CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA: "DEPRIVATIZATION" OF GEORGIAN ORTHODOXY

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Prof. Dr. Tülin Gençöz
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

Prof. Dr. Sibel Kalaycıoğlu
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Aydıngün
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Ayşe Ceylan Tokluoğlu (METU, SOC) _____

Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Aydıngün (METU, SOC) _____

Asst. Prof. Dr. Yuliya Biletska (Karabük Uni., IR) _____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Last name: Serhat KESKİN

Signature :

ABSTRACT

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KESKİN, Serhat

M.S., Department of Sociology

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Aydıngün

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This thesis analyzes the relationship between the Church and State in post-Soviet Georgia, and goes on to discuss the growing power of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and its impact on secularism, politics and society. It is argued that the power of the GOC, both in Georgian society and politics, is derived from its historical significance and from the role it played in the post-Soviet period. It is argued further that these factors, along with its presence in the public space, constitute a challenge against secularism and Western values. Based on the views of José Casanova, it is suggested that the "deprivatization" of religion experienced in Georgia differs from Western experiences. This thesis makes use of both a documentary research, including the 1995 Constitution, the 2002 Constitutional Agreement, statements of the Patriarch and high ranking priests, reports of national and international NGOs and organizations, and field researches conducted in Tbilisi and Batumi in 2015 and 2017. During the field researches, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted with the elites and experts. The field researches revealed that the failure of politicians in the post-Soviet period and their need for political legitimacy contributed to the growth in the power of the Church in the public sphere. Although the process of "deprivatization" of religion in Georgia does not necessarily comply with the three legitimate instances put forward by Casanova by which the Church enters the public sphere, the Georgian

Orthodox Church has become a powerful institution in the public sphere. The findings have also demonstrated that although the separation of the Church and state is legally binding, the principle of non-establishment is not fully realized.

Keywords: Post-Soviet Georgia, the Georgian Orthodox Church, Deprivatization, Church-State Relations, Secularism

ÖZ

POST-SOVYET GÜRCİSTAN'DA DİN-DEVLET İLİŞKİLERİ: GÜRCÜ ORTODOKLUĞU'NUN KAMUSAL ALANA DÖNÜŞÜ

KESKİN, Serhat
Yüksek Lisans, Sosyoloji Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN

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Bu tez, Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan'da kilise-devlet ilişkisini incelemekte ve Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin artan gücüyle bu gücün laiklik, siyaset ve topluma etkisini tartışmaktadır. Tezde, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Gürcü toplumunda ve siyasetindeki gücünün, tarihsel öneminden ve Sovyet sonrası dönemde oynadığı rolden kaynaklandığı iddia edilmektedir. Ayrıca, bu unsurların yanı sıra kilisenin kamusal alanda varoluş biçiminin laikliğe ve Batı değerlerine bir tehdit oluşturduğu da iddia edilmektedir. José Casanova'nın görüşlerine dayanarak, Gürcistan'da deneyimlenen 'dinin kamusal alana dönüşü'nün (*deprivatization*) Batı deneyimlerinden farklılık gösterdiği iddia edilmektedir. Bu tezde belge araştırması yöntemi kullanılmış, bu bağlamda 1995 Anayasası ve 2002 Anayasal Anlaşması, Patrik ve üst düzey rahiplerin demeçleri, ulusal ve uluslararası sivil toplum örgütlerinin ve kuruluşların raporları incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, 2015 ve 2017 yıllarında Tiflis'te ve Batum'da saha araştırmaları yapılmış ve bu çerçevede uzman ve seçkinlerle 30 derinlemesine mülakat gerçekleştirilmiştir. Saha araştırmaları, Sovyet sonrası dönemde politikacıların başarısızlıklarının ve siyasi meşruiyete ihtiyaç duymalarının, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin kamusal alandaki

gücünün artmasına katkıda bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Gürcistan'da yaşanan "dinin kamusal alana dönüşü" süreci, José Casanova'nın öne sürmüş olduğu kilisenin kamusal alana girdiği üç meşru örnekle uyumlu olmasa da Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi kamusal alanda güçlü bir kurum haline gelmiştir. Bulgular ayrıca, kilise ve devlet ayrımı yasal açıdan sağlansa da kilise-devlet ayrılığı ilkesinin fiilen tam olarak gerçekleşmediğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, Dinin Kamusal Alana Dönüşü, Kilise-Devlet İlişkileri, Laiklik

To My Family

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introducing the Study

The Republic of Georgia is located on the easternmost shores of the Black Sea. As one of the South Caucasian countries, it has borders with the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey. Georgia covers around 69,700 square kilometers, in which are included the Adjara Autonomous Republic and the *de facto* Abkhazian and South Ossetian states. According to the 2014 census, Georgia's population is around 3.72 million, excluding Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Although its population is relatively small, Georgia is ethnically the most diverse country in the South Caucasus, being home to such major ethnic communities as Georgians, Armenians, Russians, Ossetians, Yazidis, Ukrainians, Kists, Greeks and Assyrians. Georgia is also a multi-religious country, with the leading religious groups being Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Armenian Apostolics, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Yazidis, Protestants and Jews.[1]

The dissolution of the Soviet Union spurred many studies underlining the growing significance of the majority religion, Georgian Orthodoxy, and of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), both in society and in the political sphere. This thesis will study the growing significance of the Church based on an analysis of the relationship

[1] "2014 General Population Census", Accessed: March 23, 2017, http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf

between the Church and State in post-Soviet Georgia and the role played by the Church throughout the history of Georgians.

The territory within Georgia's current borders has been under the control several different dynasties in its history, including the Persians, Arabs, Mongols, Seljuks and Ottomans, although the fragmented political structure of Georgia made the unification of Georgians impossible until the Golden Age, which began in around the 11th and lasted until the 13th century. The Mongol invasion put an end to the Golden Age and the centralized administration of Georgia collapsed, and from then on, Georgia was for a long time a battleground on which the Ottomans and Iranians competed for control. In this sense, it can be claimed that a considerable part of the medieval history of Georgia was taken up by the struggle between two powerful Muslim neighbors, each of which sought to take control of Georgia. During this struggle, it was Orthodox Christianity and the Georgian language that came to the forefront in the Georgian identity (Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006: 69). In 1801, with the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire, Georgia was subordinated to Russian rule. One may argue that it was the GOC that ensured the continued sense of unity among Georgians, despite being ruled by different empires and dispersed among different Georgian princedoms, and this explains the crucial place of the GOC in the history of Georgians and the national character of the Church (Serrano, 2014: 75).

In 1811, 10 years after the Russian annexation of Georgia, the autocephaly of the GOC was abolished by the Russian Empire, and GOC was subordinated to the Russian Orthodox Church. Although subjected to a serious control and pressure by the Russian Empire, the GOC succeeded in keeping Georgians together and raising Georgian national sentiment. Shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the GOC declared its separation from the Russian Orthodox Church and its autocephaly (Vardosanidze, 2006b: 196), and in doing so, launched the process that would result in Georgia's political independence in 1918, after more than 100 years of Russian rule. The first independent Georgian Republic lasted until 1921 when the Bolshevik

government occupied Georgia, and from that date on until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia was a part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Suny, 1994: 63-113). Following the Red Army invasion, Georgia became a part of the USSR, and the GOC again lost its autocephalous status. In the era that followed, the GOC, along with the Georgian national political structure, were systematically dismantled as part of the militant atheist banning of all religions under the Soviet regime (Vardosanidze, 2006b: 192-227).

