

A Retrospective Analysis of the Influence of International Organizations on Georgia's Anti-Corruption Reforms: 2003-2023

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Public Policy

In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Public Policy

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Vienna, Austria

2024

Author's Declaration Form

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Abstract

This thesis explores the extent to which the international organizations (IOs) influence anti-corruption policies in Georgia in 2003-2023, examining the evolving role of IOs in alignment with the European Union's passive and active leverage. Employing a triangulation of qualitative methods, including stakeholder interviews in the anti-corruption sphere, document analysis, and process tracing, the thesis argues that the influence of international organizations on domestic policy in Georgia is subject to change, shaped by shifts in the country's domestic and international landscape. Initially, in the aftermath of the 2003 Rose Revolution, when the rapid anti-corruption reforms were undertaking, the primary incentive stemmed from the need of state-building, with limited influence from international organizations or the EU. However, as Georgia deepened its relations with the EU, evidenced by the signing of the Association Agreement in 2014, the EU's impact on anti-corruption endeavors expanded, and subsequent reforms were largely aligned with the EU integration process. This alignment was further emphasized by the EU granting candidate country status to Georgia in June 2022, with anti-corruption emerging as a key priority in the path towards EU membership.

Keywords: *Anti-corruption, the European Union, Influence, International Organizations, Georgia.*

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Abbreviations

EU	European Union
IOs	International Organizations
GRECO	Group of States Against Corruption
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
TI	Transparency International
IDFI	Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
AA	Association Agreement
GoG	Government of Georgia
PAR	Public Administration Reform
EaP	Eastern Partnership
COE	Council of Europe
OGP	Open Government Partnership
NGOs	National non-government organizations
OECD/ACN Network	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Anti-Corruption Network
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management, a joint initiative of the OECD and the EU

Disclaimer

The research supporting this thesis was sponsored by Central European University Foundation of Budapest (CEUBPF). The theses explained herein represent the ideas of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of CEUBPF.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Mihaly Fazekas, for his invaluable suggestions and support throughout the research process.

I also wish to thank Professor Cristina Corduneanu-Huci, whose groundbreaking class in the Politics of Government Transparency and invaluable suggestions greatly enriched my work.

Additionally, I am deeply grateful to Professor Agnes Dios-Toth, whose kindness and support were invaluable throughout the writing process.

I appreciate all the interviewees who contributed to the research and their efforts in combating corruption and advocating for good governance.

On the other side, I want to thank my friends in Georgia for consistently supporting me. Also, I'm thankful for the amazing new friendships I made at CEU and the opportunity to share daily experiences with them this past year.

My deepest thanks go to my family, whom I adore. Without them, I would never have had this opportunity.

And finally, a big thank you to Karala.

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1 Introduction

Former Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania's declaration, "I am Georgian, therefore; I am European," at the Council of Europe in 1999, underscored Georgia's aspirations for EU membership, marking a pivotal moment in its foreign policy trajectory. However, despite this proclamation, Georgia grappled with the familiar challenges of post-Soviet states, rendering it susceptible to Russian influence and manipulation. The aftermath of a civil war exacerbated these challenges, leaving Georgia in a precarious socio-economic state characterized by corruption, ethnic conflicts, and organized crime. This situation, while detrimental to Georgia's progress, was tolerable to Russia, aligning with its aspirations of reasserting global power.

In 2003, The Rose Revolution in Georgia marked a dramatic turning point, sparking initiatives for state and nation construction alongside sweeping anti-corruption measures. Georgia's unwavering commitment to a pro-Western foreign policy has catalyzed extensive democratization reforms, particularly evident in its successful anti-corruption initiatives. Transitioning from a failed state with a dismal 124th global corruption ranking in 2003 to a remarkable 51st position by 2012 underscores the profound impact of its reforms, effectively eliminating petty bribery and establishing transparent governance structures. The nation's strategic alignment with Europe was enshrined in its National Security Concept and National Military Strategy, emphasizing integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Subsequent governmental changes in 2012 led to a shift in reform strategies, with Georgia embracing a more gradual approach to anti-corruption reforms, largely due to its collaboration with the European Union. The signing of the Association Agreement in 2014 underscored Georgia's unwavering European ambition, supported by both its Constitution and

its people. Anti-corruption reforms became integral to the EU integration process, culminating in Georgia's attainment of candidate status in 2023. This alignment with Europe has been a consistent goal for Georgians, supported by a majority across the political spectrum.

In exploring the dynamics of anti-corruption reforms in Georgia, the relationship between the Georgian government and various international organizations (IOs) has fluctuated over the past two decades. This inconsistency is puzzling, given Georgia's commitment to EU integration, which inherently demands strong anti-corruption measures. The central question concerns the influence of international and transnational organizations, such as the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan (OECD/ACN), the Council of Europe (GRECO) and the European Union (EU), on Georgia's reform initiatives. Understanding the causes of these fluctuations is crucial for Georgia's EU aspirations and can provide valuable insights for other nations pursuing similar integration goals.

Since 2003, extensive research focuses on Georgia's successful anti-corruption measures and their implications (Kupatadze et al., 2011; Engvall, 2012; World Bank, 2012; O'Shea, 2022). Georgia is widely analyzed as a successful example of state reconstruction, sovereignty restoration, and the redirection of political and social life after the Rose Revolution (Lynch, 2006). In terms of collaboration with international organizations, Kupatadze (2015) notes that during the swift and systemic reforms post-2003, Georgian government officials often disregarded advice from international bodies. Similarly, Puppo (2013) highlights the diverging perspectives between the Georgian government and international organizations during the drafting and implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy. Consequently, Georgia post-2003 is also seen as an example of an "incomplete policy

transfer," which inadvertently led to "hyper-presidentialism" and weakened institutional checks and balances (Dobbins, 2014).

Two gaps exist regarding the influence of international organizations in Georgia's anti-corruption policymaking. Firstly, anti-corruption reforms are often presented with a focus on their successes, while the influence of international organizations receives insufficient emphasis, with few publications on this topic. Furthermore, most academic research on this subject focuses on the period before 2012, leaving a gap in understanding the current role of international organizations in Georgia's anti-corruption efforts. The role of the EU is particularly critical, given that Georgia received EU candidate status in 2023. Anti-corruption has been a key priority for the EU during this period. Therefore, the influence of international organizations, especially the European Union and its leverage mechanisms, is vital for sustaining the fight against corruption in Georgia. Understanding these things would be essential for thoroughly assessing Georgia's anti-corruption journey and identifying effective strategies for future progress.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the dynamics of anti-corruption reforms in Georgia and analyze the influence exerted by the European Union, the OECD/ACN, and GRECO on this process, aiming to gain valuable insights into the influence these organizations have over a country. Spanning a period of two decades, from 2003 to 2023, the timeframe of the study is chosen to capture the beginning of anti-corruption reforms in Georgia and extends to the significant milestone of Georgia obtaining candidate status from the Union in 2023. This thesis does not seek to assess specific anti-corruption policies or reforms; instead, it aims to understand the role of international influence and the interplay between domestic and international factors in shaping these changes.

Based on a positivist framework, this study employs triangulation of qualitative methods, including interviews, document analysis, and process tracing, to thoroughly investigate the influence of international organizations on domestic policymaking. The primary data collection involved conducting interviews in Georgia from April to May 2024, supplemented by additional online interviews to fulfill the research goals. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with current and former government officials, as well as representatives from international and non-governmental organizations actively engaged in anti-corruption reforms, aiming to gather firsthand insights into the process. In addition to analyzing these interviews, the study examines various policy documents such as the Association Agreements between the EU and Georgia, evaluation, and monitoring reports on anti-corruption efforts by international organizations (GRECO, OECD/ACN), and the degree of compliance with their recommendations.

This thesis uses Vachudova's (2005) theoretical framework about the “active” and “passive” leverage exerted by the European Union on domestic policy, but rather than simply build the findings on the theory, based on the Georgia’s case, we discern three distinct phases in the relationship between the EU and Georgia. The initial phase, characterized by passive leverage, commenced with Georgia's independence, and persisted until 2014, preceding the signing of the Association Agreement. Subsequently, the second phase, termed "passive-active" leverage, commenced post the Association Agreement's signing in 2014. The third phase, marked by active leverage, began with the prospect of enlargement, particularly in the wake of the Ukrainian conflict outbreak. During this phase, in 2022 Georgia formally applied for EU membership and aligned its objectives with the Union's 12 priorities, signaling a significant shift in its relationship with the EU.

