Ladaria 2012, 108).

Special attention is drawn on the consultative role of the Orthodox church regarding education system and its right to intervene in law framing (Hug 2015,9). No less important is issue of church funds received from the state budget, which is mostly spent on religious education. However, it is very difficult to control church expenses as far as transparency is not guaranteed from the side of the church (Minesashvili, 2015:5). Important is to outline that the GOC has a negative attitude towards 'LGBT' groups and some of them even participated in the violent activity against this group (Hug 2015: 9). In his argument, Hug relies on one concrete example of 17 May 2014, when sexual minorities held demonstration in the heart of Tbilisi and some of the church representatives organized opposing demonstration which turned into attack between these two sides. However, after this incident the official statement of the

church was quite negative towards this fact and they condemned this violence.

Special attention should be drawn to the homogeneity of the GOC. There are only few liberal groups within the church who are more favourably dispoted to institutional separation, but they are not in the decision-making positions (Minesashvili, 2015:5). Kakachia argues that "Patriarchate is the only institution in Georgia to demonstratively disobey secular legislation and that it improperly interferes in civil affairs" (Kakachia, 2014:1). He also outlines the importance of church opinion in shaping the foreign policy vector and how significant it was for state leaders to ensure that church would publicly support the idea of EU integration (Kakachia, 2014:5).

In the Romanian case, Stan and Turcescu emphasize the privileged place of the Orthodox church since 1989. Orthodox religion is dominant and the Orthodox Church is a privileged institution and a considerable force for political actors (Dale-Harris, 2012). Nowadays, religion and political parties are closely related, some of the priests are participating in elections, especially in municipal elections (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 121). Moreover, like in the Georgian case in Romania "the political personalities are increasingly trying to get electoral advantages by showing that they respect religious values" (Iancu, Balaban, 2009, 164). Democratizations not necessarily causes secularization, which example is Romania, where ROC gained symbolic and uniting role of the nation and maintained a special role in the public sphere by accepting (2009, 371

There are no conflicts between church and state, but their relations are politicized. Moreover, church preserves legal discrimination against sexual minorities (Enyedi 2010, 222). Thus, affiliation between ROC and national identity is the factor for discrimination towards the other churches too (Enyedi 2010, 223). In church-state relations there is visible a privileged role of the ROC in "financial assistance, media privileges or educational facilities" (Alexandru 2006, 65).

The following chapter is about the theoretical framework of the thesis, specifically democratization, democratic transition and consolidation and secularization in the post-communist is discussed in order to explain church-state relations. The next chapter discusses the methodological part, specifically case selection, the type of comparative analysis, techniques of data collections and the method of data analysis.

I. Theoretical framework and Research Methodology

1.1 Secularism in Semi-consolidated Democracies

As the theoretical approach of this paper we employ Alfred Stepan's article on 'multiple secularism' to explain church-state relations in Georgia and Romania (Freedom House 2016). Stepan considers that there should not be any special privileges for religious institutions that "allow them to authoritatively mandate public policy to democratically elected officials or to effectively deny critical freedoms to any citizens" (Stepan 2012, 116). Moreover, he believes that secularism is an 'institutional guarantee' for a functioning democracy. Fox admits that "modern challenges do not lead to religion's inevitable decline" (Fox, 2016:158). He claims that nowadays secularism has gained an ideological form and it is mostly about competition between "secularism and religious political forces in society" (159).

Moreover, they argue that religion is not the main factor in the context of which the results of democratization could be explained (Linz and Stepan 1996). Stephan emphasizes that democracy should not be considered consolidated in a country 'unless there is the opportunity for the development of a robust and critical civil society that helps check the state and constantly generates alternatives' (Stephan 2000, 39). However, during the Communist era, Orthodox Christianity, with a 'caesaropapist' tendency to rely on the state and indeed be a national church, was not able to transform itself into a force of oppositional activity (245).

1.2 Role of Religion in Democracy-Formation

In order to explain the role of the OC in democracy-formation, John Anderson's work on transitional societies is used. Anderson argues that religion is becoming less important in a

number of countries. However, at the same time he admits that religion has a vital impact on the development or lack of development of a democracy. Anderson also investigates the link between economic welfare and religious pluralism, claiming that there is a correlation between socio-economic development and the desire to become religiously more pluralistic, However, at the same time admits that this is not the case for Orthodox tradition (Anderson 2003). Analysing transitions from authoritarianism to democracy, Anderson's admits that it is more difficult for the Orthodox Christian and Islamic traditions to "consolidate their democratic experiments than [it is for] Western Catholic states" (Anderson 2004).

Norris and Inglehart similarly argue that religion is stronger in those states where people face inequality and poverty and vice-versa in the contexts of an enhanced welfare-state secularity is increasing (Norris and Inglehart 2004). They have argued that 'social vulnerability and the lack of human development drive [the levels of] religiosity' and observed that affecting 'societal vulnerability, insecurity, and risk that … drives religiosity' are not just levels of national economic resources, or growth, 'but their distribution as well' (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 64, 106). Therefore, this way of seeing secularisation has argued that while a long-term 'linear decline of religiosity over successive birth cohorts' is generally expected, its fate will be dependent on historical and political processes. It will only occur in those Central and East European Countries that have experienced 'a long-term process of human development and economic equality' and will be most evident among 'the most secure and affluent social sectors' (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 114).

Finally, and importantly the secularisation theory argues that post-Soviet countries are likely to experience 'a short-term revival of religiosity if conditions since the fall of communism generate widespread feelings of sharply diminished existential security' (Inglehart 2004, 115). This way of thinking is more historical and promising, especially for the analysis of Romania and Georgia, both of which have been characterised with high degrees of political

and social instability.

1.3 Hypothesis

Based on the above mentioned factors, the first hypothesis is that in both states the Orthodox Church exercises influence on various public institutions, as well as national and local elections by employing their social influence in support of their political preferences.

The second hypothesis is that the relationship between the Orthodox churches and state institutions has gained the form of competition due to overlapping competences.

1.4 Research Methodology

Research population of this specific topic is the Orthodox community living in Post-Communist states. Scope condition is Orthodox Christianity which puts these states under one contextual framework. The paper concentrates on two particular cases: the case of Romania as the member of the EU and as predominantly Orthodox Christian state and the case of Georgia as EU aspirant state with the same religion.

Here it should be emphasized that due to the nature of case study research, the selection of these two samples was purposeful. Both Romania and Georgia are predominantly Orthodox Christian states and religion is strongly associated with the national identity. Vast majority of Georgian and Romanian citizens are orthodox (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017, 20). In spite of the fact that the public trust in church is gradually declining during the last few years, church remains the most trusted institution among the others. It may even seem that Georgia is passing through the same history as Romania. During the Communist era, both in ROC and GOC were controlled by governments and usually chose to conform with the regime

in order to survive. After communism, both Orthodox churches became dominant and privileged. Such influence of the churches served as one of the stimulators of the rise of religious populism as post-Communist politicians sought to attract the votes of large Orthodox communities. Like Romania, Georgia also adopted an anti-discrimination law in 2013, which caused heated debates followed by huge protests and acts of aggression against the LGBT community in a rude violation of democratic principles. According to the Freedom House Report of 2016, Georgia is named as a transitional government or hybrid regime with the democracy score of 4.61 and Romania as semi-consolidated democracy, with the democracy score of 3.46, which is slightly better in comparison to the Georgian democratic index (Freedom House 2016). In Georgia 55% and in Romania 52% of people are in favor of democratic governance. Here it should be also mentioned that 46% of population supports the political influence of religious leaders (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017,100). Key differentiating factor of those two states is that Romania is an EU member state and Georgia is an EU aspirant state.

As a research methodology, similarity-based qualitative case study research in the light of comparative analysis is employed (Gisselquist 2014). For paired comparison of democratization processes, paper relies on the article of Whitehead's (Whitehead 2002). Moreover, 'Critical Junctures' are identified, which placed institutional arrangements on paths or trajectories, which constituted starting point of the path dependent processes of these movements (Kelemen, 2007:242). Timeline of the research is since the collapse of the Soviet Union until now. The research thus proceeds into two parts, one of which is historical, while the other contemporary. For the historical part, which is mostly about democratic transition, the study relies on a range of existing literature and meta-analysis. For the contemporary part, however, one of the main methods of data collection is conducting interviews. The proposed study also employees content analysis based on the journals, newspaper articles, laws, as well

as the reports of Pew Research Center, Eurobarometer, Caucasusbarometer, Freedom House, CRRC, NDI and IRES.

In the second part of the research, aim of holding interviews was to check the accuracy of the existing literature and to obtain more information about the relationship between the Church(es) and political institutions from a range of independent experts, political actors, NGOs working in a related field, theologians and number of priests varying ideological preferences are also interviewed. All interviews are comprehensive and as for the selection of the respondents there was employed purposeful sampling method (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, 79).

Thesis Interview guidelines are semi-standardized, containing 20 questions for each case (Berg, 2009:107). Follow up questions do not have numbers and are presented in bolded italic form. The interview guideline contains warm-up, core and cooling down phases (Berg 2009). As a follow up, probes and prompts (Keats, 2000:39), content *mining* and summing up questions (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) were frequently used. As for the technical part, face to face interviews were held in Tbilisi and Bucharest and only 3 of them were online interviews. All in all there were conducted 25 interviews. In Georgian case, interviews have been held with thirteen respondents, while in Romanian case, there were conducted 12 interviews. Anonymity of the respondents in the analytical part of the text is guaranteed. The duration of each interview was at least an hour or more.

For the actual analysis of the interviews, there is used matrices both in Georgian and Romanian cases. For the thematic analysis particular focus is on the following issues: different perception of secularism and shared competences, church financing, religious education, church, elections and party politics and church and minorities. All of these topics are analysed in separate chapters, each of which contains introductory part based on the already existing literature. As a coding method, Vivo's coding technique is used, according to which "words

and short phrases from participants' own language" are used (Miles, 2014:74). Respondents are divided in two or three groups according to their positioning on each topic: negatively, positively and in some cases we have neutral positions. For each topic, Georgian and Romanian cases are analyzed separately and then are drawn parallel comparisons across these two cases, on which level "causal effect is theorized and examined" (Rohlfing, 2012:12). As for the interview guidelines for each case, explanation concerning the technical part of the interview and the transcripts could be found in Appendix 1 as a Google Drive Link.