The Soviet Union, based on a Marxist-Leninist ideology, was a totalitarian regime in which one of the key factors was the prohibition on the practicing of religion. The Communist Party sought to exclude religion not only from the public sphere, but also from the private lives of individuals, and to create a Soviet Man that was free from religious influence. The anti-religious campaign was officially launched in the Soviet Union in 1921, and was ushered in with a massive implementation of militant-atheism that included the abolition of religious education in schools and the closing of houses of worship. In this period of Georgia's history, the GOC's financial and legislative capacities were all but destroyed under the government of the Soviet Union (Jones, 1989b: 294).

Following Lenin, Joseph Stalin continued to implement severe sanctions against religious organizations, although his policies in this regard became softer during World War II, as religion was seen as a source of moral support during the war period. This led the Russian Orthodox Church to recognize the autocephalous status of the GOC in 1943, but despite the implementation of relatively softer policies towards religion, the Soviet regime did not give up its control of the visibility of religion in the public sphere. The control of religion increased under Nikita Khrushchev from 1953 to 1964. Khrushchev sought to empower communism, implementing new anti-religious policies to bring it under the control. Khrushchev was replaced by Leonid Brezhnev in 1964, who led the Soviet Union until 1982, and it was in this period that the anti-religious campaign began to be perceived as damaging to the Soviet Union's image around the world. In order to break down this

image, attempts were made to establish new regulations regarding the juridical status of religion in the Soviet Union (Corley, 1996: 244), although the government control over religion continued.

In 1972, Eduard Shevardnadze took up the post of Georgian Communist Party Secretary. He made little effort to implement the anti-religious campaign in Georgia, and so the Soviet regime continued its efforts in this regard. At that time, the GOC was facing many internal problems, including corruption and election fraud in the Church (Jones, 1989b: 301), and this was leading to a decline in trust in the GOC that was exasperated by the pressure being imposed on it by the Soviet regime.

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union began to face economic, social and political problems, which led Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 to implement the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. With respect to religious issues, the Soviet administration recognized the significance of the religious demands of the Union's ethnic communities, and began to see religion as a means of overcoming the social problems that abounded in the Soviet Union. After the implementation of a new policy towards religion, the number of Orthodox Churches in Georgia increased, and Gorbachev's policies also enhanced the organizational capacity of the GOC in Georgian society (Jones, 1989b: 299-312), which, it can be argued, resulted in a partial rehabilitation of the GOC during the Soviet period.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ilia II, the Patriarch of the GOC since 1977, contributed considerably to the increasing power of the Church. The political instability during the Georgian post-Soviet nation-state building process made the strengthening of the Church easier, and the Church and the Patriarch himself would become important actors for Georgians. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of independent Georgia, stated that Orthodox Christianity should be declared as the state religion, although he accused Ilia II of being an agent of the Soviet regime. Nonetheless, it can be argued that religious rhetoric was in common

use among Georgian nationalists in the early post-Soviet period, leading to a rise in the power of the GOC in Georgian society (Chitanava, 2015: 41).

Taking the reins from Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze became president of Georgia in 1992 at a time when civil war was raging between Georgia and Abkhazia (Aydıngün, 2013: 816). The GOC became the only institution to be trusted by the Georgian people in this period of turmoil, and so Shevardnadze used it to legitimize and maintain his political power. In return for providing support to the fragile political authority of Shevardnadze, the GOC was given room to intervene in politics (Filetti, 2014: 224, Serrano, 2014: 75).

In this political climate, the 1995 Constitution of Georgia was promulgated. Although Article 9 of the Constitution guaranteed freedom of religion in Georgia, it also recognized the special role of the GOC in Georgian history.[2] After seven years, in 2002, the Constitutional Agreement known as the *Concordat* was signed between the Georgian State and the Patriarchate, defining GOC as a legal entity.[3] This gave the GOC important privileges that were enjoyed by none of the other religious organizations in Georgia. Following Shevardnadze, Mikhail Saakashvili came to power in 2004 following the Rose Revolution of 2003. The new president pursued a pro-Western policy and promoted Western values in an attempt to resolve the ongoing social, political and economic problems, and initiated important reforms to protect the rights of religious minorities. He tried to establish a legal framework to secure freedom of religion in Georgia, and the signing of the framework convention on minorities in 2005 was proof of his pro-Western approach. He also maintained strong relations with the GOC during his presidency, allowing the GOC to extend its

[2]"The Constitution of Georgia", Accessed: July 27, 2017, http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf

[3]"Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church", Accessed: February 10, 2017, https://forbcaucausus.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/concordat.pdf

influence in Georgian society. For instance, the Church played an active role in reducing tension during and after the five-day war between Georgia and Russia in 2008.[4] In this sense, it can be argued that the GOC strengthened its power under Saakashvili, despite the fact that many assumed that the power of the Church would be curtailed during his presidency. Succeeding Saakashvili, the current president Giorgi Margvelashvili came to power in 2012, and placed strong emphasis on the historical significance of the GOC, which, it can be said, has ensured its continued strength in political and social life in Georgia.[5]

As further evidence of the historical significance of the GOC, Georgia claims to have been the second state after Armenia to declare Orthodox Christianity as the state religion, darting back to the 4th century. Shortly after adopting Orthodox Christianity, the GOC translated the Bible into the Georgian language, and in this period, many other texts penned by Christian philosophers were translated into Georgian by the Church. What is more, although the GOC remained within the ecclesiastical sphere of the Antioch until gaining an autocephalous status in the 11th century, it promoted the use of the Georgian language in religious rituals, contributing to the development of Georgian national consciousness, as mentioned by Suny (1994: 20-63). As mentioned previously, the GOC has always held Georgians together and strengthened the Georgian national consciousness, and this was true also in the Soviet era, despite the strict limitations imposed upon religions. In that period, many Georgians could not attend church, and so mostly practiced their Orthodox faith and traditions in their homes (Vardosanidze, 2006b: 215).

[4] "Patriarch of Georgia: Our church and people never cut ties with Russia.", Accessed: April 18, 2017, https://www.rt.com/op-edge/patriarch-georgia-russia-ties-438/

[5] "Georgian Orthodox Church Celebrates 100th Anniversary of Restoration of Autocephaly.", Accessed: April 10, 2017, http://theorthodoxchurch.info/blog/news/georgian-orthodox-church-celebrates-100th-anniversary-of-restoration-of-autocephaly/

Following of the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991, the GOC experienced a revival and took on an important role in the development of post-Soviet Georgian national identity, while also managing to fill the ideological vacuum left behind after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Grdzelidze, 2010: 162-165). Possessing significant power at a societal level, the GOC became a key actor in the Georgian nation-state building process. When viewed from this perspective, it is not surprising that all post-Soviet Georgian governments have supported the Church and have perceived it as an important source of political legitimacy. That said, the dominance of Orthodox Christianity in Georgian social life, the growing significance of the GOC and the identification of Georgianness with Orthodox Christianity has been to the detriment of minority groups in Georgia. With non-Orthodox Christians feeling like they are discriminated against, one can argue that these developments have endangered the development of the secular state in Georgia (Aydıngün, 2016: 410).