The main finding of the thesis suggests that the impact of international organizations on domestic policy formation varies, influenced by the evolving dynamics within Georgia and on the international stage. Initially, following the Rose Revolution in 2003, when the emphasis was on state and nation-building, prioritizing policy transfer to get rapid results over just implementing the recommendations from the IOs. The relations further strengthened after 2006/2007, with a notable increase in the implementation of recommendations, such as 13 out of 14 from GRECO by 2011, but in this process the role of the EU was minimal. As Georgia deepened its ties with the EU, notably by signing and implementing the Association Agreement in 2014 and 2016 respectively, the EU's influence on national policymaking intensified. This influence was further underscored by the EU granting Georgia candidate country status in June 2023, indicating its active exertion of leverage.

This thesis has five chapters. The subsequent chapter describes the primary research methodologies employed, underscoring the adoption of a single case study approach to comprehensively examine the influence of international actors on Georgia's anti-corruption reforms. Advancing to Chapter 3, the thesis reviews literature on how international organizations shape anti-corruption policies in various countries, with a particular focus on the EU's impact. This chapter also explains the theoretical framework guiding the research. In Chapter 4, empirical facets are explored, presenting research findings on the relations of Georgia and international organizations and the influence of them on national policymaking, contextualized within the theoretical framework. Lastly, Chapter 5 serves as the concluding segment, amalgamating prevalent trends identified throughout the research, offering critical reflections, and establishing connections between the primary findings and existing scholarly literature.

2 Research Design

This chapter examines the main concepts employed in the research and begins by clarifying the rationale behind selecting international organizations such as the European Union, SIGMA, the OECD/ACN, and GRECO for studying the influence of IOs on anti-corruption efforts in Georgia. It also presents the corruption index measurement, which will aid in understanding the situation in the timeframe of 2003-2023. Additionally, the chapter discusses the research methods, including a detailed section on interviews, employed to thoroughly address the question to what extent do the international and transnational organizations influence anti-corruption policies in Georgia in 2003-2023 and how these influences evolve over time. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion on the ethical considerations of the research.

2.1 Conceptualization of the terms

2.1.1 Georgia's anti-corruption reforms

Despite the criticism of the Corruption Perception Index for its inability to identify the reasons for changes or stagnation and its lack of in identifying areas of governmental failure or improvement (Mungiu-Pippidi and Fazekas, 2020), this thesis utilizes the index to illustrate Georgia's transformation in anti-corruption efforts on a global scale. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) indicates that Georgia, initially ranked 124th worldwide in 2003 as a failed state, significantly advanced to the 51st position by 2012. As of 2023, Georgia holds the 49th place in the global rankings.

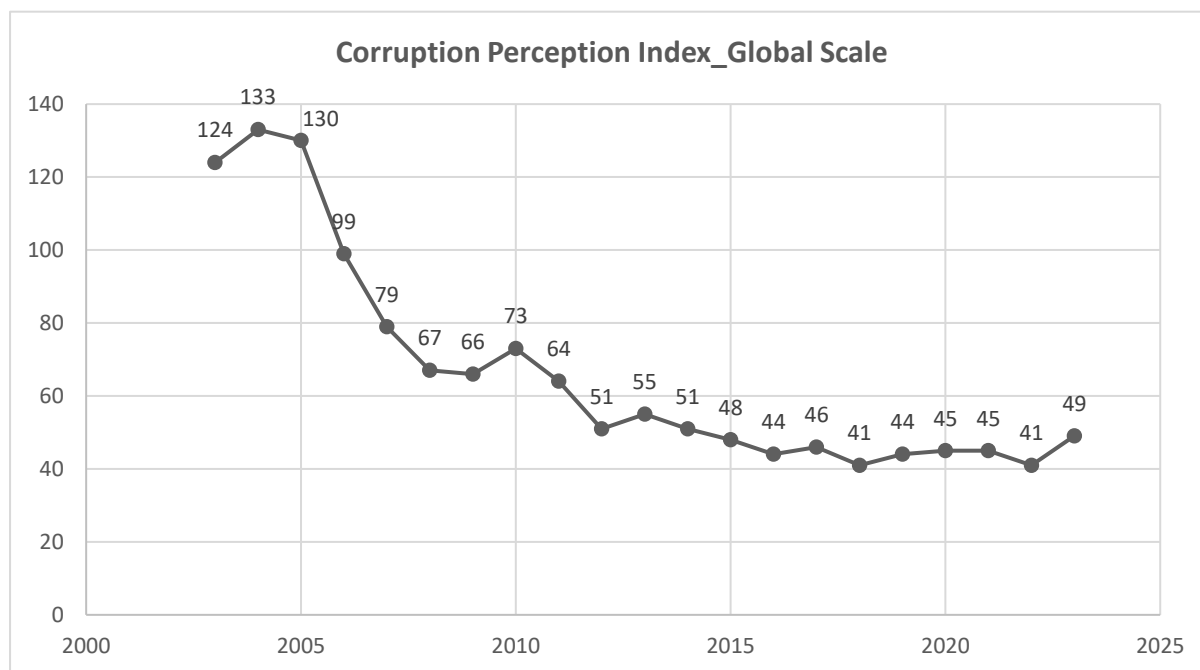


Figure 1 Georgia's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) on a Global Scale

In Corruption Perception Index each country's score is a combination of at least 3 data sources drawn from 13 different corruption surveys and assessments, which capture the assessment of experts and business executives on several corrupt behaviors in the public sector, including bribery, diversion of public funds, use of public office for private gain, nepotism in the civil service, and state capture (Transparency International). The standardization converts all the data points to a scale of 0-100 where a 0 represents the highest level of perceived corruption, and 100 the lowest level of perceived corruption. Before 2012 the data pointed to a scale of 0-10 where a 0 represents the highest level of perceived corruption, and 10 the lowest level of perceived corruption.

Due to the methodology used prior to 2012, it was not possible to compare rankings from previous years. However, post-2012 comparisons are feasible. For Georgia, the Corruption Perception Index ranking has remained relatively stable, with 52 points in 2012 and 53 points in 2023. According to Transparency International, a change of one or two points in the CPI score is unlikely to be statistically significant.

2.1.2 Georgia's Participation in International Anti-Corruption Networks

The thesis employs the European Union, the OECD/ACN, GRECO, and SIGMA leveraging their periodic evaluations and assessments of Georgia's anti-corruption efforts to determine the extent of their influence on the country's anti-corruption reforms.

OECD/ACN - The Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, a sub-regional peer-review program launched in 2003 supports anti-corruption reforms through country reviews and ongoing monitoring. This program helps participating countries implement the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and adhere to other international standards and best practices (OECD, 2004). Since joining, Georgia has undergone five monitoring reports.

GRECO - Since 1999, Georgia has been a member of the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption, which works to enhance its members' ability to combat corruption by monitoring their adherence to anti-corruption standards. This membership enables Georgia to pinpoint shortcomings in its national anti-corruption strategies, prompting legislative, institutional, and practical reforms as needed. Since joining, Georgia has undergone five monitoring reports.

The European Union - Since signing the Association Agreement in 2014, Georgia has committed to extensive reforms to enhance public administration and create a transparent, professional civil service.

OECD/SIGMA - A joint initiative of the OECD and the EU, SIGMA, evaluates Georgia's progress in the policy development and coordination area of Public Administration Reform (PAR).

2.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

The research aims to answer the question to what extent do the international organizations influence anti-corruption reforms in Georgia in 2003-2023 and how these the role of the IOs evolve in relation to the EU's active and passive leverage?

The primary hypothesis of the thesis is that the influence of international organizations on domestic policy formation in Georgia fluctuates, shaped by the changing dynamics of the country's internal and foreign policy objectives. Initially, after the 2003 Rose Revolution, the focus was on state and nation-building, leading the Government of Georgia (GoG) to prioritize rapid policy transfer over merely following recommendations from international organizations, with minimal influence from the EU's passive leverage. However, as Georgia strengthened its relationship with the EU, particularly through the Association Agreement in 2014, the EU's influence on national policymaking became more pronounced.

2.3 Methods of Analysis

This thesis employs a qualitative methodology as it allows for the integration of multiple data sources which is important for answering the research question. The thesis uses a triangulation of qualitative research methods, including interviews, process tracing, and document analysis, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between international organizations and domestic policymaking. This approach reduces research bias

by using multiple methods and enhances validity by addressing the topic from different perspectives.