Based on the analysis, finally the aim of the paper was to shed light on the reality of church-state relations and the mechanisms how church affects the national institutions through various directions and what kind of role does it play in the democratization of Georgia and Romania.

II. Historical Transition in Comparative Perspective

2.1 Baptized Communists - Georgia after Communism (1990-2003)

Georgia declared independence on 9 April 1991. However, the seminal moment in the political history of Georgia was 9th of April 1989 when the Soviet troops attacked peaceful protesters in Tbilisi and left 19 persons dead. This was the night that according to most historical opinion *de facto* ended the Soviet rule in Georgia. On that night, the protesters refused to follow Patriarch Ilia II who advised them to relinquish protest and go to the nearby church. Therefore, this was also probably the most secular moment in the contemporary history of Georgia when national and civic identity prevailed over religious identity. Such prevalence of national identity was no coincidence. The Georgian National Liberation Movement, which was an essentially conservative force that sought to preserve history, nationhood and the Orthodox Christian traditions, was the dominant energy of the day (Jojua 2010, 12). The movements' cult figure was Ilia Chavchavadze, a writer and public servant who had been killed in 1907. Jones aptly remarks how Chavchavadze's famous quote, the 'sacred trinity of language, faith and homeland', appeared wherever Georgians held demonstrations (Jones 2013, 46). Importantly, in spite of the fact that Chavchavadze was a liberal and a secularist, he canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church in 1987. This has often been seen as the moment at which 'religious nationalism' was born in Georgia. Such a view has at times been criticized for missing the obvious fact of disobedience towards the Patriarch during the 9 April demonstration.

However, both statements are accurate in their own right. 'Religious nationalism' was indeed present, but it was not controlled by the church but instead by the lay leaders of the National Movement. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who would become the first President of Georgia,

actively used a Christian messianistic political language that was coupled with the ethno-chauvinistic discourse of 'ethnic purity' and the superiority of 'Georgiannes' (Jones 2013, 56-61).

In fact, a certain competition was even discernible between the church and the nationalist elite. Gamsakhurdia called his own politics as 'the Way of Christ', while the road taken by his opponents was demonised as 'the way of Barabbas' (Gamsakhurdia 2004, 24-27). He called for a moral and spiritual reformation and appealed actively to the Orthodox Christian heritage that was then generally viewed 'as an essential factor for the formation of national self-awareness' (Zedania 2011, 124). This presents us with a particularly interesting relationship between the dominant political energy and the church on the eve of Georgia's independence. On the one hand, Gamsakhurdia was appropriating Christian vocabulary and theology for his own political ends. On the other hand, he implicitly attacked the Georgian Orthodox Church and called for the Church to be cleansed of corruption and 'KGB influences'. As in Romania, in Georgia too, the Church was in an ambivalent position. As with all Orthodox churches under Soviet rule, the Georgian church had also been persecuted. However, like many of them, and especially its Romanian counterpart, the Georgian Church had also cooperated with Communists to varying degrees. Thus, by the time Georgia became independent, the Georgian Orthodox Church was neither strong enough, nor in a morally strong position to rally the people around itself. Zedania correctly observes that the early form of religious nationalism was 'by no means dominated by the institution of the Church' (Zedania, 124).

Gamsakhurdia's government was brought down in a coup d'état in 1992. Georgia's next president Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Foreign Secretary of the Soviet Union, chose a different strategy in his treatment of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Facing a country torn by the civil war and severe economic stagnation, Shevardnadze chose to befriend the church and exploit its increasing public standing. In 1993, the formerly atheist Shevardnadze was baptised

by the Patriarch himself. This was the moment of great significance in the history of the relationship between the church and the state in Georgia.

Constitutionally, Georgia even become a republic with *laïcité* when the temporary Military Council that ruled between the two presidents restored the 1921 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. This Constitution established a strict *laïcité*: a clear institutional separation between the church and state, as well as prohibiting the funding of *any* religion (Article 31, Constitution of the DRG; Papuashvili 2012, 101). Practically, this had little effect since constitutional principles were not relevant in the country embroiled in a civil war, complete failure of political organisation and severe economic stagnation. However, considerable changes in the realm of church-state relationships were introduced by the new 1995 Constitution. Apart from guaranteeing religious freedom in general, the new constitution also recognised "the special role of the Georgian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in the history of Georgia and its independence from the state" (Constitution of Georgia, 1995, 1:9). With this totally unprecedented provision, the 1995 Constitution constitutionally 'normativised' a dominant political idea that the Georgian Orthodox Church was *the* defining institution of Georgian nationhood. Another critical juncture came in 2002 with the signing of the Constitutional Agreement between the State and the Church, known in Georgia as the 'Concordat', that granted the church a whole range of privileges not possessed by any other institution, religious or secular. These included a repatriation to the GOC as the victim of Soviet repression in the amount of 25 million Georgian Lari, a total immunity of the Patriarch from the Georgian law, the exemption of priests from military service as well as the exemption of the GOC from taxation.

The return of religious liberty, as well as greater legal and financial stability led to a renewed Christianization of Georgia. In the 25 years of independence, the number of priests increased 30 times from an estimated 100 to over 3,000 as have the number of churches also

(Father Botkoveli 2015). The social influence of the church also increased sharply in the 1990s and 2000s, especially as the question of the church's ethical responsibility during the Soviet era never arose as much as it did in Romania. Most of the 1990s were dominated by the language of religious nationalism, as Georgia remained a failed state that was in no position to generate a civic identity. This would change only with the onset of the Rose Revolution that inaugurated a new political time in the history of Georgia.

2.2 The New Symbiosis: Romania After Ceaușescu

After the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian Orthodox Church sought a policy of readjustment. The relationship between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Communist regime had been ambivalent. Before 1965, the Church was being actively persecuted by the Communist regime. This was followed by a period of relative 'liberation' that was then followed by a new wave of persecutions when Patriarch Justinian Marina died in 1979 (Stan 2011). Nevertheless, Ceaușescu's name had 'ritually been blessed while he ruled' (Mungiu-Pippidi 1998, 85). Thus the collapse of the Communist rule left the church in an ambivalent position. Patriarch Teoctist Arăpașu had tacitly supported Ceaușescu and sent him a telegram praising his 'brilliant activity', 'daring thinking' and claimed that the Romanians live 'in a Golden age, properly and righteously bearing [Ceaușescu's] name' (Bordeaux 2007). The duality of the church's image, both as a victim of Communist persecution and a collaborator with the regime, led to an inner challenge for power. As Ceaușescus left Bucharest, Patriarch Teoctist also went into hiding and spent three weeks at a monastery. Finally, Teoctist's supporters prevailed and he was reinstated in his position. These were three unique weeks, because this was the first time the church had reflected on its past under Communism and the last time it would do so.

Teoctist's quashing of inner dissent contributed tremendously to the rise of the church. The social influence of the ROC grew tremendously. The state television that was for years prohibited from showing religious material, now created a whole new department called "Spiritual Life" and began to broadcast Orthodox programmes on two channels. The schools began to teach Orthodox religion and the number of churches grew astronomically. It has been estimated that on average, one church has been built in every three days in Romania (Stan and Turcescu, 65). Already in 1991, 88% of Romanians chose to declare themselves as Orthodox, though only 8% were active church-goers (Mungiu-Pippidi 1998, 86). Therefore, already at the beginning Orthodox Christianity might be seen as a powerful part of national self-identification — a tendency that would only continue in the next two decades. In 1996, Romania's first president, Ion Iliescu, an atheist ex-Communist, was asked by the Christian-Democrat Constantinescu: "Do you believe in God, Mr. Iliescu?" Iliescu lost the election. After making carefully staged appearances at the church, he then won the 2000 presidential election again.

Romania declared its intent to join the European Union and the NATO already in 1998, which sparked the earliest wave of Euroscepticism. Most especially, Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania of Cluj was a fierce opponent of Romania's European integration. The Transylvanian bishop constantly maintained that Europe was the home of sin and homosexuality. In 1998, he proposed that the Holy Synod officially endorse priests to become 'electoral advisers to the public'(Mungiu, 86), while in 2011 a legislator proposed that Patriar Daniel head the government on the grounds 'not only of deep dissatisfaction with the government, but also the respect the Orthodox Church enjoys among Romanians' (Stan 2011).

2.3 Transitional Comparison

In both Romania and Georgia, the status of the Orthodox Churches was ambivalent.

While both churches had been persecuted, both had also cooperated to a degree with the Communist regime. None of the churches enjoyed a strong social standing amid the dawn of independence. However, they both did after a decade. While Georgia was first ruled by nationalist elites some of whom had been highly skeptical of the church, the downfall of the Gamsakhurdia regime opened the way for the formerly Communist elites to return to power. Importantly, in both Romania and Georgia, the church regained its power in the context of formerly Communist and conservative elites. This was to prove of importance, since the ex-Communist elites themselves had to gain a new foothold in new political realities, thus trying to co-opt the church instrumentally. In both Georgia and Romania, this was a defining characteristic that in turn enabled the Orthodox churches to regain and increase their power upon social and political life. The symbiosis in best exemplified in the joint blessing of the Parliament of Romania, a symbol of Communist rule in Romania for the construction of which a number of old churches were demolished. In Georgia, in turn, the baptism of ex-Soviet Foreign Minister represents the same move of the formerly Communist countries and elites towards a Christian future. In both Romania and Georgia, the Orthodox Churches exploited this need of ex-Communist elites to forget the past in order to bury their own past and present the two churches as victims of persecution.

III. Overview of Legal Framework

3.1 Legal aspects of religions in Georgia

The main legal framework for religion is the Constitution of Georgia, which provides for the freedom of religion and belief as well as religious equality before the law (Article 14). This political principle was further strengthened by the Anti-Discrimination Law (2014) that seeks to eliminate every form of discrimination including discrimination of religion or belief (Art.1). Another important document is the Concordat (2000), a constitutional agreement between the church and the state. The GOC is the only church to have this kind of a privileged constitutional agreement with the Georgian state. The Concordat exempts the GOC from taxation for producing ecclesiastic goods (Art 6). Moreover, both the state and the church are eligible to conduct joint social protection programs (Art.4[3]). According to the same document, the state assumes the obligation to take care of the Georgian Orthodox religious monuments located in the territories outside the state (Art. 10).