1.2 Theoretical Framework and Research Question

The first classical secularization theories date back to the 19th and 20th centuries, at the time of the modernization process in Europe when open conflicts raged between religious and secular authorities. With the strengthening of secular politics, religion was excluded from the public sphere and pushed into the private sphere, resulting in a change in the source of political legitimacy and a shift taking place from God and religion to the people. Although societies follow different paths of modernization and secularism, for classical theorists of secularization, modernization meant secularism. In other words, as the dominant approach in social sciences, the modernizationist approach assumed that modernization will be followed by secularism, a view that was put forward by the secularization thesis. The secularization thesis was based on three main assumptions: First it was assumed that in modern societies, religion would decline; second, it was assumed that the religious sphere and the secular sphere would be differentiated; and finally, it was assumed that a marginalization and privatization of religion would occur. In brief, it was assumed that religion would lose importance in modern societies.

In this sense, the secularization thesis goes hand in hand with the modernizationist approach, defending the view that the significance of religion in society will be minimal as a result of the transition from traditional societies to modern societies. This view was supported by several social scientists who are accepted as the founding fathers of the discipline of sociology, such as Max Weber, Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim. Although they too expected modernization to be followed by secularization, and within this process, religion would lose significance in the social life of modern individuals, in recent times, scholars such as Peter Berger (early in his career), Bryan Wilson, Steve Bruce and Karel Dobbelaere have continued to defend the idea that religion would lose value and importance in modern societies.

Berger (1999) took a different view later in his career, along with Charles Taylor (2007), Jose Casanova (1994) and David Martin (1978), arguing that modernization would not necessarily be followed by secularization. These authors underlined the complexity of the relationship between modernization and secularization, and also drew attention to the growing significance of religion, and to different types of religious revivals in different parts of the world, especially after the 1970s.

The secularization thesis remained dominant until the 1960s, when it became clear that in many countries, religion was not losing significance. As a result, important criticisms were directed towards the secularization thesis, including Grace Davie, Peter Berger, David Martin, Jeffery Hadden and Jose Casanova, all of whom criticized the secularization thesis and emphasized the continuing importance of religion in society. Berger in particular was a strong defender of the secularization thesis early in his career, but would become one of its most outspoken critics. He said that the claim that we are living in a secular world was wrong, as with the exception of Western Europe, the world is more religious than in the past. He argued that while modernization was accompanied by secularism in certain countries, secularization provoked the establishment of strong counter-secularization movements in many nations, giving the examples of the Islamic and Evangelical revivals. As a result of this, he argued that we are living in a de-secularized world,

excluding Western Europe and the international elite subcultures who undertook Western-type higher education in other countries around the world (Berger, 1999: 1-11). Briefly, Berger said that the assumption that we are living in a secularized world is false, that the secularization thesis is mistaken, and that religion continues to be important in people's lives.

David Martin (1978) provided another important criticism of the secularization thesis, saying that religion and modernity go hand in hand in many modern societies, and that religion is not losing significance. However, he recognized the fact that a differentiation has taken place in modern societies, and as a result, many spheres that have gained autonomy are out of the control of religion.

In line with the views of Berger and Martin, Jose Casanova (1994) too criticized the secularization thesis. Like Martin, he recognized the existence of a differentiation, between the religious and secular spheres in modern society, but said that religion is neither in decline, nor marginalized and privatized. For Casanova, differentiation did not necessarily mean privatization. In fact, he critically approached the public/private distinction which is made by dominant sociological theories (including the secularization thesis) and said that this is not very helpful to grasp the existing social reality (1994: 211). It is important to note that according to him theories of secularization are not capable of answering "critics who point out that the modern walls of separation between church and the state keep developing all kinds of cracks through which both re able to penetrate each other" (1994: 41).

Casanova argued further that the end of the 20th century saw a "deprivatization" of religion, and claimed that the decline of religion is reversible, like in the case of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet countries. He also argued that a repolitization of religion was taking place in many countries in which religious institutions emerged as important actors in the public space. It is because of these views that Casanova's writings are used to gain a better understanding of the issue of religion and the GOC in post-Soviet Georgia. Casanova strictly opposed the modernist perspective claim

regarding the privatization of religion, arguing that religion rejects privatization and finds itself a new place in the public sphere. Referring to Thomas Luckmann, he argues that in 1990s there has been an eruption of religion in to the public sphere challenging privatization (1994: 19). According to him, there are three legitimate instances of the "deprivatization" of religion. Firstly, religion enters the public space not only to defend its own freedom, but also to preserve modern freedoms and civil society's rights in the face of an authoritarian state. In other words, religious institutions behave like civil society institutions. Casanova gives the examples of the Catholic Church in Spain, Poland and Brazil and their contributions to the democratization process in their countries. Secondly, he claims that when political authority makes a decision without moral considerations, religious institution can question that decision. For instance, the Pastoral Letters of American Catholic bishops put forward a moral perspective of armament and the state's nuclear policies, and the brutal consequences of capitalist market relations. Thirdly, religion enters the public space so as to protect the traditional way of life from political authority by using modern discourse. To illustrate, Catholics are against abortion, in defense of the right of life, although their opposition is not based on a modernist perspective, but on their desire to maintain their traditional way of life. Overall, it can be argued that churches reject privatization and look for ways to be part of the public sphere (Casanova, 1994: 57-58).

In this context, the GOC is an example of the re-emergence of religion in the public sphere of Georgia. As an inseparable element of Georgianness during the post-Soviet Georgian nation-building process, the GOC emerged as an important actor in the public sphere. Thanks to its historical significance, which will be elaborated in the second chapter, its views on public issues are not perceived as a threat to secularism by many Georgians, which has led to the GOC's presence in the public sphere, and its intervention in social and political issues, being perceived as legitimate by many Georgians as mentioned by the interviewees.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia was liberated from the socialist ideology, although the collapse of this 70-year-old authoritarian regime left in its wake severe economic, political and social problems to be resolved by the newly independent Georgia. During that period, the GOC emerged as the most trusted institution in the country, filling the vacuum both in the socio-political and religious fields. Its historical significance gave the GOC credibility as part of the solution to the problems in the country, and it began to grow as a strong actor in the public sphere. The growing trust in the GOC and the religious revival that began under Gorbachev resulted in a rise of religiosity in post-Soviet Georgia, leading to the strengthening of the deprivatization process, as formulated by Casanova.

In the light of the above-mentioned perspectives and facts, this thesis studies the relationship between the State and Church in post-Soviet Georgia, and considering pre-Soviet and Soviet history, it discusses the growing power of the GOC and its impact on secularism, politics and society. It is argued here that the power of the GOC, both in Georgian society and politics, derives from its historical significance and the role it played in the post-Soviet transition period. It is also argued that these two factors and its presence in the public sphere can be considered a challenge to secularism and Western values, including minority rights. Finally, it is suggested that the "deprivatization" process experienced in Georgia does not necessarily fit in with the three legitimate instances through which the Church enters the public sphere according to Casanova (1994: 57-58).

1.3 Methods

This thesis makes use of both documentary research and field researches to understand the evolution of Church-State relationship, power of the Church, and the debates related to secularism in Post-Soviet Georgia. The 1995 Constitution of Georgia, the *Concordat* signed in 2002 between the Georgian State and the GOC and the statements made by the Patriarch and high ranking priests are the main documents that will be subjected to analysis, as these documents can be considered

the most valid sources of data related to the Church-State relationship and the privileges accorded to the GOC. In addition, the study also makes use of reports published by international organizations (the Council of Europe and related conventions signed by Georgia), national NGOs, and the Ombudsman office related to the research topic. The study also reviews related academic literature in both Turkish and English.