Georgia is a crucial case in anti-corruption research due to its unwavering commitment to a pro-western foreign policy that has catalyzed extensive democratization reforms, particularly evident in its successful anti-corruption initiatives. Georgia's transitioning from a failed state with a dismal 124th global corruption ranking in 2003 to a remarkable 51st position by 2012 underscores the profound impact of its reforms. Additionally, Georgia's EU aspiration and active participation in anti-corruption platforms further enrich the case study by illustrating the influence of international organizations on the country's reform agenda, providing a nuanced understanding of the connection between domestic efforts and external support in combating corruption. Focusing on Georgia, the thesis examines Vachudova's (2005) theory of the "active" and "passive" leverage of the European Union on domestic policy. However, instead of merely applying the theory's findings, we introduce a third, intermediary phase specific to Georgia's case, termed "passive-active leverage," which bridges the gap between passive and active leverage.

The purpose of the case selection is explained to explain the dynamics of anti-corruption reforms in Georgia and analyze the influence exerted by the European Union, the OECD/ACN, and GRECO on this process, aiming to gain insights into the influence these organizations have over a country. This thesis does not seek to evaluate the specific anti-corruption policies or reforms; instead, it aims to explain the influence of international organizations. The process of analysis is retrospective as it offers a detailed explanation of the context and processes of the reforms, emphasizing the richness of detail rather than presenting stylized fact (Thomas, 2011),.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data for this thesis comprises elite and expert interviews within the realm of anti-corruption, providing first-hand insights into the decision-making processes associated with anti-corruption reforms. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted through fieldwork in Georgia during April-May 2024, with current and former government officials, as well as representatives from international and non-governmental organizations actively engaged in anti-corruption reforms, aiming to gather firsthand insights into the process. Additionally, two supplementary interviews were conducted online with the same interviewees as they emerged as relevant during the analysis.

The interviewees included both current and former government officials, as well as representatives from international and non-governmental organizations actively involved in anti-corruption reforms in Georgia in 2003-2023. Participants are responsible for policy and engagement with international organizations across different government administrations.

Utilizing a non-probability sampling approach, interviewees were selected based on their expertise in anti-corruption through purposive sampling methodology informed by field knowledge. The semi-structured nature of the interviews, coupled with open-ended questions, facilitated an in-depth exploration of the reforms in anti-corruption and allowed for nuanced insights. Interviews adopted a doxastic style to understand interviewees' experiences and perspectives and embraced an ethnographic approach to capture their viewpoints and understanding of the research question. The data generated during interviews was analyzed through coding, enabling connections between the opinions of key anti-corruption figures and other data sources.

The interview guides were structured around five key themes, tailored to the interviewees' experience in anti-corruption. These themes included inquiries about anti-corruption reforms in Georgia since 2003, the influence wielded by non-governmental and international organizations in anti-corruption policymaking, the role of EU integration in anti-corruption policymaking, and factors that shifted the influence of international organizations (domestic factors or foreign policy goals). Before each interview, the guide was customized based on desk research into the interviewee's involvement in anti-corruption activities.

Process tracing is used to see the shift of the impact of international organizations on Georgia's anti-corruption reforms over the years. By utilizing process tracing, the research aims to identify and analyze the sequence of events, decisions, and actions that have shaped anti-corruption reforms. This method allows for a detailed examination of how international organizations like the EU, OECD, and GRECO have interacted with domestic actors and institutions in Georgia.

In addition to process tracing, the thesis employs document analysis to examine official documents, policy papers, and agreements related to anti-corruption reforms in Georgia. The analysis focuses on several key areas, including evaluation and monitoring reports by GRECO and OECD/ACN, OECD/SIGMA reports on public administration reform in Georgia, EU reports on Georgia, including the Association Agreements between the EU and Georgia, and the Country Reports from the European Commission to Georgia. These documents will be assessed to evaluate Georgia's engagement in anti-corruption platforms, compliance with recommendations, and the implementation status of reforms over time.

2.4.1 Ethical Considerations

The interviewees were given a brief description of the research along and asked about the consent and anonymity disclaimers. Respondents were informed in advance that the interviews would be audio recorded. All interviewees, except one, agreed to have their names disclosed in the research. One interviewee requested anonymity for both them and the organization they represent. Additionally, two interviewees asked to review their interview material before they were included in the research. Based on the reciprocity principle of the research and their interest, the final thesis will be also shared with them.

In order not to impede Georgia's EU integration process in any way, the names of participants from international and national non-government organizations (NGOs), and former and current state officials involved in the anti-corruption research will not be disclosed in this thesis. However, they can be supplied upon request.

3 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The aim of this chapter is to review the existing literature on the impact of international and transnational organizations on anti-corruption policymaking and to present a theoretical framework that examines this influence. The chapter begins with a review of the phenomenon of corruption and the significance of combating it. It then discusses the various types of policy transfer and how these can shape anti-corruption efforts. Given that corruption is not solely a domestic issue, the chapter also addresses the internationalization of the fight against corruption. After reviewing various anti-corruption platforms, the focus shifts to the EU's leverage in promoting anti-corruption policies. Following the literature review, the chapter will introduce the theoretical framework that best explains the EU's influence on national policymaking. This discussion includes the concepts of passive and active leverage as theorized by Vachudova (2005). While building my arguments on this theory, I am also modifying the theory by adding an intermediary (passive-active) leverage phase that is also relevant to Georgia.

3.1 Definition, Types, and Consequences of Corruption

While there is no universally accepted definition of corruption, it is commonly described as the abuse of entrusted power for personal gain (Transparency International). However, there is ongoing debate about the scope of entrusted power - whether it pertains solely to public officials or also includes those in private positions. Nye (1967) offers a narrow definition, describing corruption as behavior deviating from formal public duties for personal gains, such as money or status. Mushtaq Khan echoes this view, identifying corruption as actions by public officials that break formal conduct rules for personal motives like wealth, power, or status (Khan, 1996). Conversely, the OECD adopts a broader perspective, defining corruption

as the misuse of both public and private positions for personal gain. USAID expands this definition to include "the abuse of entrusted power and influence for personal or political gain" (USAID, 2022). This thesis utilizes Transparency International's definition, viewing corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.

Corruption, a multifaceted phenomenon, can occur within national borders or transnationally, evolving over time to take on new forms. Primarily, it is characterized as political corruption, occurring among the highest echelons of authority, including heads of states, ministers, and top officials, alongside bureaucratic corruption experienced in everyday interactions with public administration and services (Amundsen et al., 2006). Political corruption may also involve covert payments from large multinational corporations to political leaders (Islam et al., 2021; Fazekas et al., 2013; Schubert & Miller, 2008). Conversely, transnational corruption operates across borders, leveraging global networks and intricate schemes to divert a country's wealth from its rightful owners - the people (USAID, 2022). USAID identifies additional forms of corruption, such as kleptocracy, which encompasses state capture, and strategic corruption, where corrupt practices are weaponized as part of a government's foreign policy (2022).

Corruption, in its various forms, exerts profoundly negative political, social, and economic impact. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that bribery alone costs between \$1.5 to \$2 trillion annually, amounting to approximately 2% of global GDP (IMF, 2016). It serves as a breeding ground for poverty and poses a significant threat to democracy, eroding citizens' trust in institutions and destabilizing global peace and stability (OECD).

Furthermore, it acts as a formidable barrier to economic progress, with well-documented adverse effects on economic growth, income, and overall development across nations, prompting widespread concern among the public, scholars, and policymakers (Transparency

International, 2019). Corruption also hampers innovative endeavors (Anokhin & Schulze, 2009), discourages both immediate foreign direct investment and overall investment (Mauro, 1995). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) underscores the economic repercussions of fraud, money laundering, and tax evasion for nations and economic inequality at large (UNODC). Despite arguments by some scholars that corruption may facilitate bureaucratic processes and expedite tasks ("greasing the wheels") (Huntington, 2006; Leff, 1964; Leys, 1965; Rose-Ackerman, 1978), its detrimental effects far outweigh any perceived benefits (UKaid, 2015).