Until 2005, the GOC was the only religious denomination that was officially registered as a legal entity under public law (Abashidze 2006, 101). In 2005, the Georgian parliament canceled this article, thereby demonstrating an initial intent to introduce greater legal equality among religious institutions. On the 5th June 2011, the new article 1509[1] was added to the Civil Code that enabled other religious organisations to register as legal entities under public law, like the GOC (Chitanava 2015,7). With this, all recognised confessions became legally equal to GOC.

There are more laws mentioning religion, such as the law on General Education adopted in 2005, according to which the state guarantees freedom of public schools from religious units (Art. 3) and prohibits religious indoctrination, proselytism and forceful assimilation with

particular religious confessions (Art.13). Moreover, in the Tax Code of Georgia (2010), the content of religious organizations is also specified (Art. 11). Based on this law, religious activity is defined as non-economic (Art. 9). According to this law, religious organizations are free from taxation of their property and as for the GOC they have some additional privileges in terms of tax free activities in different directions.and the head of the GOC is free from customs control (Art. 219).

3.2. Some legal Aspects of Religions in Romania

The two chief documents in the realm of religion and politics in Romania are the Constitution of Romania (1991) and the Law on Religions (2006). The Romanian constitution entered into force in 1991 and was amended in 2003. At first, the constitutional change was opposed by the ROC on the grounds that the 1923 Constitution had granted the ROC a superior position in relation to other religions (Stan 2011). The 1923 Constitution indeed recognised two national religious confessions: the Romanian Orthodox church and the Greek Catholic Church of Romania. The current constitution draws no clear boundaries between church and state institutions and does not declare Romania to be a secular state. While the 1991 constitution holds that the state is not allowed to interfere in the sphere of religion, the same is not declared explicitly about the church's interference in the state's activities.

In 1998, under the Governmental Decree 63, the State Secretariat for Religions was allowed to register new religious denominations. A further important steps in this direction was taken in 2006 when the Romanian government adopted the Law 489, according to which all religious denominations that had been functioning continuously for 12 years, and had a membership amounting to at least 0.1% of the population, were able to be officially registered. Based on this criteria, there are 18 religious denominations registered currently (Marcus 2015, 65). The political liberty of all recognized denominations is guaranteed by the constitution

(Lordache 2003,245).

The Romanian constitution also guarantees religious education in public schools (Art. 32[7)]. The chapter below on religious education in Romania illustrates the legal aspects and factual information further. In the case of Romania, the state can grant a different legal status to different religious groups. They could be a private or a public entity (Marcus 2015, 87). Despite the fact that the law recognised the special role of the ROC, the equality of all denominations before the law is still formally recognised. However, this comes into a conflict with the actual situation. Unlike the Georgian case, in the articles 10, 11 and 12 of the Law of Religions, issues related to the state finances are clearly defined, but in practice it is still difficult to control how much money is spent in sum due to the decentralised nature of funding. Unlike Georgia, Romania has a special law on Military Clergy (2000) as well as the Law on State Support of the Salaries of Clergy (1999) and the Law on the denomination's' executive rights to produce objects of religious worships.

If we compare the legal organization of the two states concerning religion, we might conclude that the Romanian legislation is at once more complex and also more problematic than the Georgian one. None of the two constitutions state that the state is secular and in both countries the OC is distinctly privileged. In the Georgian case, we could not find a clear picture of how the church is linked with the educational system and the Concordat also leaves a possibility of interpretation. In contrast, the Romanian law on education is clearer and explicitly guarantees religious education at schools. Unlike Romania, in Georgia priests do not receive salaries. Therefore, there is no specific law on this issue. Apart from this, the procedure of registration, as well as the legal status of religious denominations is better defined in Georgia. However, in Georgia there are neither statutes of specific religious denominations, nor a general law on religious denominations.

IV. Various Aspects of Church-State Relationship Since 2000s

4.1 Georgia after 2000s

A new era began in Georgia with the Rose Revolution that ousted President Shevardnadze. Mikheil Saakashvili assumed presidency in February 2004 with a massive popular mandate of almost 90% of the votes. Saakashvili's decade-long presidency would be the era of revolutionary modernisation characterised by speedy reforms that profoundly shook the conservative society unused to reform. By 2004, the Georgian Orthodox Church was the very defining institution of the 'old order' towards which the Western-educated liberal reformer showed a disdain. As a former minister tells me, the church was 'faced with the Revolution as the reality, so while it was neither happy with Saakashvili, nor welcoming, the church nevertheless made peace with its fortune' (No13 Zakareishvili).

Initially, in 2007, amid the visit of the Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I, Saakashvili in fact praised the Georgian Orthodox Church not only 'for its loyalty towards the Orthodox faith, but also for its tolerance and very consistent policy of promoting European values' (Civil/Oct 2007) The relationship between the president and the patriarch deteriorated formally in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008. In the aftermath of the war, the patriarch criticised Saakashvili's wartime leadership observing that ''it will never do to bump your head against the wall without being able to find a door in it; the captain of a ship must lead his vessel, being able to maneuver and escape reefs' (Radio Liberty, 16 October 2009) However, at that time Saakashvili's mandate was fresh and there was still no viable alternative that the church could support. Therefore, until a powerful billionaire, Bidzina Ivanishvili, would challenge Saakashvili in 2011, the GOC was short of options but somehow

to coexist with Saakashvili. However, before the 2012 elections the vast majority of clerics, including high-ranking bishops, unofficially supported Ivanishvili's opposition. Some churches even rose the blue flags of Ivanishvili's "Georgian Dream Coalition" in plain sight and in violation of the Ecclesiastical Law (Minesashvili).

However, paradoxically, during the era of the allegedly liberal president —though he never identified himself as a secularist — Georgia did not become either more secular, or more religiously free. On the contrary, the political and religious influence of the Church grew dramatically exactly during the decade of Georgia's alleged 'liberalisation'. Church-financing grew to hitherto unprecedented levels, religious property expropriated by the Soviet Union and given to the church was not returned to religious minorities, the GOC remained the only church in receipt of state funding and there were several unresolved instances of attacks on religious minorities (Chitanava 2016).

The church's exceptionalist discourse, best captured by the patriarch when he declared in 1997 that "only the Orthodox Church maintains the true and original teaching of Christianity" (*Saqartvelos Respublika*, 1997) only intensified in the 200s. If before the Rose Revolution the Georgian failed state was in no position to attempt the generation of its own political language of civic patriotism and civic nationalism, the Saakashvili state, with a modernised army, the "Patriot" summer camp, a new flag and a new anthem certainly tried to create a new civic identity for contemporary Georgia. This happened along essentially liberal-conservative lines, however, the GOC found the modernising zeal as 'anti-Georgian' and 'anti-traditional'. Consequently, the sense of exceptionalism increased when faced with a greater existential threat coming from the state engaged in revolutionary modernisation (Zedania 2011).

While the GOC has in general supported the democratisation of Georgia, its practice has often remained at odds with democratic values. The representatives of the GOC have

vehemently opposed the restitution of confiscated properties to religious minorities, the Anti-Discrimination Law, and the introduction of the civic education subject "The Society and I". In 2015, the patriarch then suggested that he should be granted the right to pardon prisoners — a competency of the President of Georgia. While the vast majority of the political elites dismissed the proposal, there swiftly appeared a number of politicians willing to back it Practically all attempts of the GOC failed to reach the desired outcome. However, the GOC managed to have the contents both of the Anti-Discrimination Law and the civic education subject modified, but none of them were dropped.

4.2 Romania after 2000s

Romania embarked on democratisation earlier than Georgia, though it has still not enacted the kinds of reforms that Georgia went through under the Saakashvili administration. Instead of a revolutionary turmoil and a decade of radical reforms, Romanian politics instead progressed calmly. In 1996, Ion Iliescu was defeated by Emil Constantinescu, a Christian-Democrat who was then succeeded by the already more 'Christianized' Iliescu who had made sure to be able to provide a more positive answer to the question that had contributed to his earlier defeat: 'Do you believe in God, Mr. Iliescu?' Under Iliescu's leadership, Romania joined NATO in 2004. Several months later, Traian Basescu assumed presidency. Under the leadership of the new president, Romania intensified the process of integration into the European Union. In 2005, Romania signed the EU accession treaty and, in 2007, finally joined the European Union along with Bulgaria, yet another predominantly Orthodox Balkan state. That Romanian politics progressed in a calmer and more stable manner is important in the context of church-state relationships as well. What best characterises the Romanian situation is a conservative continuum in all realms, including the church-state relationships.

Since the successful return of Patriarch Teoctist, which was also the victory of the image of the church as the victim of Soviet terror, the Romanian Orthodox Church has grown rapidly. Since the 200s, the church has remained the most publicly trusted institution in Romania with the public support of some 87% of Romanians. Like Georgia where only 17% of the population are practicing Orthodox Christians, only 15% of the Romanian population is a church-goer (No4, p.28). However, in both countries, the church has remained as an inseparable part of national identity. As almost all respondents have stressed, regardless of their occupation or persuasion, identifying as an Orthodox is a part of self-identification as a Romanian (No4, p.34; No1, p.8; No5, p.41). This is perhaps best captured in what one of the respondents, himself a priest, told me: 'the voice of the church is the voice of the nation' (No1,p.4). Over the course of years, the ROC has grown financially, receiving approximately 300 - 400 million euros annually from the state, and the number of churches have also increased. According to the estimate, a new church construction is initiated once in every 3 days and the total number of churches exceeds 18, 000 (No11, 99). At the time of writing, there was an ongoing protest in Romania with the motto: "We Want Hospitals, Not Churches!". Almost all respondents unanimously stress that the ROC has a direct influence on party-politics. While priests are not allowed to run for a political office at the national level, there are a number of priests in public institutions in advisory capacities. Moreover, priests exercise influence upon decisions made by their flock. This is especially the case in rural areas where, as one of the respondents told me, 'the priest, the teacher, the mayor and the policeman are the four pillars of the community' (No9, p.80). As in Georgia, where the Patriarch's absence on the eve of the coming revolution was important, in Romania too the Patriarch's position, even if not formally expressed, has a great political influence. As one of the respondents, a politician and a former advisor to a former prime-minister observes in an interview, the election of Klaus Iohannis, a Lutheran President of Romania, was supported in part by the Patriarch's last-minute

statement that ‘even a Lutheran president might be fine’ (No8,p.67). The ROC has generally supported European integration as well as democracy, however, as in the case of the GOC, its practice has often varied (Stan and Turcescu 2000).