The field researches involved semi-structured in-depth elite and expert interviews. First field research was carried out in Tbilisi in May 2015 and 13 in-depth interviews were conducted. The second one was carried out in October 2015 in Batumi, the capital city of the Adjara Autonomous Republic, and 8 interviews were conducted. After analyzing the interview data collected both in Tbilisi and Batumi, a third field research was realized in April 2017 in Tbilisi and 9 interviews were conducted. In summary, a total of 30 in-depth interviews were conducted during the field researches with government officials from the State Agency for Religious Issues, non-governmental organization representatives, representatives of the GOC, academicians and leaders of different religious communities. Each in-depth interview lasted for at least one hour, and was conducted in either in Turkish or English, while the interviews with representatives of official institutions were made in Georgian with the help of a translator. The main objective of the interviews was to understand the perceptions and thoughts of the interviewees about the GOC, the Church-State relationship and the state of secularism in Georgia. The intention in this regard was to understand the significance of the GOC within Georgian society in the period since the dissolution of the Soviet Union up to the present day, and the evolution of the Church-State relationship.

The use of semi-structured in-depth interviews allows the researcher to garner rich first-hand data from the interviewees regarding their thoughts and perceptions of the research question. Through the use of open-ended questions, researchers can ensure the predetermined topics of the study are covered, while also gaining information on issues not considered by the researcher when preparing the questions, but which may

be significant to the research (Edwards and Holland, 2013: 30). To illustrate, during an interview in which the interviewer sought information on the official function of the State Agency for Religious Issues (In short, ensuring the peaceful coexistence of religions in a multi-religious society, and facilitating dialogue between religious communities and the State), when given the opportunity to express their own views, thanks to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the interviewees revealed that equality between religions is far from being realized, and that the views of the GOC's influence the policies of the Agency. The second reason why semi-structured in-depth interviews are preferred in this study is that the method can help in the understanding of sensitive topics (Seidman, 2006: 76). Should a respondent be reluctant to answer a particular question, the researcher has the opportunity to reformulate the question into a form that the respondent may be more willing to answer. For example, it was difficult to discuss the role of the GOC in Georgian society with some of the respondents, given the predominance of Orthodox Christianity in the country, however during in-depth interviews, after gauging the attitudes of the individual respondents, the researcher was able to reformulate the semi-structured questions into a 'flexible dialogue' that made the respondents feel more comfortable about expressing their thoughts.

The elite and expert interviews gave the researcher a rapid understanding of the key dynamics and factors in the Church-State relationship, as well as the power of the Church, during the brief field researches carried out in Georgia. This research method also provided insights into actions that may not covered in the media or are kept out of the public realm. Furthermore, elite and expert interviews can throw light on issues not addressed in official documents, or those that may be prone to misunderstanding in official communications (Edwards and Holland, 2013: 82-84).

1.4 Chapters of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of five chapters. The first chapter presents a brief introduction to the study, including the research question, the theoretical framework

and the methods used. The second chapter provides concise information on the history of the GOC, from the time of the Russian through to the present day. The third chapter discusses the growing power of the GOC following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Based on the interview data, the fourth chapter discusses the evolution of the Church-State relationship in the post-Soviet period and the role of the GOC in Georgia, making an analysis also of the 'secular' nature of the Georgian State. The concluding chapter presents an overall analysis of the findings based on the views of José Casanova and his concept of "deprivatization".

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (1801 – 1991)

2.1 Introduction

The GOC has maintained a significant role throughout Georgian history. It has served as a primordial tie for Georgians thanks to its centuries-long existence, and as different kingdoms came to rule Georgia throughout its history, the Church helped to mobilize Georgians as a nation and to foster unity. It can be argued that Georgians owe their national consciousness and identity to the GOC (Serrano, 2014: 75; Aydıngün, 2013: 814; Jones, 1989b: 293), and so membership of the GOC is a vital element of being Georgian. To fully understand the importance of the GOC, this chapter presents a brief history of the GOC, beginning with the Russian Empire's annexation of Georgia in 1801, and culminating in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This will allow a clear understanding of the structural reforms towards the GOC not only under the influence of the Russian Empire, but also under the Soviet Union, and will explain how the GOC was able to increase its influence and become a significant marker of Georgian national identity.

2.2 The Georgian Orthodox Church Before and After the Russian Empire's Annexation of Georgia and Its Policies towards the Georgian Orthodox Church (1801-1917)

Christianity gained popularity and began to spread in Georgia from the 4th century onwards, and was accepted as Georgia's official religion in the same century.[6] It gained autocephalous status in the 11th century, which was known as the beginning of the "Golden Age" of Georgians, coinciding with the State of Georgia starting to consolidate its administrative power (Asker and Kahraman, 2016: 27). With the granting of autocephalous status,[7] the head of the GOC was given the title Catholicos-Patriarch (Krindatch, 2010: 1196). The Golden Age came to an end with the invasion of Georgia by the Mongols in 1221, which led to Georgia losing its power of central administration, and its division into two kingdoms as a West and East (Grousset, 2010: 278-279). Following the collapse of the Mongol Empire in 1294, two important actors entered the arena – the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire. Another actor at that time was the Safavid Dynasty. At the start of the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was in competition with the Safavid Dynasty for controlling the region, which meant that the Georgian Princes were accountable to two different empires. In the mid-16th century, the Ottoman Empire, which was stronger than the Safavid Dynasty, managed to take control of the most of the South Caucasus, which resulted in the Russian Empire entering the arena as another important actor. The Russian Empire increased its interests in the region with the Treaty of *Küçük Kaynarca* (1774), marking the first instance of Georgia falling under the rule of the Russian Empire (Aydıngün and Asker, 2012: 128; Coene, 2010: 118-124).

[6] Christianity first began to spread in Western Georgia in the 1st Century. Rather than Georgians, the region was occupied by Svans, Megrelians and Abhazians. Although archaeological evidence points to the spread of Christianity from the 3rd century in Eastern Georgia, the findings could have belonged to Jewish colonists as an early Christian believer in Urbnisi and Mtskheta. In this regard, there is little proof that Georgians adopted Christianity before the 4th century. Although the exact date of the adoption of Christianity in Georgia is unclear, it is generally accepted that St. Nino baptized Georgians during the reign of Mirian III, the king of Kartli-Iberia (AD284–361). According to the accepted Georgian narrative, two apostles, Saint Andrew and Simon the Zealot, brought Christianity to Kartli-Iberia.

[7] East and West Georgia were united into one kingdom in 1008.

The year 1801 represents a breaking point in the political history of Georgia. The Russian Empire invaded Kartli-Kakhetia in 1801, making it part of the Empire (Grdzelidze, 2010: 273; Gvosdev, 1995: 407),[8] and from this time onwards, the GOC was subjected to radical changes and reforms, as directed by the Empire. These reforms aimed to turn the GOC into a tool for the re-organization of Georgian society, and to bolster the Russian Empire's influence among the Georgian people (Gvosdev, 1995: 407). Of these reforms, the abolition of the autocephalous status of the GOC in 1811 was pivotal, and saw the GOC brought under the control of the Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (Chitanava, 2015: 40; Abashidze, 2006a: 120; Rapp, 2007: 150; Werth, 2006: 86, Suny, 1994: 64).[9] The Russian Holy Synod[10] appointed Varlaam Eristavi to the GOC as head of the Dicasteria, with the title Exarchate of Georgia, replacing Catholicos-Patriarch Antony II.[11] Varlaam Eristavi was a member of a very important Georgian family, the Eristavs, whose social standing was second only to that of the Bagrationi royal family,[12] and so the choice of Russian Empire was a wise one, aimed at preventing possible reactions from Georgians to the decision of the Synod.[13] Eristavi stood as a member of the Russian Holy Synod from 1801 to 1808, which provided him with knowledge about the

[8] Upon the demand of George XII and Solomon II, Georgia was divided into two parts. Alexander I, the Russian Emperor, proclaimed that Georgia was a part of Russian Empire. The Bagrationi family was outthroned (Suny, 1994: 59).