3.2 The internationalization of the fight against corruption

Corruption has long posed a significant governance challenge, with states only beginning to implement binding agreements to combat it in the 1990s (Lohaus, 2019). Recognizing the imperative for a comprehensive, legally binding framework to confront corruption, the global community has increasingly prioritized international collaboration, a sentiment echoed by Klitgaard (1998). A pivotal moment came in 2003 with the adoption of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) by the United Nations, which entered into force in 2005. Concurrently, the Council of Europe has made significant strides in preventing and penalizing corruption through initiatives like the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption, monitored by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) through a peer review process. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has also played a crucial role in developing policies to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, ensuring member compliance. Additionally, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has contributed significantly by adopting the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions in 1997 (OECD, 2007).

Various motivations exist of policy transfer in national policy, including ranging from lesson drawing under perfect rationality to the constraints of bounded rationality, as well as conditionality and coercion (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). Reinicke (1999/2000) introduces the notion of "global public policy networks," which aid policymakers in addressing emerging challenges. These networks, with their diverse membership, facilitate the exchange of information and expertise from various backgrounds, offering a comprehensive understanding of policy issues and amplifying the voices of previously marginalized groups. By fostering connections among disparate groups, they also foster learning and collaboration (1999/2000). Dolowitz and Marsh (1996; 2001) further support this perspective, emphasizing the influence of international governing organizations (IGOs) like the OECD, The Group of Seven (G7), and International Monetary Fund (IMF). They assert that these organizations directly impact national policymakers through their policies and loan conditions, as well as indirectly through the dissemination of information and policies via conferences and reports (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000).

Anti-corruption agreements serve as significant focal points and benchmarks, with many incorporating follow-up mechanisms, among which peer review is the most common (Lohaus, 2019). Through regular reviews of member states' performance in fulfilling treaty commitments, these mechanisms inherently facilitate information collection, sharing, and benchmarking, aiming to boost compliance levels by exerting peer pressure and imposing reputational costs. Consequently, anti-corruption agreements can serve as platforms for public naming and shaming (p.15). Although the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) introduces some innovations, its monitoring mechanism is not groundbreaking, merely establishing a Conference of State Parties to convene regularly for monitoring purposes (Wouters et al., 2012).

In the internationalization of efforts to combat corruption, corruption measures are seen as indispensable policy tools, as affirmed by Abramo (2007). Particularly notable among these measures is the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which wields considerable influence as a tool for evaluating international governance, shaping government actions, corporate conduct, civil society involvement, and media discourse (Eigen, 2005; Financial Times, 2004; Transparency International, 2006; Andersson and Heywood, 2009). On the other hand, despite its widespread recognition, the CPI also remains under persistent methodological scrutiny, with ongoing doubts regarding its reliability and effectiveness (OECD, 2010). Mungiu-Pippidi and Fazekas (2020) further critique the index, highlighting its inability to pinpoint reasons for change or stagnation and its lack of specificity in identifying areas of governmental failure or improvement. Moreover, there is ambiguity surrounding whether the CPI measures the level of corruption within a government or within society as a whole, likely encompassing both aspects (Mungiu-Pippidi and Fazekas, 2020). As a result, these contradictory perspectives underscore the enduring methodological obstacles and divergent understandings, emphasizing the continued challenge of effectively tackling corruption worldwide.

Kos (2020) argues that few countries genuinely fight corruption purely out of internal motives; rather, many are driven by both internal and international pressures. Mungiu-Pippidi (2020) highlights that the recent democratic regressions globally have emphasized the significant role of external actors. With countries increasingly disregarding international viewpoints, the importance of international organizations becomes paramount (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2020).

3.3 The Influence of the European Union on Anti-Corruption Reforms

Following the EU's 2004 enlargement there was a notable rise in the publication of books examining conditionality and the accession process as drivers of anti-corruption reforms in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Grabbe, 2006; Hughes et al., 2004; Jacoby, 2004; Kelley, 2006; Pridham, 2005; Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier, 2005; Vachudova, 2005). Many of these have sought to highlight, in the words of Heather Grabbe (2006), the EU's "transformative power.

Research into the EU's influence on anti-corruption efforts delves into the distinctions between pre-accession and post-accession phases, with the extent of the EU's influence on domestic policy remaining a subject of debate. Before accession, the European Commission's annual reports, assessing candidate countries' readiness for EU membership, plays a pivotal role (Batory, 2010). Sicakova-Beblava et al. (2011) underscore the significance of EU political conditionality in endorsing and ratifying anti-corruption conventions, particularly in Slovakia's initial strides toward implementing GRECO recommendations, making Slovakia a prime example of the EU's active leverage (e.g., Lord and Harris, 2006). This leverage became apparent when, following a failure to meet the political criterion in 1997, a change in government in 1998 led to an invitation to commence accession negotiations. However, Haughton (2007) suggests that the EU's influence in this process may be overstated, arguing that the motivation to remove the previous government stemmed more from a desire to address domestic political and economic issues, including corruption and economic mismanagement.

Amidst discussions about the EU's impact on anti-corruption efforts, Batory (2010) also emphasizes the domestic factors. Despite the prevailing assumption that anti-corruption measures would diminish post-accession due to the removal of accession incentives, Batory

(2010) argues for a more nuanced perspective, particularly in Hungary. Her examination reveals that while certain measures introduced after joining the Union in 2004 were influenced by international obligations, substantial domestic factors also shaped reform efforts. In contrast, Pridham (2008) claims that although the EU introduces new policies post-accession, their tangible impact remains largely symbolic. For instance, the influence of EU conditionality on Slovakia's anti-corruption policies exhibits a nuanced trajectory, with the EU exerting greater influence pre-accession than post-accession (Beblavý and Sičáková-Beblavá, 2014). However, compliance with these recommendations gradually diminished in subsequent rounds, attributed to reduced EU pressure and escalating domestic compliance costs (Sicakova-Beblava et al., 2011).

3.4 Theoretical Framework

This thesis utilizes Vachudova's (2005) theoretical framework to elucidate the influence the European Union can exert on prospective members. Vachudova differentiates between “passive” and “active” leverage to theoretically categorize the types of influence the EU can have on credible future members. Passive leverage refers to the EU's inherent appeal or magnetism, especially regarding the expected economic benefits of membership. Active leverage involves the deliberate conditionality applied during the EU's pre-accession process. Focusing on Georgia, a country with EU candidate status, I will utilize Vachudova's notions of active and passive leverage to examine the Union's influence. However, instead of solely relying on the theory, I identify, based on Georgia's circumstances, three distinct phases in the relationship between the EU and Georgia: passive, active-passive, and active leverage.

Vachudova contends that during the first five years following 1989, the EU exerted only passive leverage over its six credible future member states: Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania (collectively referred to as the ECE countries).

The collapse of communism and the end of the Soviet Union marked a critical juncture in their political development. According to Vachudova, these countries had experienced only four decades of locally led communism under nominal state sovereignty before transitioning to democratization. Consequently, joining the EU was seen as the symbolic culmination of their “return to Europe” (Vachudova, 2005: p.3-4). Therefore, while EU membership became the common foreign policy objective for all six countries, addressing the domestic requirements for membership was not initially a top government priority. As a result, in 1993, these countries were recognized as credible candidates for European Union membership (Vachudova, 2005: p.2).

Once the EU started moving toward enlargement, it began implementing its active leverage which involves deliberate policies directed at candidate states. According to Vachudova (2005), active leverage is driven by the substantial benefits of EU membership, incentivizing states to meet extensive entry requirements and thus making the EU's conditionality within the pre-accession process highly effective. This process is particularly powerful due to three main characteristics: asymmetric interdependence, where candidate countries are weaker relative to the EU; strict but fair enforcement of rules; and a meritocratic system that rewards countries based on performance and compliance (Vachudova, 2005). Each candidate's path to membership allows the EU to exercise active leverage through various tools. These tools enable the EU to use the threat of exclusion from the next stage of the process for candidates not fulfilling required reforms, while rewarding states that make progress. The potential tools of active leverage include association agreements, criticism and demarches related to the Copenhagen Criteria, Agenda 2000 and the opinions, regular reports, accession partnerships, national programs for adopting the *acquis*, and negotiations and screening (2005: 125-132).

According to Vachudova, the EU's initial potential tool of active leverage was the timing and scope of association agreements with potential candidates, but this tool was never utilized in case of ECE countries. The association agreements, known as the “Europe Agreements,” were primarily trade agreements that also established a political relationship. Despite provisions allowing for suspension in cases of breaches of democratic standards or human rights, the EU has never suspended, or even seriously threatened to suspend, a Europe Agreement with a misbehaving associate member. Vachudova concludes that the Europe Agreements predate the concept of active leverage and primarily reflect the commercial interests of EU member states (2005: 127).