4.3 Conflicting Views of Secularism

In both Romania and Georgia, there are conflicting views of secularism that could be divided into three main categories. Respondents in the first category support *institutional secularism* — that is, an institutional separation between religious and political institutions. Those in the second category support both *secularism* and *secularisation* — that is a decrease of religiosity in the mind and life of a society. Respondents in the third group believe that both *institutional secularism* and *secularisation* are adverse phenomena. Except for two priests, all other Orthodox priests that I interviewed support *institutional secularism*. The most broadly representative respondent of this group maintains that at the institutional level, secularism is acceptable and in fact the only variant of church-state relationship in the contemporary reality’ (No3, p.29; No5,p.47; No12, p.123; No11,p.110; No10, p.101). The two priests that represent an exception, both see *both* secularism and secularisation as an existential threat posed by modernity to religion. In fact, both of them support monarchy as the ideal form of government and one of them supports theocracy as well (No2, p.17).

As in Georgia, in Romania too, the absolute majority of my respondents support institutional secularism. However, their opinions are characterised by a greater plurality of qualifications. One of them cites Charles Taylor (2007) and observes that secularism is ‘natural in the West, but not so natural in non-Western non-Christian societies’. While another respondent, even if herself a religious minority conceives of secularism as ‘dangerous and aggressive’ (No5, p.39). Respondents belonging to the second category support both

institutional secularism and secularisation. As the most representative respondent of this group argues, 'the separation of the institutions and also the separation of what is considered to be a religious norm from a legal norm'. He deems it essential that there be laws to avoid even micro-regression from which minorities are never immune (No3, 19). To another respondent in this group a secular Romania necessarily means one in which the church's 'influence which is translated into advantages' is no more. However, as he makes clear, their agenda concerns not only the ROC, but all religions in Romania (No11,91). Finally, belonging to the third category there are those respondents who deem secularism and/or secularisation as negative phenomena. One of them, a conservative priest, maintains that the church's public involvement is crucial because 'the church expresses the moral line of the society'. Strikingly, this priest exemplifies the kind of political exceptionalism of the churches that we have encountered in both countries and especially in the context of the Georgian Orthodox Church's self-identification. Also in the same category of respondents, there is a Lutheran Romania who finds that separation between church and state 'is okay' but at the same person believes that 'secularism is dangerous, because secularism is a campaign against church, it is very violent' (No5, p.99)

Among the factors that weaken secularism, the vast majority or respondents in both countries identified the weakness of political elites as they key factor (No8, p.78; No7, 70), along with the low education levels within the two societies and within the two respective churches (No8, 79; No, p72; No12, 125; No7, 47;No7, 56). One Georgian respondent connected the weakness of secularism to 'the murder of politics during the Soviet Union', which again leads back to the notion that low civic education is a key cause of a weak secular state. On a similar note, a Romanian respondent observed that the ROC's ability to cast itself as the victim of Soviet terror and the voice of the newly redeemed nation is the key factor. However, this too goes back to the two chief causes upon which almost all respondents unanimously agree.

4.4 Overlapping competences

There are several responsibilities that the GOC shares with the state or has a privilege to have a consultative role, which excludes complete separation between church and state institutions. Apart from the educational issues, which is discussed in a separate chapter below, the GOC also has some competences in the penitential system. According to the 2002 Concordat, priests shall be allocated in army and prisons (Art. 4^2). In 2009, a further memorandum was signed according to which "prisoners who had served half of their terms and who presented no danger to society would serve the rest of their terms in monasteries" (Chedia 2009, 174). Moreover, the Concordat allows for the church and state to implement "united social protection programs" (Art.4^3). The Patriarchate, the chief administrative body of the GOC, owns 4 hospitals, from which 2 are therapeutic clinics for the poor (TI 2014). Officially, the Patriarchate also owns "four universities, five seminaries, 25 schools, eight social institutions, 16 charity and development funds and 16 cultural and spiritual institutions" (Minesashvili 2015).

The church also has a certain role in foreign affairs. Despite the fact that the Russian Federation recognises the separatist regions of Abkhazia and "South-Ossetia", the Russian Orthodox Church still recognises the territorial integrity of Georgia and refuses to recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as either its own jurisdiction, or as an independent ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This is viewed in part as a success of Georgian Patriarch Ilia II. However, the Abkhazian Orthodox Church does not consider itself as a part of Georgian territory (Accent.com.ge 2016). As for the foreign political vector, nowadays church's official position concerning Georgia's prospective Euro-Atlantic integration is positive. As the priests claim, the only concerns that the GOC has concerns equal rights for sexual minorities and legalizing

homosexual marriage (No1,p.14; No3,p.36; No4, p.65). However, some of the experts argue that despite such official position the GOC is not really in favour either the EU or NATO. As one of them observes, Georgia and Russia share the same religion with Russians and "money, literature and ideology, alas, comes from there" (No13, p.141). Relatively same issue raised by the other four experts and scholars (No9, p.91; No12, p.131). As one of them mentions, while there are some pro-Russian groups within the GOC, on the whole the Church does not influence Georgian foreign political course (No8,79).

Like the GOC in Georgia, in Romania too, the ROC has similar competences shared with the state institutions. According to the Romanian Constitution religious confessions "shall enjoy support from it, including the facilitation of religious assistance in the army, in hospitals, prisons, homes and orphanages" (Art. 29[5]). According to the news, ROC invested more than 100 million for charity activities and 610 social programs are implemented. They have orphanages, canteens and emergency centers (Basilica.ro 2017). This is also confirmed by one of the respondents, who is a priest and he adds that the State supports church in implementing social programs. As for the penitential system, he admits that "every penitentiary has its own priest and chaplain" (No1, p.10). He also mentions that they provide assistance to drug addicted people (No1,10). The other two respondents, theologian and NGO representative say that ROC has especially good program which aim is to prevent early school abandonment (No3, p.20; No4, 29). The other theologian argues that affiliation with the state money makes church marginalized and the church also realized that it is better to develop their social programs separately, without state funds (No2, p.14). As for the influence of the ROC on framing state's foreign policy, most of the respondents argue that church almost never opposes the state and officially they were very supportive of EU integration as well (No4, No7, No6, No9). In fact, the ROC even has its representation in Brussels (No2, p.17; No10). One of the scholars recalls that the only case when church opposed the government was when NATO wanted to use the

airspace of Romania in order to bomb Serbia in 1999. The position of many members of the ROC was that Serbians were their Orthodox brethren and they would not allow them to use the airspace — an opinion also shared by the majority of population. However, the government allowed this because NATO membership was among Romania's priorities (No6, p.82).

4.5 Church and Education

4.5.1 GOC and education

In Georgia, religious education was mandatory until 2005 and the only religion taught at schools was Orthodox Christianity. In 2005, the government changed the Law of General Education, according to which "religion as a mandatory subject was removed from the curriculum and public schools were recognized as a neutral space" (Chitanava 2015, 8). Religion is not mandatory any more but it depends on school whether they choose to teach religion or not and pupils could choose to study their preferred religion (Kevanishvili 2014). Apart from this, the GOC has a strong consultative role regarding educational issues (Kakachia 2014, 2).

One of the experts recalls the 1990s when one of the bishops announced on the 1st of September that "It's the light in your souls that matters most, not what you learn from the books", which he finds very wrong (No9,p.95). He also mentions that the exact nature of what children are taught is vague and argues that the optimal way is to teach a history of religions (No9, p.96). Another respondent mentions that in the 1990s there existed the retraining center and "as a rule, there were sermons, while the teachers wore headscarves" (No12, p.129). A former minister mentions argues that the way religion is taught now is that our wealth is in our

exceptional nature, that Orthodox Christianity is the best and everything else is useless. “This shatters the foundations of the state and is counter-productive” (No13, p.139). He believes that Orthodox children as well as the members of the other religious denominations should be more integrated, they should learns about each other’s religions, because “our wealth is in our diversity”(No13, p.139).

Some of the priests and theologians place an emphasis on the vital importance of religious education. They stress that although the Concordat provides for cooperation between church and state regarding the educational matters, the reality is different especially concerning the religious education at schools (No2, p.21). The other priest also claims that there are enough educated people in the church to teach and should the state ask, the church is ready to allocate teachers for each school (No6, p.66). The third priest says that “not to teach the dominant religion at school is pretty much the same as not to teach the Georgian language and if the school and the classes were in English” (No3, p.32). On the one hand, state representatives and experts express doubts concerning the qualification of the teachers of religion and on the other hand, majority of the clergy believe that they could freely deal with teaching at schools.

4.5.2 ROC and education

In Romania, religious education went through three stages. In the 1990s religious education, more specifically Orthodox religious education, was a compulsory subject which then gave way to an opt-in system. Since 2014, the enrollment of a child in religious education has depended on parental application to enroll the child in a religious class (Demirgian and Leşcu, 30 July, 2014). Nowadays, all of the 18 recognized denominations could provide religious education at schools upon request (Marcus 2015, 65).

First of all, it should be admitted that all respondents mention that there are many

theologians in Romania, considering this half of the interviewees claim that nevertheless there are not enough qualified teachers who could teach religion. “There are more than 10 000 young students on theology every year” said one of the respondents (No8, p.51). He also argues that after law, theology is the second the most prestigious faculty in Romania. One of the theologian admits that the religious education is confessional which is not ideal. He claims that it would be better if children study generally history of religions. Moreover he admits that in 90s teachers were very high qualified and on the other hand, the students which he teaches after 2000 are not that well prepared. “The worst of my students are getting into education system because salaries are so low” he said (No2, p.15). While the other respondent said that there should be introduced civic education courses for church representatives. “If they educate the small children, let me make sure as the state that you are educated in turn” she says (No9, p.83). The other professor argues that 99% of school teachers are graduates from theology faculty, most of them orthodox. In many classes there are religious minority groups whose professors are not representatives of the same religious denominations and “there were many accusations about orthodox religious prosaicism in state schools” he says (No12, p.102). The same claims the other interviewee, who says that sometime children from religious minorities are obliged to stay on orthodox religion class (No8, p.72).