[9] The Treaty of Georgievsk, signed between Georgia and the Russian Empire in 1783, brought the East Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakhetia under the control of the Russian Empire. However, the autocephaly of the GOC and the Church's privileges were also recognized in Article 8 of the Treaty. In this sense, the abolition of the autocephaly of the GOC was a violation of this treaty.

[10] The Russian Holy Synod was an assembly of Orthodox Church leaders in Russia. It was founded by Peter the Great and was dissolved following the 1917 Revolution..

[11] Although Patriarch Anthony II continued his official duties even after the Russian Empire's annexation of Kartli-Kakheti, he had been removed one year before the abolition of the autocephaly of the GOC.

[12] For more detailed information about the Bagratid royal family, see Toumanoff (1949).

[13] Due to Varlaam's family background, Georgia's bishops had a hope for autocephality of the GOC, in spite of Russian Empire's existence in Georgia.

institutional functioning of the Russian Orthodox Church. This made him a useful figure for the Russian Empire in its efforts to reorganize its policies regarding the GOC, although Russification policies imposed by the Empire could not be fully realized during his period. It became apparent that he was uncommitted to the implementation of the Russian Empire's policies, and so the Russian Holy Synod relieved him of his duty in 1817.[14] Theofilalkt Rusanov, the Bishop of Riazan, was appointed by the Russian Holy Synod as Eristavi's replacement in 1817, and pioneered the radical reforms of the Russian Empire related to the GOC. Although there was a revolt against him in Imereti in 1819 due to his loyalty to the Russian Empire, it was suppressed by the Russian Empire, allowing him to continue his implementation of the Russification policies related to the GOC.[15] No other Georgian Exarch was appointed after his rule, as all were Russian, appointed by the Russian Holy Synod, until the GOC regained its autocephalous status in 1917 (Gvosdev, 2000: 137; Gvosdev, 1995: 411-412; Rapp, 2007: 150; Abashidze, 2006a: 121, 128; Werth, 2006: 84).

The reforms that were realized by the Russian Holy Synod were implemented in three important areas, namely the status of the dioceses and their clergies, the regulations regarding the GOC's economy, and the breaking of the GOC's cultural dominance in Georgia. These activities correspond with two time periods. From 1801 to 1840, the Russian Empire forced through the implementation of reforms related to the GOC, while from 1850 to 1917, more oppressive policies implemented against the GOC that ushered in a rise in Georgian nationalism (Bubulashvili, 2006: 153-155; Saitidze, 2006: 173-176).

The Russian Empire's policies related to the GOC aimed generally at centralizing the power of the GOC in Georgia, and then fully subordinating it to Moscow. The first step taken in the centralization of local Georgian bishops and dioceses was the

[14] Varlaam continued to be a member of the Russian Holy Synod from 1817 to 1825.

[15] The Imereti uprising in 1819.

establishment of the Georgian Dicasteria, which was founded in Eastern Georgia in 1809. This institution, which was under the control of the Russian Empire, had responsibility for all crucial matters related to Georgian churches. For instance, it had authority to bring prosecutions against churches that could lead to clergy being discharged, or even to the closing of churches (Gvosdev, 1995: 413-414).[16] To consolidate the power of the Russian Empire over Georgia's churches, the Russian Holy Synod reduced the number of dioceses in Georgia from 13 to four (Krindatch, 2010: 1197).[17] By unifying the existing dioceses under the roof of a central dioceses and reducing the number of bishops, the Russian Empire sought to break the direct link between the Georgian Church and society in a bid to reduce the influence of the GOC at a societal level (Gvosdev, 1995: 407-415).

The Russian Empire also attempted to change the status of clergy in Georgia. The administration of the Russian Orthodox Church had been under the control of the Russian Holy Synod since 1722, in the reign of Peter I (Abashidze, 2006a: 113), and so the Russian Empire's political wing had no jurisdiction in its operation. Similarly, the Russian Orthodox Church had little influence in the political running of the Russian Empire, and the clergy were merely religious professionals, holding no other title in daily life. Unlike in the Russian Empire, the clergy of the GOC played a significant role in Georgian politics. Being a member of the ruling Bagrationi dynasty, the primates of the GOC was not distant to politics. Furthermore, the bishops were appointed from the same ruling family in the local Georgian administrative structure, and so shared the same rights as the political rulers. For example, bishops like Georgian princes, could keep serfs, and could also command troops on the condition that they would send them to the front in times of war. In this

[16] In addition, Georgian priests had only limited rights, and had no right to say anything related to the administration of the GOC without the consent of the Russian Holy Synod. Many Georgian clergy were dismissed from their churches and replaced with Russian priests.

[17]The Eastern part of Georgia was divided into two dioceses, namely Kakhetia and Kartli; while in Western Georgia, the Church of Mingrelia was consolidated into one diocese in 1823. In addition, after the Imeretia revolt in 1819, four eparchies were consolidated into one diocese in 1821, and Guria was included in the Imeretian Diocese in 1833.

sense, it can be claimed that Georgian bishops had not only spiritual functions in society, but also significant secular duties. For this reason, the Georgian priesthood was seen as an occupation and not as a distinct social class, as was the case across the Russian Empire.[18] With the aim of distancing priests from secular functions and limiting their influence to religious practice as a distinct social class in Georgia, the Russian Empire enacted a law in 1832 stating that non-nobles could not keep serfs. In doing so, the Russian Empire destroyed the link between priests and nobles, and attempted to push the priests into the religious sphere. The other reform initiated by the Russian Empire in Georgia aimed at transforming the priesthood from an occupation to a distinct social class was related to how priests were appointed in Georgia. Throughout the 18th century in the Russian Empire, only the children of priests could become priests, meaning that the position was inherited. In parallel to this, the Russian Empire removed the status of serf priest in Georgia, and if the child of a clerical family did not want to become a priest in Georgia, the state would give them land, allowing them to live in Georgian society as peasants rather than priests or serf priests. In this way, the Russian Empire created a distinction between priests and peasants, and made priests a distinct social class in Georgian society (Gvosdev, 1995: 408-409, 416).

The second important reform to be implemented by the Russian Empire related to the GOC targeted its economic structure. Before being annexed by the Russian Empire, the GOC had significant property holdings, and enjoyed sizeable donations and revenues from the carrying out of such religious rituals as baptisms and church marriages. Following the annexation of Georgia by the Russian Empire, the Russian Holy Synod standardized the money that the Georgian Church could obtain from its religious activities in the country, with all revenues above this limit being taken by the Russian Empire as tax, and the GOC priests being paid low salaries directly by the Empire (Bubulashvili, 2006: 139). Furthermore, the Dicasteria founded in

[18] For more information on Georgian Society under the rule of the Russian Empire, see Suny (1994: 63-96).