3.5 Georgia-EU relations: passive and active leverage

Drawing from the concepts of "active" and "passive" leverage exerted by the European Union on domestic policy, we can discern three distinct phases in the relationship between the EU and Georgia: passive, active-passive, and active leverage. The initial phase, characterized by passive leverage, commenced with Georgia's independence, and persisted until 2014, preceding the signing of the Association Agreement. Subsequently, the second phase, termed "passive-active" leverage, commenced post the Association Agreement's signing. Throughout this period, Georgia, although not yet perceived as a credible EU candidate, diligently adhered to the regulations outlined in the Association Agreement, distinguishing itself as one of the Eastern Partnership's most enthusiastic collaborators in comparison to other members. For instance, a briefing on EU-Georgia relations published by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) in May 2021 highlighted Georgia's standing as a frontrunner among Eastern Partnership nations. The third phase, marked by active leverage, began with the prospect of enlargement, particularly in the wake of the Ukrainian conflict outbreak. During this phase, in 2022 Georgia formally applied for EU membership and aligned its

objectives with the Union's 12 priorities, signaling a significant shift in its relationship with the EU.

The initial phase of EU-Georgia relations saw passive leverage from the EU, beginning with the collapse of the Soviet Union. During this period, the EU provided humanitarian aid and limited technical assistance, viewing Georgia as part of Moscow's near abroad rather than a neighbor (Sabanadze, 2023). The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in 1999 marked a deepening of EU engagement, focusing on economic development, democracy promotion, and political dialogue. When Mikheil Saakashvili assumed the presidency after the 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgia prioritized alignment with the West, emphasizing Euro-Atlantic integration for its security and prosperity (Paul and Shiriyev, 2012). Saakashvili's tenure coincided with the launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) by the EU in 2009, aiming to strengthen ties with six former Soviet neighbors, including Georgia. While EU membership was not imminent for these countries (Waal, 2011), benefits such as visa liberalization and trade privileges were offered in exchange for reform commitments.

The second phase, characterized by the EU's passive-active leverage, begins with the signing of the Association Agreement (AA) in 2014, which serves as a pivotal step in the accession process (European Commission). This agreement, implemented in July 2016, aims to foster both political association and economic integration between the EU and Georgia (EU delegation to Georgia, 2023). Additionally, the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and the provision of visa-free travel to the Schengen area for Georgian citizens since March 28, 2017, further signify the deepening of ties between the EU and Georgia (EU delegation to Georgia, 2023). Under the Association Agreement, Georgia has committed to reforms aimed at enhancing public administration and fostering a transparent, professional civil service (GoG, 2019). These reform priorities, particularly

within the realm of Public Administration Reform (PAR), are also outlined in national policy documents such as the “Government Programme 2021-2024” and “Georgia's Development Strategy – Vision 2030” (GoG, 2019).

The third phase, marked by the EU's active leverage over Georgia, began in June 2022, following Georgia's submission of its application for European Union membership on March 3, 2022. The submission was made during Russia's hostile conflict with Ukraine, a pivotal moment that significantly influenced Georgia's pathway toward EU integration. In June 2022, the Commission recommended to the Council that Georgia be granted the perspective of EU membership, contingent upon the fulfillment of twelve priorities, including anti-corruption measures (European Commission, 2022). Subsequently, in December 2023, Georgia was granted candidate status for EU membership.

4 Empirics/discussion of results

This chapter examines the influence of international organizations on anti-corruption reforms in Georgia spanning from 2003 to 2023, tracing the evolution of these impacts over time, particularly in alignment with the varying phases of the European Union's leverage. The analysis will categorize these influences into three distinct phases: passive (2003-2012), passive-active (2013-2022), and active forms of leverage (after 2022). These phases will be scrutinized using empirical data and perspectives gathered from interviews with stakeholders in anti-corruption. In this thesis, "passive-active leverage" refers to the phase where the Association Agreement serves as a key tool in anti-corruption policymaking, as described by Vachudova (2005). This challenges the conventional assumption that such leverage only starts with achieving credible EU candidate status.

4.1 The passive leverage of the EU: 2003-2012

Following the Rose Revolution, combating corruption in Georgia was framed as a crucial aspect of nation and state building (Puppo, Di., 2010). At that time, corruption was widely seen as a key factor behind the public uprising, with anti-corruption slogans dominating the popular movement (Kupatadze, 2015). Over 60% of the population believed that corruption had spread through all public institutions (2015). According to Kupatadze (2015), Kakha Bendukidze, the architect of Georgia's neoliberal reforms, emphasized the importance of seizing the opportunity to enact changes while public confidence in the government was high, noting that the window of opportunity following a revolution is often brief. This unique "window of opportunity" was acknowledged in one of Saakashvili's speeches (2004) (Kupatadze, 2015). Consequently, anti-corruption policies enjoyed widespread support, and

the elected incumbents who secured a significant mandate were empowered to implement them.

Georgia's anti-corruption successes sparked what the Economist referred to as a "mental revolution," challenging the widespread belief that corruption was deeply ingrained in Georgian culture (the Economist, 2010). The Saakashvili government's initial anti-corruption efforts targeted various sectors of the public administration, notably the police, tax administration, customs, public services, and education (World Bank, 2012). Consequently, petty corruption was effectively eliminated within a relatively short timeframe, leading to significant improvements in police performance and tax collection (Transparency International, 2012). According to Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, Georgia ranked first in the world in 2010 in terms of the relative reduction in corruption levels and second globally in terms of the public's perception of the government's effectiveness in combating corruption. In 2010, only 2 percent of Georgia's population reported having paid a bribe in the previous 12 months (World Bank, 2012).

During the subsequent years of the revolution, as rapid reforms were underway, Georgia chose not to follow all the international standards and good practices that were promoted by IOs, but chose to create its own approaches, often based on very liberal views of the leadership of the time. According to Puppo D. (2013), the process of drafting and implementing a national anti-corruption strategy in Georgia highlighted differing perspectives between the government and the Council of Europe (COE). In our interview, a representative of the international organization involved in monitoring anti-corruption reforms since the Rose Revolution also notes that officials dismissed suggestions for implementing anti-corruption policy documents, asserting the superiority of their unique approach. This sentiment is echoed by a former senior official from the Saakashvili

administration, and one of the coordinators of anti-corruption policymaking. He mentions that international organizations encouraged them to develop an anti-corruption strategy, but initially, they did not perceive the need for a stand-alone anti-corruption strategy as the approach was to integrate anti-corruption measures into all the policies and development areas. However, given the insistence of the international organizations, they eventually created the national anti-corruption strategy by 2005/2006.

This tension between Georgia and IOs is also evident in the monitoring report by the OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (OECD/ACN), which emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive policy, robust institutions, and various reforms, particularly in the civil service, for the stability and continuity of reforms (OECD/ACN, 2006). A former NGO representative, who was involved in civil service events, recalled in our interview that Bendukidze and his team strongly resisted establishing a career-based, strong, independent, and autonomous civil service. They feared it would become too rigid and inflexible, leading to bureaucratic challenges.

After the Rose Revolution, the Government of Georgia drew on international experiences to design its reforms, modifying foreign practices to fit local circumstances when necessary (World Bank, 2012). For instance, the United States' Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act and the Italian anti-mafia model were used in drafting a new criminal code and enacting amendments within the first six months of 2004 (World Bank, 2012). According to Dobbins (2014), these anti-corruption reforms were driven by a "policy transfer" strategy, which often resulted in "incomplete transfer" processes due to misunderstandings or deliberate misinterpretations of Western practices. By 2007, Georgia had failed to implement seven out of the 25 recommendations from GRECO (GRECO, 2007) and four recommendations from OECD/ACN (OECD/ACN, 2006). Consequently, GRECO

expressed disappointment over the lack of progress reported by the Georgian authorities (GRECO, 2007).

The analysis of the monitoring reports reveals that in the second monitoring rounds conducted by GRECO (2006/2011) and OECD/ACN (2010), there is a noticeable shift in the government's focus towards compliance with the recommendations. In terms of GRECO recommendations, the government successfully implemented 13 out of 14 recommendations (GRECO, 2009/2011). Similarly, the OECD/ACN report indicates significant compliance by the government, with 18 recommendations being fully complied with, 2 partially complied with, and no outstanding non-compliant recommendations (OECD/ACN, 2010).