There were some respondents who were quite critical concerning religious education. One respondent mentions that 3 years ago there a rulebook was published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs according to which a religious assistance department will be created and assigned writing reports about moral education within the ministry, which will be send to Synod, “kind of creepy” he said (No11, p.90). He also claims that “Metropolitan of Constanza sent instruction to all the religious teachers in the area to promote the so called the March for Life” (No11, p.91).

The other respondent states that before adopting the law about ‘opt in’ system, 86%

was involved in Orthodox classes. After adopting the law everyone expected that only 60% would register but surprisingly 90% signed the form to take the religious classes (No 6, p.53). In spite of this fact, she claims that there is a serious problem of religious education in society, The ROC is a very 'relaxed body' and people do not know to what they believe, they are more Easter and Christmas believers (No8, p.47).

Some of the respondents were the supporters of religious education. One of the respondents says that children learn morality (No5, p.41). The other respondent shares this idea and claims that moral values are taught in religious classes, children learn what is good and bad. He also mentions that if people had moral principles life would be better for the society (No1, p.5). The other expert and professor claims that having religious education at schools has historical importance and it is also significant for "spirituality and development of our country" (No4, p.27). According to him, church is a "spiritual counsellor to the army, in the penitentiary system, in the hospitals" (No4, p.27).

While there are categorical similarities in the respondents positions about education, with both OCs trying to influence the contents of education, unlike Romania in Georgia there is no religious education at schools.

4.6 Church Financing

4.6.1 GE - Financing

According to the Pew Research center report on Religions and Public Life, published on May 10, 2017, among Orthodox countries, the GOC has greatest public support for the funding of the church (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017, 42). While 82% of Georgians have a positive attitude about church financing, those who express a critical attitude towards this

represent only a tiny minority.

To go back to the legal aspects of church financing, according to the Constitutional Agreement between the state and the GOC, the church could be financed through public donations as well as from incomes from the business activities. However, exactly what kind of business activity this might refer to remains vague, because the church is not allowed to conduct business activities directly. Moreover the church can get grants, some other types of assistance and other non-specified incomes (Art 6[4]). In 2014 Transparency International, Georgia (TI) provided data concerning business activities of the GOC, church has its own television "Ertsulovneba" registered in 2008 and financed by Patriarchate and partly from the state budget (TI 2014). Apart from this, 25% of Georgians admit that Orthodox Church "focus too much on money" (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017,94).

According to the 2014-2015 joint report of EMC and TDI, from 2002 to 2015 Georgian Patriarchate received 200 971 600 Gel from the central budget . In 2002 GRO funding from the national budget was 857,600 Gel and in 2015 it is officially 25,000,000 Georgian Lari (Gel) (Gvritishvili, Chitanava, Mikeladze, Kvaratskhelia 2016, 13). Based on their research, in 2015 GOC received 31,153,900 GEL from which 82% comes from the state's central budget, 12,7% from the local municipalities and 5,1% from the Government's Reserve Fund. As the report indicated, monitoring of the amount of money given to the GOC from the municipalities is not effective (14). Based on the report of State Agency for Religious Issues (2015), the four recognized religious denominations: Muslims, Armenian Christians, Roman Catholic Church of Georgia and Georgian Jewish Community all in all received 3,500,000 GEL. As far as I could not access the written official course concerning the number of the religious institutions of the GOC, I called in the chancellery of the Patriarchate and based on their oral information according to their data of 2016 there are 1375 acting churches and 420 monasteries.

If we move to the interview analysis, we will see widely divided opinions concerning

reasonability or unreasonability of church funding, church building, church property and also concerning its exemption from taxation. First of all, it is important to illustrate what the priests think about the matter of church financing — all of them have similar approaches. The first two respondents claim that the money handout from the state budget in reality is a very small amount and the largest part of it is directed to educational activities. One of them states that the amount could be far greater in order to organize social programs. “I wish that in the framework of social programs the priest and the village teachers were financed in order to provide instruction in religious choir and chanting” (No1, p.16; No2, p.16). The same mentioned the other two priests, however one of them added that this could not be named as church financing, this is compensation for the damage which church got during the Communist regime (No4, p.41). In addition, the other priest claims that the priests, bishops, chanters, deacons survive thanks to donations and “practically are at God’s mercy” (No6,p.68). The other clergy claims that there exist more advanced financing systems in different states according to which people would willingly pay 5 or 3 percentage for the church to which they belong or just for social work. At the same time, he thinks that giving salaries for clergy is absolutely normal and recalls the example of Finland. He hereby stresses that the protest concerning the church funding is caused because of intransparency, which is fear. However, he also admits that this money is not distributed among clergy members. (N3, p.33). The other priest, who is more critical, says that Orthodox Church was not the only institution to incur damage, but other also incurred the loss (No 13, p.138). Regarding the business activities, one of the priests mentions that running business is not the job of the church, but producing the candles and the other stuff used during the liturgy should not be a problem (No 1, p16). However, he mentions nothing about whether in reality the church runs its own business or not, he just states how it should be. Unlike the previous priest, the other clergy allows that the rumors concerning the church’s business activity could be true. Moreover, he confirmed that some of the priest are more privileged than

the others and they have luxury cars (No5, 13). As for the church building, the other clergy emphasizes on the importance of church existence in self-governmental districts by following phrase: “before building this church, this district was full with sectarians and the nest of drug-addicts”(No3, p.58).

Relatively moderate was the opinion of the current state representative. According to him, the Constitutional Agreement between Church and State is optimal version for cooperation and it does not require changes (No 10, p.109). He hereby admits that “what is established here, on the one hand the legislation and on the other hand practice, both guarantees proper separation between the state and church”(No10,p.102).

The opinions are very diverse in scholars and NGO representatives. Like some of the priests, almost all the rest respondents agree that it would be better to establish the new system of church financing and all of them support the voluntary basis donation from the income tax. However, two of the interviewees claim that in reality there are only 17% of population who are practitioners from whom only 9-10% would pay for the church, so the amount of money which church receives could be three times less than now (No9,p.89). He believes that the only tiny minority of clergies who talk about priests’ salaries are decent priests who feel that there is permanent talk about the corruption in the church, but majority of the priests prefer to have free relationship with the state regarding the finances. “In case the state introduces the salary system for the clergy, the second should be the control of the money which the church receives from the other sources” he said. Here he specifically meant the funds of Georgian businessmen from Russian, who finance them due to the political reasons. (No9, p.92). The other expert and former minister claims that some clergies abused the custom free privilege they even imported tobacco, but then this stopped (No 13, p.139). Another expert also stated that this 25 million is not a huge amount of money, if we divide among the population that will be 8 Gel for per resident yearly. On the other hand he admitted that is is very vague how this money is spent.

According to him the teachers of religious seminaries get 7-8 Gel in hour, so he is curious where this money goes if not on seminaries (No11, p.120).

One of the interviewees claims that during the governance of Saakashvili, the increase of church funding was the "attempt to gain sympathy of church for his government's legitimacy"(No8, p. 83). He also admits that nowadays stopping the funding or decreasing the amount will be seen as taking away their own money. The other interviewee who drafted the concordat states that GOC should not be financed from the state budget at all, but if compromise, the only sensible solution is the voluntary donation (No12, p.126). The last interviewee who is the NGO representative claims that church gets much more money than it is officially known and says that if the church will not receive money from the state this institution will lose power and will not be able to indoctrinate the society (No7.p.67).

To group the responses, the first type of answer was that the church needs more money and priests need salaries, the second type of answer was that everything including finances and law should remain as it is now and the third type of answer was more radical, where respondents stated that there should not exist church financing at all and the only solution could be donation.

4.6.2 RO – Financing

In Romania 58% of population supports public financing of the ROC (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017, 42). But at the same time, 53% of Romanians admit that OC "focus too much on money" (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017,94). Since 2013 some Romanian citizens have raised questions concerning the funding and 1500 people have launched protest demanding that money be spent on building hospitals and not on church-building (Cojocariu and Nicolescu 2013). The slogan of the protests is: "We want hospitals, not cathedrals" („vrem spitale, nu catedrale!") and the number of protesters has grown over the course of years. However, based

on the 2015 data of State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, overall there are 16, 403 religious buildings in Romania (State Secretariat for Religious Affairs 2015). Situation became tense after the nightclub fire in the heart of Bucharest, where 32 people died and 200 were injured and people were especially angry with Patriarch Daniel for being silent regarding this incident (Theguardian 2015). On the other hand, the Patriarchate of Romania announced that closing hospitals and schools is no fault of the church, but is due to demographic problems and the shrinking of the Romanian population (B1 TV 2013).

According to the Law nr. 489/2006, religious denominations get funds based on the number of believers, contribution and also based on the "genuine needs" of particular religions (Art 10^4) and "tax breaks" are also provided for them (Art 10^3). In Romania, all 18 recognized religious denominations receive partial state funding, which is basically distributed on the salaries of clergies "(65% generally and 80% for low income parishes/communities)", also for religious personnel in the penitential system, army and police and educational staff (Marcus 2015, 84). State funds are also used for church-building or reconstruction. Apart from the central budget, religious denominations can also receive money from local municipalities upon the request of the church, as well as from partnerships and **tenders** (85). In 2014 the total amount of salaries for ROC clergies was 219,255,119.

The problematic issue which is very much opposed in certain parts of society is connected with funding of the big Cathedral next to the Romanian Parliament. Between 2009-2014 government allocated 111 million lei for Cathedral construction (Marcus 2015, 64). According to 'Romania-Insider', the Cathedral will have a 25 tone bell with the portrait of Patriarch Daniel and "Patriarchal Cross and Star engraved on it" (Romania-Insider 2017). The bell costs almost 425,000 euro, total cost of the Cathedral building is more than 80 million euro, from which 65 million euro has already spent. "The money is coming from the Romanian Orthodox Church's own funds and from donations" (Romania-Insider 2017). The Romanian

state undertook obligation to build the Cathedral one century ago, but due to the Communist regime the state could not construct it. In 1990 Patriarch Teoctist brought the issues forward again and decision regarding its location was finally made in 2005. One of the oft cited reasons for building a cathedral of this magnitude is that there is not a large enough church which could accommodate all believers (Marcus 2015, 63).