Eastern Georgia became a mechanism for the supervision of the financial holdings of Georgian churches, and had the authority to control and intervene in the financial activities of all parishes. Without the approval of Dicasteria, parishes were not allowed to manage their own budgets. For the remaining parts of Georgia, especially in the west, Kontora was created in August 30, 1814 by the Russian Holy Synod. From then on, all dioceses were obliged to inform Kontora of their revenues, and the Kontora would then decide how funds for each diocese would be distributed. The budget for each church could not exceed the limit set by Kontora without its approval. Under this centralized financial administration, local bishops had no say in their own financial administration in Western Georgia, and the Dicasteria and Kontora also maintained control of all church lands. Even if churches in Georgia had right to use their land, the ownership of the land belonged to the local nobility. Under these circumstances, the local nobility were able to obtain revenues from church lands without being subjected to taxes, which led to tax deficits in the state, while another significant concern was related to the transfer of Church lands into the hands of the local nobility. For these two mentioned reasons, the Kontora was also given the responsibility of inspecting how the church managed its land holdings (Gvosdev, 1995: 414). After a thorough inspection of the GOC, all church property taken under the control of the Russian Empire between 1843 and 1852 (Tadumadze, 1993: 12 cited in Abashidze, 2006a: 127). The Russian Empire's economic sanctions against the GOC can interpreted as a bid to consolidate their power in Georgia. With the breaking down of the GOC's independent economic structure, any hope of resistance to the Russian Empire was lost (Gvosdev, 1995: 413-414).

The third important reform imposed by the Russian Empire on the GOC was aimed at breaking its cultural continuity in the history of Georgia. To this end, the first significant sanction against the GOC was to limit the use of the Georgian language in religious rituals in favor of Russian and the Church Slavonic language. The ceremonial language was Georgian only in the churches attended by Georgians, although on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, the official language at all church services was Russian in Tbilisi. The forced use of the Russian language in

church activities resulted in a decrease in the number of Georgian church-goers. Furthermore, this language policy was also implemented in theological schools after the removal of the autocephaly of the GOC in 1816, and the language of these schools became Russian. The Georgian language was further eliminated from all educational establishments so as to achieve full Russification (Abashidze, 2006b: 28, Abashidze, 2006a: 133, Bubulashvili, 2006: 150).[19] During the 1880s, the strict promotion of the Russian language increased (Werth, 2006: 84), and Khutsisvili argued that it was hard to find priests who were able to read the Georgian alphabet (cited in Abashidze, 2006a: 134). In this way, priests became detached from the society of which they were a cultural part. As a consequence, Georgians who could not speak Russian lost their motivation to participate in church rituals, and it can thus be claimed that the cultural link between priests and the Georgian people was broken. The second sanction that aimed to interrupt the GOC's cultural continuity targeted the symbolic meaning of the GOC in Georgian society. The Georgian church names were replaced by Russian names. Even the Georgian style of churches was destroyed, with many reconstructed in the Russian style, especially in the second half of the 19th century. Furthermore, the sacred icons that adorned the church that came from the ancient times of the GOC were stolen. Although church museums attempted to save what they could of the Georgian manuscripts and precious objects between 1889 and 1921, they were unable to fully protect these objects, depriving the following generations of the unique characteristics of the Georgian Orthodox Christianity (Bubulashvili, 2006: 159).

From the second half of the 19th century onwards, the severe consequences of the policies of the Russian Empire imposed on the GOC began to take their toll. In the early 20th century, as a result of increasing pressure from the Russian Empire, a great struggle for the creation of a Georgian national identity was initiated by

[19] It was during the 1860s that the periodicals penned by Bishops in Georgia began to be published in Georgian, although there were no regular publications. These periodicals were published in Russian from 1891 to 1917.

Georgian thinkers and clerics of the time (Crego, 1994). For example, Ilia Chavchavadze, after completing his studies in Russia, returned to Georgia to fight against Russian assimilation on Georgian culture. Later, Noe Zhordania and Pilipe Makharadze would have a deep effect on Georgian intellectuals, seeing the Russian administration in Georgia as the destroyer of Georgian culture.[20]

For most Georgians, national identity became the main focus of their loyalty, replacing their former loyalties to regions, religions and feudal lords. In this atmosphere, especially after 1905, the GOC struggled to gain an autocephalous status, with all efforts in this regard being rejected (Çipaşvili, 2010: 61-63), and the pressure on the GOC was greatly increased with the murder of Exarch Nikon in 1908 (Saitidze, 2006: 184-189).[21]

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the entry of Imperial Russia into the war brought about a softening of the harsh attitude of the Russian administration towards the GOC in a bid, perhaps, to gain the support of the people living within the boundaries of the Russian Empire. This ease in attitude, however, was short-lived, but when the Russian Empire attempted to abolish the Exarchate of Georgia and pass control of the GOC to the Metropolitan Province of the Caucasus, they faced strong protests from the Georgian public (Saitidze, 2006: 190-191).

2.3 The Georgian Orthodox Church from the 1917 Revolution to the Establishment of the USSR in 1922

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, new political formations appeared in the South Caucasus, and in April 1918, the South Caucasian Democratic Federative

[20] For more information about the struggle of the GOC to gain autocephalous status and a brief history of the beginning of Georgian Nationalism see (Suny, 1994: 145-159).

[21] Werth (2006: 74) argued that the assassination of Exarch Nikon was a result of political tension between two groups, being those proposing the GOC's independence, and those arguing that the GOC should remain under Russian rule.

Republic was founded, including, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, but it would prove to be short lived, in part due to disputes surrounding the military activities of the Ottoman Empire in the region and other internal problems. Georgia declared independence on May 26, 1918 and accepted the protectorate of Germany, followed later by Azerbaijan and Armenia, which also declared independence as republics. This period of Georgian independence came to a quick end with the advances of the Soviet regime in the region in March 1921. In the period that followed, the Soviet government granted self-autonomy to such regions as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and merged other countries under the name of the 'Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Federative Republics'. In December 1921, this union which was transformed into Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Federative Republics (TSFSC) continued to maintain its existence until the year of 1936, after which, the three Southern Caucasus countries took their place among the other 15 Republics that made up the Soviet Union (Aydıngün and Asker, 2012: 130; Coene: 131-133).

After the 1917 revolution, the priests of the GOC came together to discuss gaining an autocephalous status, and following these meetings, the GOC declared its autocephaly on 12 March 1917, although it was not recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church (Serrano, 2014: 76). It can be argued that, by proclaiming its autocephaly from the Russian Empire before the Georgian State, the GOC became a locomotive of the national struggle for the Georgian people. Shortly after the GOC became autocephalous, Georgia, under the Menshevik government, declared political independence on May 25, 1918, and the government granted religious freedom to the church between 1918 and 1921. Prior to the Soviet occupation, the Democratic Republic of Georgia had ratified its first Constitution in 1921. Taking on board many modern European values, the 1921 Constitution was considered one of the most advanced of the early-20th century, guaranteeing freedom of conscience and belief, and clearly defining the separation of church and state. Although the Constitution recognized the historical significance of the GOC, Article 144 banned any allocation of funds to the church from the state budget**.** In this regard, the Constitution of 1921

can be considered the first adoption of the principle of secularism in the country (Chitanava, 2015: 40).