A former senior official of the Saakashvili government acknowledges that the European Union's role in the process was minimal. In our interview, he states that “the reforms were primarily undertaken for the country's benefit itself, not for window-dressing with minimal influence from international organizations or the EU”. He emphasizes that the success of anti-corruption reforms stemmed from the internal drive, stating, “we did it for ourselves as homework, and if and when the international organization recognized and appreciated that, it motivated us even more.” He further explains that the international organization opted to focus on other areas where external motivation for progress was deemed more necessary.

4.2 The passive-active leverage of the EU: 2013-2022

In contrast to the rapid anti-corruption reforms observed during Saakashvili's administration, the Georgian Dream party pursued different objectives after assuming power in October 2012. Post-2013, anti-corruption reforms were closely tied to the goal of EU membership. In our interview, a current representative of the Government of Georgia asserted that anti-corruption had been a priority in the country's EU integration efforts since 2013, with

initiatives aligned with this endeavor. Similarly, a former senior official of Ivanishvili's government echoed this sentiment, affirming that "the Georgian government was determined and aimed to make significant strides towards closer ties with the European Union and NATO, which was also part of their election campaign." In 2014, Georgia signed the Association Agreement and subsequently achieved visa liberalization (European Council, 2024).

The EU-Georgia Association Agreement mandated comprehensive reforms in public administration, civil service sectors, and anti-corruption, all of which were preconditions for EU membership. Public administration reform was underway in Georgia since 2015, representing a crucial step towards establishing a transparent, accountable, and effective public administration system and creating public institutions based on good governance principles to ensure citizen wellbeing (IDFI, 2024). Additionally, Georgia had been a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) since 2011. Implementing OGP action plans had been a top priority within the accountability pillar of PAR. In 2016, Georgia's active engagement in OGP resulted in its appointment as a Co-Chair of OGP for a one-year term, followed by assuming the chairmanship for another year in 2017 (Open Government Partnership).

From 2015 to 2020, Georgia achieved several milestones in Public Administration Reform (PAR), which included the enactment of laws such as "On Public Service" and "On Labor Remuneration in Public Institutions" (IDFI, 2024). Moreover, a monitoring system for the property declarations of public officials was established as part of the reform initiative.

According to a former representative of civil society, these reforms encompassed improvements in whistleblower protection legislation and verification of asset declarations. As he adds, civil society of Georgia has also lauded these measures for their encouraging

features. However, he states that doubts lingered regarding the sustainability and progression of these reforms.

In our interview, a former civil servant involved in the Public Administration Reform process emphasized, "Yes, international organizations exerted influence, with the EU being the most influential among them. Whether the country desired it or not, for instance, in 2015, the PAR strategy had to be approved."

While the Georgian Government prioritized public administration reform, progress in policy development and coordination was slow, as noted by SIGMA in 2018. On the contrary, in 2018, OECD/SIGMA assessed the direction of policy planning and coordination within the PAR framework in Georgia for the 2015-2017 period, issuing 21 recommendations.

However, according to the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) (IDFI, 2021), by 2020, most of these recommendations, specifically 14 out of 21, remained unfulfilled. Many planned reforms were not fully implemented, resulting in persistent challenges and gaps, particularly in establishing and operating an effective policy development and coordination system (SIGMA, 2018).

Non-governmental organizations have voiced criticism against the action plans of the Public Administration Reform due to their perceived lack of ambition (IDFI, 2019). According to IDFI, a member organization of the PAR Council, the plans have been repeating the old commitments from previous policy documents without introducing new reforms (IDFI, 2019).

In parallel with the Public Administration Reform and Open Government, the new government also undertook efforts to address recommendations from GRECO and OECD/ACN. Notably, GRECO's third evaluation report holds significance, being adopted in

2011 during Saakashvili's administration, with the first compliance report issued in 2013 under the new government. Between 2011 and 2018, the government diligently pursued the implementation of these recommendations, successfully enacting nine and partially addressing six (wherein six out of 15 recommendations were fully implemented in the first compliance round by 2013). Nonetheless, GRECO expressed disappointment that the outstanding recommendations had not been prioritized with greater urgency since the adoption of the Evaluation Report almost seven years prior (GRECO, 2018). Recalling the process differently, a former senior official from Ivanishvili's government asserted in our interview that while not all actions aligned with the expectations of international organizations, no recommendations were disregarded. He further noted that most recommendations were fully executed, some partially fulfilled, and the government committed to complete the remaining recommendations.

The momentum between Georgia and international organizations significantly declined since 2019/2020, as evidenced by monitoring reports from GRECO, OECD/ACN. In 2022, Georgia's decision to withdraw from participating in the OECD/ACN monitoring round marked a notable setback, according to a report by Transparency International Georgia (2023). The current representative of the Government of Georgia stated that, to the best of her knowledge, this decision was attributed to the OECD/ACN's new methodology, which no longer aligned with the government's priorities. However, representatives from both national and international organizations, in our interviews, viewed this move as a political decision, characterized by a refusal to adhere to established norms. One representative from an international organization described it as part of a broader trend of deglobalization, where countries resist following rules or engaging in dialogue with each other, and are wary of external monitoring and criticism. This view is further aligned with the ideas of Mungiu-Pippidi (2020) who claimed that in the process of the recent democratic regressions globally,

when countries increasingly disregard international viewpoints, the importance of international organizations becomes paramount.

GRECO's monitoring report also reveals two recommendations that had not been implemented by 2022, marking the first occurrence since 2007 (GRECO 2019/2022).

Additionally, progress in adopting action plans within the OGP slows, with a gap between the 2018/2019 action plan and the subsequent one in 2024/2025 (OGP Georgia). Civil society organizations highlight challenges related to the anti-corruption reform agenda in Georgia in a Letter of Concern addressed to OGP, indicating the absence of valid National Anti-Corruption policy documents (Strategy and Action Plan) since December 2020. The action plan of OGP is eventually approved on December 29, 2023 (IDFI, 2024). As explained by IDFI (2024), missing another cycle would put the country at risk of receiving an inactive status.

In our interview, a representative from the international organization suggests that rankings, such as the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), assist the government in impeding anti-corruption efforts since it achieves "a golden point". He notes that the Georgian Government frequently emphasizes its standing in international rankings like the CPI, asserting superiority over countries such as Ukraine and Moldova. Despite this rhetoric, however, Georgia's CPI ranking has remained stagnant since 2012, signalling limited progress. This observation aligns with the critique offered by Mungiu-Pippidi and Fazekas (2020), who question the index's effectiveness in explaining the reasons for change or stagnation, and its failure to provide specific insights into areas where governmental performance has either failed or improved.

4.3 The active leverage of the EU: since 2022

A significant milestone in Georgia's path towards the EU occurred in March 2022, as the country submitted its application to join the European Union and further activated the declined momentum in some areas of anti-corruption, mostly based on the priorities of the EU. Subsequently, in June 2022, Georgia received a European perspective, along with 12 priorities specified in the Commission's opinion on Georgia's membership application. These priorities needed to be fulfilled to obtain candidate status from the Union. Strengthening Georgia's anti-corruption efforts was among these priorities, as stated in the opinion. In alignment with these recommendations, an Anti-corruption Bureau was established, consolidating various anti-corruption functions within a single body (European Commission, 2023).

The establishment of an anti-corruption bureau highlights the significant influence of the EU on domestic policy decisions and underscores the importance of its recommendations. IDFI reports that the inclusion of an "Autonomous anti-corruption agency (empowered with investigative capabilities)" was proposed by civil society organizations as a key commitment for the fifth OGP action plan. However, this commitment was initially omitted from the fifth action plan of the Open Government Action Plan (IDFI, 2024). According to our interview with the current representative of the Government of Georgia, to the best of her knowledge, although civil society had this commitment, there was limited consensus on the matter at the time in the stakeholders generally. However, with anti-corruption emerging as a priority in the country's path to EU integration and the receipt of 12 priorities from the Union, the government recognized the importance of acting and decided to prioritize this initiative.

Transparency International welcomed the establishment of the anti-corruption bureau. However, it highlighted that the centralized model is effective only when the institution is granted genuine independence and relevant investigative powers. Presently, the anti-corruption bureau lacks investigative authority (Transparency International, 2022).

The influence of the EU is also evident in another star commitment made by civil society regarding the "Creation of a beneficial owners registry," which is incorporated into the Ordinance adopted in November 2023 titled "On the Approval of the Action Plan to Avoid Excessive Influence of Interests in Economic, Political, and Public Life in Georgia" (IDFI, 2024). As the organization states, at the initial stage, the government did not consider any of these commitments in the Open Government Action Plan.