As a Romanian priest explains only a part of the priest's salary is provided for by the state endowment, while the rest of the money from donations. Priests salary is the same as school teachers' income. In districts where community is stronger, the church gets more support, but there are also some small communities where priests could not get donations at all (No1, p.5). Another respondent, a scholar, argues that in the small parishes the state indeed covers full salaries and the same applies to the salaries of bishops and all higher hierarchy representatives (No10, 85). The representative of secularist association mentions that "30% of the priests can have [...] 80% coefficient salary, the others are paid by point 65% coefficient with regard to the similar salary of a teacher" (No11, p.93). However, as he also stresses, it is very difficult to find the exact numbers and figures of church financing, because they get funds from various sources, including various ministries. He also mentions that 19,000 priests and their assistants get funds from the central budget. He says that after 3 years complaining, the church decided to write press-releases where was indicated that church financing is less than 4% of GDP, but in 24 hour they changed their press-release because they realized that 4% of GDP is 500-600 million euros. This respondent, in fact, believes that this could be the truth (No11, p.95). The expert from the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs mentions that they do not have exact numbers (No7, p.59).

Another scholar was more specific in explaining the reason of the church funding and its historical background. She says that the ordinary priests get nearly "300 euros per month and it can easily get to one thousand" (No6, p.52). She also mentioned that Patriarch gets

almost equal amount as president. Apart from this, she admits that the tax exemptions for producing candles and some religious stuff also applies to the other denominations, which is guaranteed by the law (No6, p.55). As a reason of church financing she recalls the historical facts and states that "after Moldavians and Wallachians united in the Romanian principality, there was this secularization of religious lands" (No6, p.55). And then state signed contract with the ROC to provide funds salaries and religious education, on the other hand the state took control over these lands. After the union with Transylvania, a similar contractual agreement was signed with other religions. She thinks that during the Communism this was "preserved as probably a way to control the church and to control financing" (No6, p.51). The same issue raised the other expert, who added that before 1864 many properties also belonged to the Greeks and Mount Athos and my respondent named this as a confiscation of properties which were given to the state. "This reform was called secularization of the territories of the churches" he said (No4, p.34). However, the other respondent claims that nowadays ROC owns lots of land given by the state (No11, p.98). As a continuation of the previous argument, another interviewee says that compensating of the properties is fair but today ROC has lands, forests and even hotels given by the state, which did not belonged to the church before (No8, 63).

The other expert explains that the building of the big Cathedral is directly connected with national identity and he also emphasizes that along with the church opening ceremony in 2018 the 100 years anniversary of independence of Romania will also be celebrated (No4, p34). The other respondent who was a theologian argues that people need more churches because there are lots of believers (No5, p.42). A church representative argues the same: "We need the church and priest to pray for us" (No1, p.4). In contrast, the NGO representative claims that the Cathedral buildings do not have much support from public (No3, p.23). As the other respondent says, there were thousands of schools closed because of lack of money, but there are many churches being built (No8, p.70). Apart from this, he mentions that 5 years ago, when

the government and the church wanted to build the cathedral in a big, green historic park, the same cathedral that is now being built next to the parliament) they had a huge protest and started the law against the government, they did not attack the church and they succeeded (No8, p.65).

Famous Romanian historical researcher mentions that there are many complaints around Patriarchate for the expensive clothes of the higher hierarchy members and "Patriarch Daniel was called CEO of the church because he was accused that he behaves like a business manager" (No12, p.95). The other respondent claims that church has monopoly on selling "candles, religious calendars, paraphernalia" (No11, p.94). As one respondent says of the ROC. "their needs could be infinite!" (No8, p.71), thus supporting a model whereby citizens voluntarily choose to donate to the religious institution of their preference, for which he also initiated a law in the parliament, which did not pass (No8, p.71).

To conclude, there are opposite opinions regarding priest's salaries, some of them claim that the money given to the priests in the small communities in comparison to larger ones is not enough. In contrast, experts and scholars say that priests get salaries not only based on proportion of believers, but it also depending on the needs. None of the respondents managed to name an exact amount of church funding.

If we compare situations in Georgia and Romania, we will see two clear differences: Firstly, unlike Romania, in Georgia priests do not get salaries from the state budget, only Patriarch and bishops get certain amount. Secondly, unlike Romania, building of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Georgia was fully financed by the businessman Ivanishvili and not by the state. Its construction was the initiative of Patriarch Ilia II, who wanted to celebrate the anniversary of 1500 years anniversary of Restoration of autocephaly.

4.7 Church, Elections and Party Politics

4.7.2 GE politics

All Georgian governments have tried to put religious sentiments in the service of their political ends. While the first president appropriated religious vocabulary, the Shevardnadze and Ivanishvili administrations, second and fourth respectively, tried to befriend the GOC. The third president, Saakashvili, tried not to involve the GOC in political processes but at the same time raised lavish funding for the GOC and gifted luxury cars to 10 bishops in order to benefit his political persona individually (Hug 2015, 9). According to the State Agency for Religious Affairs, which sets the official politics of the Georgian state concerning religious matters, "the state finds the involvement of religion in politics impermissible, just as it should be unacceptable for religion itself to deploy a political language in order to realize its ends" (State Agency for Religious Issues 2014). However, the GOC has a high authority among the political elite and also influences the political processes by supporting or opposing legislation or certain political decisions backed by the large number of believers (Minesashvili 2017, 3). According to Pew Research latest poll, 28% of Georgian populations say that church is very much interferes in politics (Sahgal and Cooperman 2017,94) .

The fact that there is no evidence of priests' direct involvement in elections, by way of personal participation, is confirmed by all respondents. Moreover, all of them confirm that politicians manipulate with religious sensibilities to succeed in elections. However, the opinions are split concerning church's indirect influence on political processes and especially on elections. One of the respondents speaks of a 'bribe' and describes church-state relationship with the following sentence: "one gives money and the second wins the elections" (No12, p.123). The other expert and former statesman claims that it is simply impossible to oppose

this institution, so nobody would even attempt this (No.13, p.139). One scholar says that generally the GOC tries to support incumbents; however the 2012 parliamentary election proved to be an exception, when the church supported businessman Ivanishvili (No8, p.83).

On the contrary, the state representative claims that all Georgian governments have tried to involve the church in political processes but church wisely refused. However, even he admits that there are some "individual cases when particular priests get involved in certain processes pertaining to the exercise of government" (No10, p.107). Similarly, priests claim that official position of the Holy Synod is to refrain from having political positions. However, one of the priests confirms that there are some precedents when some members of the clergy express their political sympathy in public (No4, p.43). Moreover, they admit that none of the political parties are explicitly religious. As one priest observes, if the politician claims that church is everything to him and at the same time he is morally depraved, he can no longer trust that politician" (No3, p.33).

The majority of the interviewees state that *Georgian Dream* is closest to the GOC, however the *United National Movement* also has close contacts with some representatives of the church who strengthen this party, but their supporters inside the church are quite few (No7, p.74). There are also "some marginal groups like the parties of Burjanadze, Bregadze and Inashvili who try to manipulate with religious feelings of electorate" (No7, No8, No9). As a number of respondents say, the party that tried to maintain a distance from the church was *Republican Party* (No3, No11, No8). One of them also names *Free Democrats* (No8).

4.7.3 RO-Elections/Party Politics

During the first 15 years of Romanian democratization 'dependence of Romanian political parties on religious actors and symbols became stronger and increasingly accepted'

(Stan and Turcescu 2006, 13). Between 1990 and 1992, the ROC played a certain role in political processes, but their significance increased especially in the 1996 electoral campaign (Stan and Turcescu 2006, 14). Since then, three forms of church involvement could be discerned: the clergy's direct involvement in elections, their public support of candidates and the fact of using religious symbols in electoral campaigns (Stan and Turcescu 2006, 3). The Holy Synod banned priests' involvement in political activities three times: in 1990, in 1992 and in 2000 but this was ineffective since some of the priests still acted according to their parrticulr political preferences. However, based on Pew Research Center 2017 poll results 44% of Romanians think that "church very much intervenes in politics"(Sahgal and Cooperman 2017,94). In 2002, a Social Democrat priest in Sucaeva refused to bless the building of the Christian Democratic Party. This was on the grounds that five years earlier, in 1997, a Christian Democratic priest in Timisoara had attacked Ion Iliescu and called him 'Satan'. Iliescu was the loser in those years in part due his lack of religiosity that was publicly known. However, by the time in 2002 when the priest refused to bless the opponent's party, Iliescu was again the president. In 2004, according to the decision of Holy Synod (No. 410/February 2), priests were prohibited to "be members of a political party, participate in electoral campaigns […] or hold positions in the central public" (Rus 2009, 10). In 2008, the amendment was formulated according to which priest were allowed to run for elections as independent candidates for "local or district counselor" but not as a mayor (Rus 2009, 10).

As the respondents claim, nowadays a direct priestly participation in elections is formally allowed only after the priest has given up the priesthood. As the church representatives emphasize, inside the ROC they have agreed not to involve or support the politicians and stay neutral. At the same time he mentions that in the small villages people ask opinion of the clergy, in part because they could be the most educated people in that community (No 1, p.3). Almost all the respondents confirm that the role of the priest in the countryside and small communities

is very important and their opinion matters on various topics. One of the respondents admits that even in Bucharest, where there is not much contact between parish priests and the locals, they still have some political power (No3, p.86). The other interviewee, who is close to the church says that if the candidate participating in elections goes to the monastery, a bishop could not refuse him, but it does not mean that they support this candidate. He mentions that they refuse to promote them in public, so "church is very attentive" regarding this issue (No4, p.32). Another respondent, also close to the orthodox church states that during the last 10 years, the church has tried to keep a distance from political affairs (No. 2, p.14).

In contrast, the other respondents still talk about direct or indirect involvement of the ROC in politics, specifically during electoral campaigns. They explain that lobbying for certain candidates or a specific party is a very common thing, especially by mentioning in public that he/she is a "good Orthodox" (No5,p.66). One of the respondents remembers that according to Romanian Constitution, the President, the Prime-Minister should be believers: "you have to believe is something" (No 8, p.65). However, the other interviewee at the same time mentions that being a good orthodox is not always the decisive during the elections and hereby stresses that out of four presidents only Constantinescu was a real believer (No7,54).