2.4 Soviet Union's Religious Policies and the Effects on the Georgian Orthodox Church (1922–1991)

The Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin, brought down the Russian Empire with October Revolution of 1917. The Russian Empire had withdrawn from World War I due to the October Revolution taking place within its borders. The three-year civil war between the Red and White Armies[22] came to an end in 1920, with the Red Army (the Bolsheviks) taking control. Shortly after in February 1921, the Bolsheviks invaded Georgia and removed the Mensheviks from power, consolidating their own political strength in Georgia (Suny, 1994: 209-237).[23]

In 1922, the Bolsheviks founded the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), under which, the state-religion relationship was shaped around the Marxist idea that religion creates a deceptive world. According to Karl Marx, religion, by founding a different world from the one in which we live, establishes a false world consciousness in which the proletariat forget the harsh conditions in which they are living, and prevents them from rebelling against the bourgeoisie society. In this context, religion can be likened to opium, ensuring the continuity of the capitalist society in which the bourgeois consolidates power (Raines, 2002: 5, 7, 84, 152).

All across the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks considered religion to be a threat to the consolidation of the communist regime. According to Zelkina (1999: 357), the Soviet religious policies sought the complete destruction of religion, and to create a completely atheistic society, the Bolsheviks banned all religious education from

[22] The White Army consisted of former Russian Empire generals, commanders and volunteers, who fought against the Red Army, as the military force of the Bolsheviks.

[23] The Red Army entered Georgia in 1920, although it they did not formally occupy the country until 1921.

schools, replacing it with courses about communism and anti-religious ideology. Although launched in the 1920s, the education system failed in its efforts to promote atheism. The Soviet Union had not only separated religion from the state, but also made promoted atheism in socio-cultural life through propaganda. From that time onwards, the Bolsheviks regarded the GOC to be a hindrance to the dissemination of the communist ideology in Georgia, given the GOC's deeply influential position in the perpetuation of Georgian nationalism. As a result, the Bolsheviks subjected the GOC to serious forms of oppression that other national churches were spared from (Flake, 2007: 94-95).

2.4.1 Soviet Religious Policy under the Rule of Lenin and Stalin, and Its Effects on the Georgian Orthodox Church

Lenin came to power following the 1917 Revolution, and his first goal was to convince the non-Russians who had formerly suffered the oppression of the Russian Empire to become part the Soviet Union. To this end, he offered all nations in the Soviet Union the right of self-determination, which included the right to preserve their religion (Slezkine, 1994: 420).[24] Lenin's approach was actually a line with the Marxist ideology. He stated that:

> Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches, and each and every religious organization, as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and to befuddle the working class (Quoted in Marsh, 2011: 47).

In this regard, it can be argued that he saw religion as a form of "spiritual booze" (Boer, 2013: 102-105), and what was more, unlike Marx, Lenin's approach to religion gave priority to combatting it so as to remove it from the public sphere. As a result of Lenin's policies aimed at suspending religion from the public sphere,

[24] For detailed information of the right of self- determination see, (Slezkine, 1994).

religious institutions were subjected to severe limitations in Georgia. To begin with, 2,355 churches were closed by 1923 and the land confiscated by the Soviet regime. Secondly, church attendance among Georgians declined following an intense campaign of atheistic propaganda. Thirdly, priests who opposed the strict limitations on the Church imposed by the Soviet regime were dismissed, leading to a breakdown of the influence of the Church in organizing protests against the policies of the Soviet Union that targeted them (Jones, 1989a: 176).

With the death of Lenin, Stalin came to power in 1924 and strived to further weaken the power of religion, implementing a campaign of anti-religious propaganda. In 1929, he enacted the Religious Associations law, which replaced religious education of with more atheistic studies. The law also imposed an obligation on all religious organization to register their continuing activities. Stalin also used collective farming as an instrument to promote his anti-religious propaganda. By closing local churches and subjecting the peasants to anti-religious propaganda in collective farming, he sought to break the Church's influence on rural life. In the cities and towns in the Soviet Union, Stalin replaced houses of worship with atheist corners, and built museums that promoted the atheist ideology (Tapley, 2009: 5-6; Kelly and Shepherd, 1998: 277). Briefly, it can be claimed that through his intense anti-religious campaign, which lasted until 1941, he sought to create a secularized national identity for all those living within the Soviet borders (Jones; 1989a: 177).

The Soviet Regime's anti-religious campaign was somewhat curtailed during World War II (Flake, 2007: 95; Corley, 1996: 130-131), and between 1941 and 1945, relations between the Soviet Union and the GOC were partially restored. In 1943, Russian Patriarch Sergey and Georgian Patriarch Kalistrate entered into dialog, culminating in the declaration of an alliance. In the same year, the associations of these two churches became legitimized. The Russian church recognized the autonomy of the GOC, giving it a legal status that it had not enjoyed since 1917. In addition to this judicial recognition, the Soviet government established a special committee of religious affairs with branches in all countries of the Soviet Union to

coordinate relations with the church.[25] Within this more positive atmosphere, the number of churches increased and a number of religious books belonging to the Church were published (Çipaşvili, 2010: 76-77). Nonetheless, Stalin's anti-religious campaign was restarted in 1949, and the two organizations dealing with religious issues for the Orthodox and non-Orthodox churches were united under the banner of the Council for Religious Affairs (Tapley, 2009: 7).

2.4.2 Khrushchev's Religious Policy and Its Effects on the Georgian Orthodox Church

After the death of Stalin in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev, a hot-blooded believer of the Communist ideology, came to power.[26] For Khrushchev, there was no room for religion in the ideal communist society, and he saw the growing significance of religion as a result of the soft policies applied in wartime as a challenge to his ideal communist society. Accordingly, he restarted the anti-religious campaign against all religious groups in 1959 that would remain in place until 1964, when he was removed from office. As part of his anti-religious propaganda, he promoted anti-religious publications and established a group of intellectuals who were responsible for spreading anti-religious ideology through lectures and other organizations. This anti-religious propaganda, claiming the non-existence of God, was directed also into the curriculum of the theological schools across the Soviet Union. Khrushchev also placed limitations on how many priests could participate to the religious seminaries. Furthermore, the taxes taken from religious activities were increased as a further discouragement (Tapley, 2009: 9-10). The goal in the enactment of these policies was to close over one-third of the registered places of worship that were allowed in

[25] The GOC behaved compatible with other Soviet religious organizations. It adopted a patriotic position with them. Owing to this attitude, the Soviet Regime rewarded the church by recognizing its judicial existence.

[26] Khrushchev and his opponents competed against each other in order to come to power. Although Malenkov became the leader of the Communist Party Union on 5 March 1953, he was obliged to its place to Khrushchev on 8 February 1955.

Stalin's period by 1964. It was the GOC that suffered the brunt of these policies in Khrushchev's period, with the closure of almost 6,000 churches (Corley, 1996: 184).

According to Jones (1989b: 297; 1989a: 177-178), there was little proof of the GOC being seriously affected by Khrushchev's religious policy, in that it had already been reduced to a poor state under Stalin's anti-religious policies. Before Khrushchev launched his anti-religious drive, only seven students were being educated to become priests, the majority of churches had been closed and the priests running the remaining churches did not speak Georgian. The participation of the GOC at the World Council of Churches in 1962 brought an end to the GOC's political isolation from the world churches, although it was the aim of the Soviet authorities to gain more seats on the Council so as to increase its influence there.