Georgia also adhered to one of the ambitious GRECO's recommendation regarding the expansion of the asset declaration regime to include all prosecutors. As mentioned by representatives of civil society in our interviews, this compliance is considered ambitious and linked to the influence of the EU. This step is further recognized in the report of the European Commission, which states: "The recommendations in the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) fourth evaluation round suggest widening the asset declaration regime to cover all prosecutors. On 16 May 2023, the parliament adopts amendments to the Law on conflict of interest and corruption which extend the asset declaration regime to all prosecutors" (Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2023).

4.4 Discussion of the results

This chapter explored the influence exerted by international organizations on anti-corruption reforms in Georgia spanning the years 2003 to 2023. It investigates the evolution of these

influences over time, particularly considering the concepts of passive, passive-active, and active leverage attributed to the EU. The analysis delved into the influence of these organizations, particularly the EU, by assessing the level of compliance with anti-corruption recommendations from GRECO and OECD/ACN and clarifying the EU's role to uncover its impact on the process, especially by analyzing the Public Administration Reform and Open Government Partnership, as interconnected to the Association Agreement. The examination illuminated a dynamic evolution in the role of international organizations within Georgia's domestic policy landscape, influenced by shifting motivations over time.

Initially, in the wake of the Rose Revolution, the primary focus was on state and nation-building, with participation in anti-corruption platforms such as GRECO and OECD/CAN, but less emphasis on formal ties to the EU. Nevertheless, this did not impede the implementation of recommendations from IOs, nor did it deter the country's notable ascent in the Corruption Perception Index ranking, soaring from 124th to 51st place on a global scale. However, a former official from the Government of Georgia underscores that their commitment to anti-corruption primarily stemmed from internal motivations, with minimal influence from the EU. He further emphasizes that in this success the political will was important. This sentiment resonates with the insights of Rotberg (2017), who underscores the critical role of strong political leadership in combating corruption, positing that leaders who exhibit genuine dedication can effectively drive reforms forward.

Following a change in government in 2012 and deeper engagement with the EU, as signing the Association Agreement in 2014 and implementing it in 2016, Georgia intensified its efforts towards active participation in international platforms and the role of the EU became more pronounced. As it is assessed by one representative of the civil society in Georgia, Georgia went from systemic to incremental changes in anti-corruption. Notably, since 2013,

anti-corruption efforts have run parallel to the EU integration process, with Georgia adopting and implementing action plans for Public Administration Reform and the Open Government Partnership. However, progress slowed since 2019/2020, with compliance efforts stagnating, and delays observed in PAR and OGP initiatives. The real window of opportunity emerged when the EU, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, revised its policy on enlargement. This bold move saw the EU grant candidate country status to Moldova and Ukraine, designating Georgia a potential candidate. Consequently, anti-corruption became a top priority, leading to the establishment of the Anti-corruption Bureau, a previously neglected initiative.

Presently, within civil society, the EU's conditionality is perceived as one of the foremost tools for propelling anti-corruption reforms in Georgia. Conversely, there is a call for greater clarity in the priorities or recommendations set forth by the EU. This is because occasionally, seemingly minor recommendations may inadvertently divert attention from the primary objective, yet still be considered as implemented, albeit partially. Moreover, civil society underscores the significance of relationships with other international organizations and their assessment reports when the EU exercises active leverage. As one member of civil society expressed, "Currently, everything is influenced by Western pressure, with the main focus being on aligning with the European Union's directives, as well as meeting grant eligibility criteria. In this process, the evaluations of organizations such as the OECD/ACN and GRECO are instrumental.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the dynamics of anti-corruption reforms in Georgia and analyze the influence exerted by the European Union, the OECD/ACN, and GRECO on this process. The study covered anti-corruption policies over two decades, from 2003 to 2023, without evaluating specific policies. Instead, it focused on the role of international influence and the interaction between domestic and international factors in shaping these changes.

Using a positivist approach, this thesis examined the influence of international organizations on domestic policymaking through a mix of qualitative methods, including interviews, document analysis, and process tracing. The primary data came from interviews, offering different viewpoints on anti-corruption reforms in Georgia. Interviewees included current and former government officials, and representatives from international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in anti-corruption efforts. By analyzing these interviews, conducting process tracing, and examining various documents, such as evaluation and monitoring reports from international organizations, the study thoroughly examined the process.

This thesis applied Vachudova's (2005) framework of “active” and “passive” leverage exerted by the European Union on domestic policy. Based on Georgia's case, it identified three distinct phases in the relationship between the EU and Georgia. The central finding was that during the passive leverage phase (2003-2012), anti-corruption reforms were highly successful, focusing on state and nation-building rather than being influenced by international

organizations or the EU. Consequently, the EU's passive leverage was minimal during this time.

During the passive-active leverage phase (2013-2022), the EU's influence on national policymaking grew, with anti-corruption reforms increasingly linked to the EU, especially before 2019/2020. During this period, anti-corruption reforms slowed, as shown by document analysis and interviews with stakeholders. A significant milestone in Georgia's path towards the EU occurred in March 2022, with the submission of its application to join the EU. After this, the EU's active leverage became evident, as Georgia established the anti-corruption bureau, which was one of the EU's priorities but had previously been neglected by the Georgian government.

The main contribution of this research is highlighting the phase of passive-active leverage. By thoroughly examining the case of Georgia, it became evident that contrary to conventional assumptions that such leverage begins with attaining credible EU candidate status, decisions at the domestic level played a crucial role. In Georgia's case, the Association Agreement was a key tool by the EU on Georgia's anti-corruption policymaking. This differed from the scenario in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, where, according to Vachudova, the Association Agreement was almost not used as an active leverage tool by the EU. However, EU integration did not prevent Georgia from withdrawing from the OECD/ACN monitoring report.

Future research could extend the timeframe to examine how the EU's leverage on anti-corruption develops now that Georgia has candidate status and anti-corruption is a priority. It would be interesting to see how Georgia's connections with other international organizations

(GRECO, OECD/ACN) continue. Since Georgia established the anti-corruption bureau per EU priorities, it remains to be seen if the anti-corruption efforts that had stalled will be revitalized, such as the delayed anti-corruption strategy not adopted since 2019, and how Public Administration Reform progresses. The role of the anti-corruption bureau is crucial as it collaborates with international anti-corruption networks.

It is also intriguing to examine the extent of leverage the European Union exerts on the anti-corruption policymaking of other candidate countries, as the prospect of EU membership serves as a potent incentive for democratic reforms in nations aspiring to join the EU.