As yet another respondent admits, without church's 'tacit' support it is impossible to become a president (No9, p.78). Another interviewee adds that when Prime-Minister Ponta was competing with President Iohannis in the second round of presidential elections, few days before the elections some archbishops had expressed support for Ponta who was 1 million votes stronger than Iohannis. During the first round, not all of the representatives of the Romanian diaspora in foreign countries managed to vote because there were not enough ballots at the embassies. Although Ponta was the acting prime-minister, he did not change anything for the second round, believing that altering the law during the process would be a violation of rules. However, this caused anger among the electorate. In front of the Romanian Embassy in Italy,

where there was a particularly lengthy line of voters, "the police bit some Romanians who wanted to vote" which was broadcast in news. As a result of this anger, Iohannis won with 1 million votes more than Ponta. It is worth mentioning that election was on a Sunday and that day before the results were announced, around 1 pm the Patriarch Daniel announced that "it is good to cooperate with national minorities" (No8, p.67). The other respondent confirms that Patriarch said that "who were not ethnic Romanians had done many good things for country" (No7, p.58).

The other interviewee who works on the issues related to the church-state relation claims that apart from indirect involvement, there are still some facts of direct involvement of the priests in politics and shows the pictures of the priests who at the same time hold political positions. During the interview, he showed several pictures and one of them was the photo of director at the ministry of transportation, who as he claims was previously director of State Development Agency and is simultaneously a missionary priest (No11, p.95).

As for the proximity of the ROC with specific parties, all of the respondents mention that the *Social Democratic Party* have the best relationship with the church. They also named *National Liberal Party* especially, but admitted that almost all parties have good relationships with the ROC. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are close to religious values (N7;No8). As for the most distanced parties, some of them named *Democratic alliance of Hungarians* (No5; No1) and *Save Romania Union* (No2; No3; No7).

In both Georgia and Romania, the OCs have officially maintained a position of neutrality in relation to party politics, though in both countries there have been individual violations of these official stances of the two OCs. However, distinguishing between an interference in politics from delivering a sermon, or advising a member of the flock can be very hard. The above-mentioned lack of civic and political cultures in both countries only contributes to the dilemma. Thus Stepan's contention about the need of 'a robust and critical

civil society' as a necessary prerequisite of democratisation holds very true in both Georgian and Romanian cases, especially since they are both political cultures dominated by Orthodox Christianity with its "'caesaropapist' tendency" to seek *symphonia* (Stephan 2000, 245).

4.8 Minorities

4.8.1 The GOC and minorities

Generally, the discourse of the GOC has presented religious, sexual and ethnic minorities as an existential threat to the Georgian nation that is itself presented as indissolubly linked to Orthodox Christianity. As part of the ever-evolving discourse of religious nationalism, the GOC has been broadly portrayed as the defender of the purity of Georgian nation, while the NGOs, critical citizens and 'the West' have often been depicted as 'part of a larger plot to rob Georgia of its sacred role as a protector of Orthodox tradition' (Minesashvili, 24).

The church has vehemently opposed returning to religious minorities historic sites that were confiscated by the Communist regime and subsequently given to the GOC. In 2011, the Patriarch of Georgia publicly condemned the proposed amendment in the Civil Code of Georgia that granted religious minority groups the right to register as legal entities of Public Law (Civil.ge. 2011, July 7). This was primarily on the grounds that the amendment would lead to renewed contestation regarding properties by the Catholic and the Armenian Orthodox churches. In 2012, shortly after the fall of Saakashvili regime, a series of three incidents against muslims occurred in Nigvziani, Tsintskaro and Samtatskaro. In response, the GOC both 'monopolized the situation and initiated the breach of the rights of religious minorities' (EMC Report, 2013, December 5).

In 2013, an LGBT-friendly rally of 50 persons was attacked in central Tbilisi by approximately 50,000 religious protesters led by priests with icons. The GOC lukewarmly condemned the attack on the following day. However, prior to the event, the GOC hierarchy did nothing either to avoid huge mobilization or priestly involvement that is directly against the Ecclesiastical Law. Eventually, the Church declared 17 May as the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, as the Day of the Sanctity of Family. In 2014, the Church protested against the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Law arguing that the law endangered traditional moral principles (Civil.ge. 2014, April 28). In those weeks, during a Sunday sermon, the Patriarch of Georgia asked the following rhetorically: “we are told that minority rights should be protected, but who will protect majority, who will protect Georgian people?” (Sermon 1, 2014, April 13).

Of those priests who answered the question about religious minorities directly, all of them are of the opinion that relationships between the GOC and religious minorities are entirely fine (No1; No2; No3; No4; No5). As one of the most representative answers holds: "We have a normal relationship. I mean, who confronts them?" (No1, p.12). However, two priests attacked the idea of equality of all religions: 'it would be inadequate to say that all churches are equal' (No, p.42) He also notes that other religious denominations are lobbying for constitutional agreements of their own with the state. However, for this there is no evidence: no public demands of this nature have ever been made.

The vast majority of priests interviewed see homosexuality as a disease. Some of them believe that it can, and must, be cured. In fact, one of the priests maintains that it's the state's duty to cure homosexuality (No2, ვ.46). The common language that was used to describe the phenomenon included ‘transgression’ (No1,ვ.14), ‘disease’, ‘pathology’ (No1,No2), ‘unnatural’ (No4). The common argument, in turn, was that the GOC is not persecuting LGBT persons for their identity, but for their attempts ‘to propagate’ their sin (No1, p.12) - that is, a

public display of orientation - and 'the recognition of homosexuality as a norm' (No4, p.43).

The second category of respondents, mostly comprised of liberal intellectuals and progressive activists, has seen the church's role as adverse. One respondent, an LGBT activist has maintained that the church has continuously tried to 'purify the public space of all evil presence in the form of public manifestation of LGBTs and countered the IDAHO day by a 'Family-Sanctity Day' of its own' (No7, p.74). In his opinion, while the state has tried to ensure the citizens enact their constitutional rights safely, it has still succumbed to the church's huge power, granting them the privileged space for their march on 17 May each year, while leaving peripheral places or small squares for the LGBT march.

The third category of Georgian respondents are those who believe in equal rights for all, do not have a homogenous position on the phenomenon of homosexuality, yet have respect for homosexual persons. However, at the same time they believe that 'they do not have to provoke enmity; they are free to be the way the are in their own private space' (No12, intskirveli).

4.8.2 The ROC and minorities

As in Georgia, in Romania too the governments have failed to restitute religious property confiscated from religious minorities during the Communist rule by the Decree 176 of 1948. After the fall of Communism, negotiations were begun to restitute property that had previously belonged to religious minorities. For instance, Archbishop Corneanu wished to return some of the property to the Romanian Greek Catholic Church (RGCC). However, this was blocked by Orthodox hierarchy in Bucharest (Radun 2014). The ROC has argued that the property of the RGCC was never confiscated by the Communist state, but directly granted to the ROC; therefore, no property rights applied anymore (Moldovei 1997). The ROC also holds that the RGCC does not need more churches (Radun 2014). Romania decriminalised

homosexuality in 2001 as part of necessary measures of democratisation amid accession to the EU and in 2002 introduced the Anti-Discrimination law. However, as Stan and Turcescu (2005) have documented in great depths, the issue has remained contentious ever since. As in Georgia, in Romania too, the ROC has positioned itself consciously as the voice of the nation and the defender of its moral, spiritual and even physical 'purity'.

The views of Romanian respondents on the treatment of sexual minorities are categorically similar to those of Georgian respondents. The religious conservative argument is best summarised by a Romanian priest who argues that homosexuality is not only a sin but also a transgression: 'All the studies show that they are not stable mentally' and 'a society of homosexuals cannot resist' (No1, 12). This respondent sees the proactive involvement of state and family by way of education as the solution to what he believes to be the problem of homosexuality, 'because the moral values of the family goes on with the children' (No1, Father Ionut). The second group of respondents holds that LGBT rights are well protected and that the state respects both religious denominations and individual rights of citizens, 'homosexuals or not' (No.4, p.45). Another respondent argues that while there are inevitable social tensions, but the LGBT 'are not really being distracted by anyone' (No7, Colovici). Finally, the third group of respondents believe that the ROC is continuously trying to dominate public space and fashion itself as the defender of its 'purity'. As one of the respondents says, over the course of years the ROC discourse has become softer, however, then also adds that 'the ROC still opposes decriminalization of homosexuality and civil marriage' (No3, Mihnea). Another respondent adds that 'sexual minorities and same sex marriages are like anathema' (No9, Stan). She also observes that the ROC generates a politics of fear towards minorities of all kinds, sexual as well as ethnic-religious. As some respondents remark, and correctly so, 'there's a clear overlap between ethnic minorities and religious minorities' (Mihnea, but also Sincan and Stan). This, interestingly, causes a kind of cross-ethnic and cross-religious competition for

the domination of public space. In Transylvania, which is ethnically the most diverse county of Romania, the church is 'used to define [one's] ethnicity'. Motivated by competition, 'people go to church to demonstrate their identity' (Sincan, also Tanase). As in Georgia, in Romania too, Orthodoxy is intimately connected by the churches with national identity. According to one respondent, the ROC fuels a conservative ideology that leads people to think of religion as the key identifier of nationhood and purity: 'to be Romanian means to be ethnic Romanian and Orthodox' (No9, Stan). In 2015, a religious education priest-teacher delivered a pamphlet at a school in Brasov entitled "Homosexuality - Human Degeneration Propaganda", which 'starts by saying that "those [homosexuals] should be put to death". Similarly, another religious education teacher at a Romanian school was filmed saying that the Roma people should have been put to death by the Fascist government of Romania' (Patrascu).

The treatment of minorities by the ROC and GOC are in many ways similar. Apart from their exceptionalist discourses, both demonstrate a clear sense of their own superiority not only numerically but also before the law. At the same time, both churches have continuously attempted to remain dominant institutionally and to dominate the public sphere. Perhaps most importantly, both the ROC and the GOC have consciously portrayed themselves as the 'voices of the nation' and defenders of their traditional purity. Minorities, even when their are members of the dominant ethnic group, or of traditional religious minorities, have not fitted the two church's account of 'national purity' well enough.