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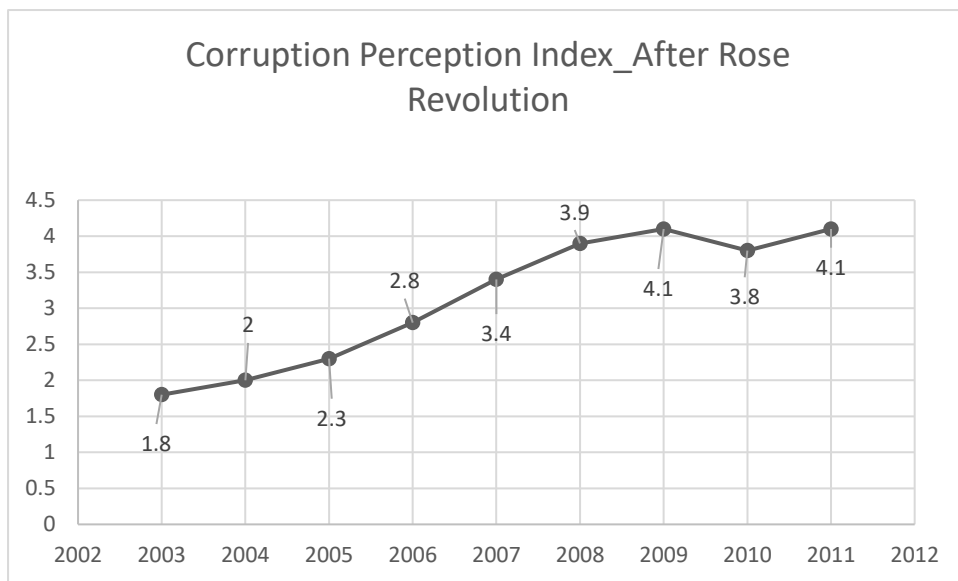
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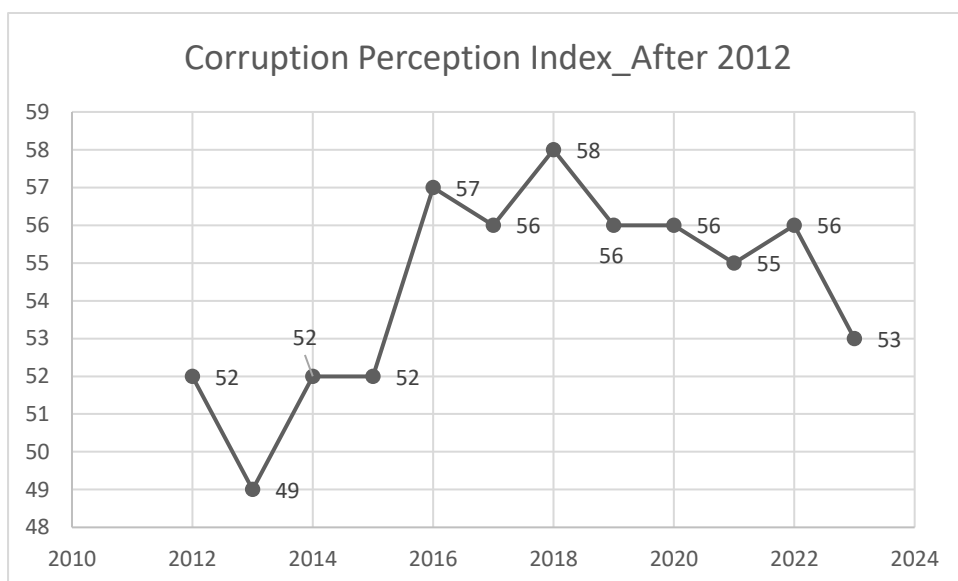
Interviews

1. Interview with a senior official of the Saakashvili administration. Tbilisi, April 2024.
2. Interview with a former senior official of Ivanishvili's government. Tbilisi, April 2024.
3. Interview with a representative of the international organizations, online, May 2024.
4. Interview with an executive director of the non-governmental organization in Georgia. Tbilisi, April 2024.
5. Interview with a head of anti-corruption program at the non-governmental organization in Georgia. Tbilisi, April 2024.
6. Interview with a senior analyst at the non-governmental organization in Georgia. Tbilisi, April 2024.
7. Interview with a former head of anti-corruption program at the non-governmental organization in Georgia. Tbilisi, April 2024.
8. Interview with a representative of the international organizations, online, May 2024
9. Interview with a representative of the Government of Georgia. Online, May 2024
10. Interview with an analyst at the non-governmental organization in Georgia. Tbilisi, April 2024.

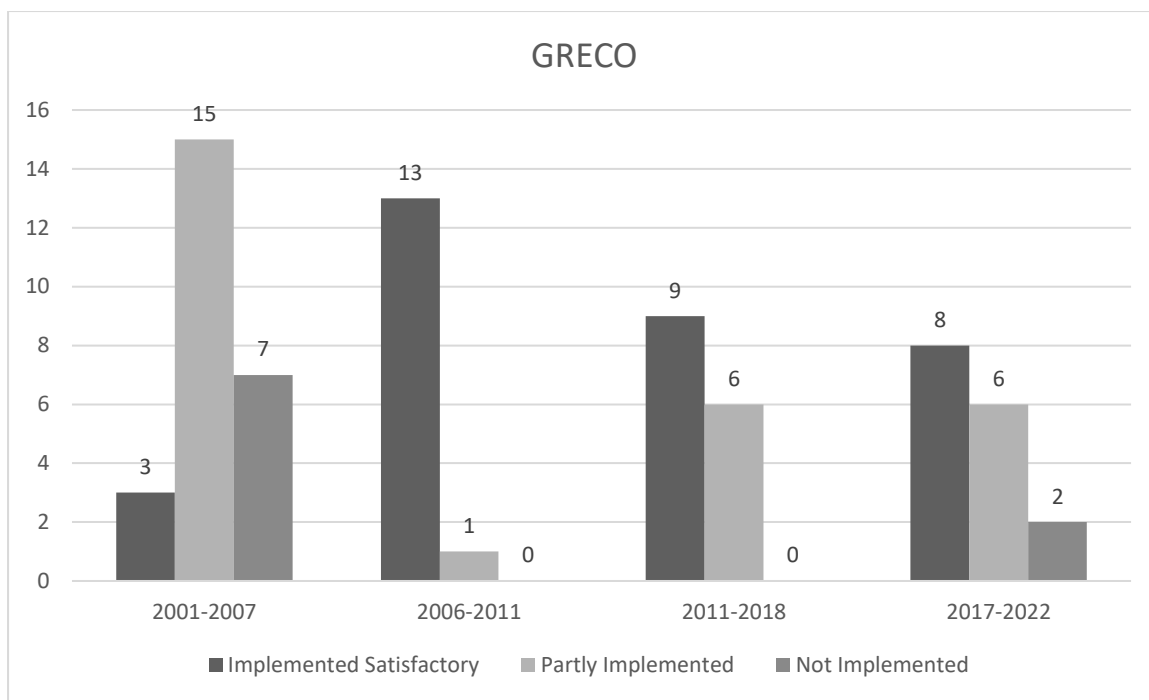
7 Appendices



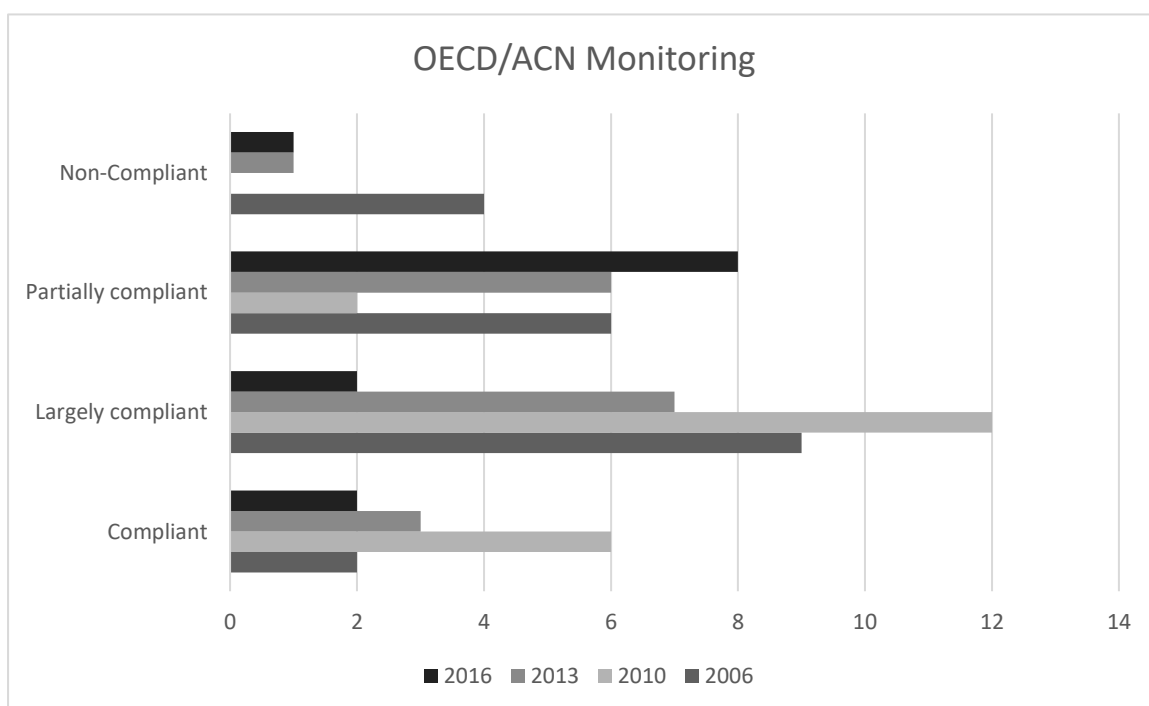
Appendix 1 the Corruption Perception Index of Georgia in the years 2003-2011



Appendix 2 the Corruption Perception Index of Georgia in the years 2012-2023



Appendix 3 Compliance of GRECO recommendations



Appendix 4 Compliance of OECD/ACN recommendations