Conclusion

In both countries, the OCs were in an ambivalent position when independence dawned. However, the political elites of both countries faced a crisis of legitimacy of their own, which enabled the OCs not only to make convenient peace with the past, but also to become leading symbols of newly regained nationhood in Georgia and Romania. The blessing of the Communist Parliament by the Patriarch of Romania and the baptism of the ex-Communist Shevardnadze by the Patriarch of Georgia both represent defining symbols of the new symbiosis between the OCs and the respective states — much in the style of the Byzantine idea of *symphonia*. During the transition periods, both OCs successfully managed to fashion themselves as the *vox populi* and defenders of history and tradition. Practically, during that period, they both sought to re-occupy the public space they had both lost during the Communist era.

During the 25 years of independence, both OCs became the most publicly revered institutions. However, in both countries this trend has changed in recent years. The public level of trust of the ROC has fallen, while the number of those who assess the work of GOC as 'positive' has reached all-time low. However, this have been for different reasons. In Georgia, lack of transparency stands out as the main cause, as well as the recent scandalous attempt allegedly to poison the Patriarch of Georgia that led to the exposure of internal intrigues among high-ranking clergy and the leaking of information about the lavish lifestyle of some of the bishops. In contrast, in Romania, where the chief reason behind greater disapproval is not only transparency but, as the respondents attest, also the ROC's spending priorities, the very direct involvement of priests in politics, the riches of the church and notably the existence of over 16,000 churches officially (in fact, according to my respondents well over 19, 000), while there are only 400 hospitals (No 11). To this attests the ongoing protest with the motto: „vrem spitale,

nu catedrale!“ (“We want hospitals, Not Cathedrals!”). The way that funds allocated to the OCs are spent differs in two countries. In Romania, the vast majority of funding is spent on paying priests’ salaries and construction works, while in Georgia the funds are primarily spent on the religious education institutions of the GOC.

However, the social role of the OCs is profound. The ROC has orphanages, canteens and emergency centres, while the GOC has hospitals, canteens and cultural institutions. However, all respondents, religious and lay alike almost unanimously observe that far more social projects could be undertaken jointly in the legislative framework of the Concordat. The legislative framework in Georgia also provides for a number of other types of cooperation, for instance, in the penitentiary and educational systems. However, judging from the perspective of GOC representatives, these legal provisions are not fully put into practice. In contrast, the Romanian legislative framework is more sophisticated. This, in fact, shows in practice as well. In Romania, religious education is available for all recognised 18 denominations according to the principles of the opt-in system. In contrast, in Georgia each secondary school is given an autonomous choice about teaching or not teaching religious education. To that end, representatives of government and experts explain that currently are not enough religious education who would teach history of religions, not indoctrinate. However, the vast majority of priests hold that they would be ready to allocate teachers for religious education.

As we have seen, other than education, there are other overlapping competences also. The gradual evolution of overlapping competences has throughout time caused competition between the church and state. This has many different forms, including a value-based confrontation as well as more recently also policy contestation. As my respondents intelligently relate, such competition has in part been fuelled by the lack of civic and political education that often contributes to the actor's’ inability to distinguish between the competences of the state and the church. As Stepan (2012) holds, this kind of overlap in competences, that is itself a

result of weak secularism, prevents the functioning of democratic institutions and hinders democratic accountability.

Feeding such overlaps has been the sense of exceptionalism in the discourse of both OCs. Both OCs have actively sought to draw synonymity between national identity and themselves. This has in been a part of the discourse of 'national and traditional purity' that has often come at the cost of religious, sexual and ethnic minorities' rights. Moreover, in both countries, OCs have shown a zeal to dominate all aspects of social and cultural life, spatially by trying to dominate public space, as well as temporally — for instance, by appropriating 17 May in both countries and by trying to subvert its meaning.

Inglehart and Norris' contention that there is a direct link between the levels of secularism and the social conditions of a society holds very true in both the Romania and the Georgian cases that have a long history of crises and stagnations. The success that the two Orthodox churches have enjoyed is partly due to their ability to appeal to people as cradles of hope, charity and stability. Over the course of two decades, both churches have maintained a powerful position in their respective democracies. However, both of them have had to give way to measures of democratisation that they have deemed unpleasant. Despite the fact that both OCs are still powerful institutions, a competition between the two OCs and their respective states is nevertheless clearly discernible. While the attempts at *symphonia* continue, they now take modernised forms.

Based on scholarly literature, interviews and analysis, three chief problems might be identified that will have a considerable impact the future of this competition. Firstly, there is a clear need to improve legislation, especially by way of introducing different models of OC funding such as the system of *voluntary*, opt-in payments. Secondly, clearer boundaries that distinguishing the religious and the secular spheres of actions should be drawn. Thirdly, greater priority needs to be allotted to social matters, such as building schools and hospitals, as well as

ensuring the instruction of better qualified teachers. Finally, both countries face apparent need to enhance the levels of civic and political education, the levels of which directly shape the configurations that the power-relationship shall take between the two Orthodox Churches and their respective states.

Summary Data

%	People declaring themselves as orthodox Christians	Public trust in Orthodox Church	Averages of public trust	Practitioner Orthodox Christians	Public in favor of separation between religion and government policies
Georgia	89% (2017)	92% (2008) 82% (2013) 75% (2015) 58%(NDI, April 2017) 88% (IRI, Feb. 2017)	81% (averages of 2013,2015, February 2017 years)	17% (2017)	44% (2017)
Romania	86% (2017)	90% (2003) 82% (2004) 84% (2011) 61% (2015) 58% (2016)	67.7% (averages of 2011, 2015, 2016 years)	21% (2017)	51% (2017)
%	Citizens in favor of public funding of the OC	Public support to democratic governance over non-democratic	*"Orthodox Church focuses too much on money"*	Public support of church leaders' political influence	"*Orthodox church is very much involved in politics"*
Georgia	82% (2017)	55% (2017)	25% (2017)	46% (2017)	28% (2017)
Romania	58% (2017)	52% (2017)	53% (2017)	46% (2017)	44% (2017)
%/N	Orthodox Church funds	Number of religious buildings	Funds for religious minorities	Number and % of Religious minorities	Number of recognized religious denominations
Georgia	857,600 GEL (2002) 25,000,000 (2015)	1375 churches and 420 Monasteries (2016)	3500000 GEL (2015)	676,659 (15.5%) in 2014	5
Romania	Salaries of orthodox priests: 219,255,119 Lei; 111 million Lei for Cathedral	16,403 Religious buildings (2015)	Amount of salaries for clergies 49,097,976	3,814,637 (7.3%) in 2011	18

Appendices

Topic Guide for Interviews
Aim:

- *Double-checking facts, figures, finding out the reasons of certain outcomes*
- *Examining church-state relations from different perspectives (Representatives of Church, State as participants and experts/scholars/NGOs as observers)*
- *Finding similarities and differences across the cases*

Objectives:

- *Respondent's perception about 'secularism' (as separation between church and state institutions) and 'secularization' (as decrease in religiosity)*
- *Exploring the tendencies of change of church-state power relationship through time*
- *Distinguishing the forms of impact Orthodox Church has over the state institutions*
- *Examining compatibility between Orthodox religion and democratic values*
- *Investigating the feasibility of church funding from the state budget*
- *Learning more about the attitude of the OC and state towards religious and sexual minorities*
- *Investigating the appropriateness of teaching religion at schools*
- *Finding out the effectiveness and coherence of pursuing shared competences between church and state*
- *Examining the interaction between Orthodox Church and political parties and its effects on elections*

Technical part:

- *3 types semi-standardized guidelines each containing 18 questions (for priests, politicians, experts)*
- *25 Interviews (13 in Georgia/12 in Romania)*
- *Location: Tbilisi (7-18 April,2017) and Bucharest (5-12 May,2017)*
- *Duration: 1 hour; All interviews Recorded*

List of Respondents (for remaining anonymity, chronology of below listed respondents is not similar as the numbering of attached transcript)

<u>Georgia:</u>

1. Zaza Piralishvili - Philosopher, Public Intellectual, Member of the Advisory Council of the State Agency for Religious Affairs
2. Levan Abashidze - Theologian, Public Intellectual, Independent Expert at the State Agency for Religious Affairs
3. Lela Intskirveli – Lawyer / Graduate of Theologian Academy
4. Paata Zakareishvili – Former State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality; Conflictologist;
5. Irakli Kobakhidze – Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia; Constitutionalist;

Professor

6. Archiprist Maksime Chanturia – Doctor of Theology
7. Archpriest Teodore Gignadze - Theologian
8. Archipriest Giorgi Tserodze – Theologian
9. Archipriest Ioseb Gvelukashvili – Lecturer at Theologian Academy
10. Father Vakhtang – Expert in History of Religions
11. Father Kakhaber – Priest
12. Gia Nodia – Chairman at Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development; Former Minister of Education; Scholar/Professor
13. Beka Gabadadze – Social Worker, Gay Activist, Project-manager at LGBT Association

Romania:

1. Dr. Laurentiu D. Tanase – Secretary of State – Member of the Collegium at the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archieves – C.N.S.A.S.
2. Toma Patrascu – President of Secularist-Humanist Association
3. Remus Cernea - Human rights and animal rights activist, environmentalist, humanist and Former Independent Member of the Deputies Chamber, Parliament of Romania
4. Iuliana Conovici – Expert at State Secretariat for Religious Affairs
5. Cristian Vasile – Historical Researcher at Nicolae Iorga History Institute, Romanian Academy
6. Mihnea-Mihail Florea - Program Assistant at The German Marshall Fund of the United States; Founder at "Cariere cu Cauze"; Defender of LGBT Rights
7. Anca Sincan - Guest Lecturer at Central European University; Researcher
8. Father Ionut Alexandru Tudorie – Priest
9. Adriana Mihaela Macsut – PhD in Philosophy; Consultant in Bucharest for IBN Khaldun Center for Research & Studies
10. Ionut Tudore - Lecturer at the University of Bucharest; Post-Doc. fellow (Medieval Studies Department) at the CEU
11. Lavinia Stan - President of the Society for Romanian Studies, Scholar
12. Lucian Turcescu - Professor of Theology, Graduate Program Director at Concordia University

Interview Questions and Full Transcript:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EEMBRJRA1jY7MAF9Ccu7vm06KPvL8RNv386MCJOGSYE/edit Transcript for Georgia

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jEcn7X7KLuXm6LuIT7eQg7Al_mogjjO1aay0lmXiAi0/edit Transcript for Romania

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