2.4.3 Soviet Religious Policies from Brezhnev to Gorbachev and Their Effects on the Georgian Orthodox Church

During the rule of Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982), more liberal policies started to be adopted towards religion. Even though persecutions, arrests and imprisonments were still occurring, the number of prosecutions decreased, especially in the 1970s. Unlike Khrushchev, Brezhnev was not looking to wipe religion out completely as he did not consider it to be an enemy of the Soviet Union, and he was aware that despite the pressures imposed by his predecessors, religion had not been stamped out. Consequently, atheist education at this time was focused on research and science, with the intention being to understand why religion had continued to exist among the young. Brezhnev was replaced as president by Yuri Andropov in 1982, but his term in office would be cut short by his death in 1984, Andropov would leave little mark on the religious policies of Soviet Union, although there was a marked increase in the number of people arrested for their religious affiliations in those years. Konstantin Chernenko took over the reins of the Soviet Union from 1982 to 1984, and it can be said that his religious policies were, to some extent, a continuation of those of Brezhnev. Although they shared a similar perspective in this matter, the number of

arrests for religious reasons increased during his term in office (Tapley, 2009: 57-123).

Eduard Shevardnadze was appointed as the Georgian Communist Party First Secretary in 1972 during the Brezhnev period. As the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, he tried to soften anti-religious campaign in Georgia, in contrast to the relatively harsh policies of Soviet regime. However, in the first two years of Shevardnadze's rule, 25,000 people were arrested, while from 1972 to 1977, the number of people engaged in atheistic studies in universities increased from 350 to 520. It was also during this period that church marriages, baptisms and religious festivals were labeled harmful traditions, and a new Centre of Festivities was created to take up the slack in 1978 (Jones, 1989b: 299).

Although the GOC had faced severe internal problems[27] in the 1970s, the appointment of Ilia Shiolashvili (Ilia II) as the Catholicos-Patriarch of the GOC was a turning point in the histories both of the GOC and Georgia as a whole. His first acts in his new role were to tackle the problem of corruption within the GOC, and to try to achieve a level of internal unity. In his early years, 15 eparchies were re-established and many churches were re-opened, increasing the number of places of worship from 50 to 200. Furthermore, a foreign relations department and an architectural building department were founded in the Patriarchate, with the latter playing a pivotal role in the restoration of the country's old churches. Ilia II also improved theological education through the appointment of qualified teachers, and oversaw the launch of a number of new church journals and the translation of several religious books into the Georgian language. In addition to the internal affairs of the GOC, he was also elected as one of the six presidents of the World Council of Churches in 1979, which contributed greatly to the image of the GOC not only in Georgia, but also among other churches around the world (Jones, 1989b: 305).

[27] For more detailed information on the GOC's internal problems, see Jones (1989b: 301-305).

Under Ilia II, the GOC became more active in public life in Georgia. Regarding GOC and Georgian history as one, Ilia II rejected the Soviet legacy, to some extent. During his Christmas sermon in 1980–1981, he said that the preservation of Christianity in Georgia means the preservation of national existence of Georgia. What was more, by inviting Ilia II to Parliament to commemorate the end of World War II, the Georgian government increased the standing of the GOC in society and enhanced the relationship between the Church and national interests (Jones, 1989a: 187-189).

2.4.4 Gorbachev's Religious Policy and Its Effects on the Georgian Orthodox Church

At the end of Chernenko's short term as president, Mikhail Gorbachev took the reins in March 1985, and a considerable shift was seen in the approach to religion. Although no significant changes were made to religious policies in Gorbachev's first year, the Soviet Union would soon witness a radical transformation in religious policy to the most liberal seen in its history, and many of the people who had been arrested for their religious affiliations were released. There was also liberalization of the press, and newspapers dropped much of the anti-religious sentiment, being able to write more freely on religious issues (Corley, 1996: 289). Furthermore, restrictions on religious radio broadcasts and TV shows were lifted, and people became free to own Bibles, receive religious education, open churches and engage in such church rituals as baptisms under Gorbachev (Tapley, 2009: 154). It can thus be understood that Gorbachev's reforms of religion policies brought a radical transformation to the lives of believers. This was of course part of a general policy of relative liberalization ushered in by Gorbachev.

The GOC benefitted too from Gorbachev's liberal policies towards religion. In 1988, 72 new parishes were established, many churches were reopened and a new theological school started accepting students. The GOC was also able to begin exercising its religious rituals again, and Ilia II would baptize some 5,000 people in 1989.Related to the language issue, the Soviet authorities granted the GOC

permission to translate the Bible into the Georgian language, and it was within this more accommodating atmosphere that the GOC emerged as a defender of the Georgian national identity. Ilia II in particular lent his support to the establishment of strong relations between the preservation of the Georgian language and the maintenance of Georgianness. Events on April 9, 1989 would bring about a significant rise in Georgian nationalism, when many Georgians gathered in front of the government building in Tbilisi in a peaceful protest against the Soviet Regime. The response of the administration, however, was brutal, with 20 Georgians who were mainly women and children being killed by government forces. In the aftermath, the GOC emerged as a key point of focus for Georgians looking to commemorate those killed in the events (Jones, 1989b: 311), and thus, a wave of Georgian nationalism was mobilized.

In summary, Georgia had been occupied by the Russian Empire in 1801, and this led to the GOC losing its autocephalous status in 1811. Although the GOC was exposed to severe sanctions by the Russian Empire, it managed to mobilize Georgians to come together with a common voice to protect the Georgian language and culture. The GOC also demonstrated its prominence by declaring its autocephalous status prior to Georgia's political independence from the Russian Empire. After the establishment of the USSR, the GOC would again lose its autocephalous status and was a prime target of the Soviet administration's policies promoting atheism. The GOC, in time, would become a figurehead organization for Georgians opposing the administration of the Soviet Union, playing a part in the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. In this sense, the GOC increased its significance in Georgian society, becoming an inseparable from Georgianness itself.

CHAPTER 3

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS UNDER DIFFERENT PRESIDENTS IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA (1991-2017)

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a number of substantial economic, social and political reforms were introduced by Gorbachev during the last years of the Soviet Union, although these were perceived by conservative socialist groups as being against the fundamental principles of the Soviet ideology. Faced with resistance, the Soviet regime was hindered in their attempts to implement the reforms in the Soviet republics, and so their realization was delayed. This situation prevailed, despite the fact that some of these reforms ushered in feelings of relative freedom in the Soviet Union when compared to the past. Taking advantage of this new-found freedom, nationalist movements were able to gain power in many Soviet republics (Aydıngün and Asker, 2012: 130), and the Georgian national movement was no exception. As a result of the growing Georgian nationalism, the country declared independence from the Soviet Union on April 9, 1991, becoming the first Caucasian Republic to do so. This newly founded republic was seen as a continuation of the Georgian Democratic Republic that had existed between May 26, 1918 and February 25, 1921, and for this reason, May 26 is celebrated as National Independence Day in Georgia (Coene, 2010: 36).

From the dissolution of the Soviet Union onwards, while leading political figures in post-Soviet Georgia were engaged in Georgian nation-state building efforts, the GOC was able to consolidate its power. Knowing the historical role and power of the Church and the significance of the Christianity for Georgians as explained in the previous chapter, the leaders of post-Soviet Georgia used religion to keep Georgians together. From the other side, the GOC was regarded as a source of legitimation for the existing political authority, owing much to the public trust in the Church. It was in this way the GOC started to enter the public sphere in Georgia, gaining a say in both political and social issues. In this regard, it can be argued that the GOC, along with the growth of Georgian nationalism, managed to regain the influential position that had lost during the Soviet period (Aydıngün, 2013: 811-812, 814). To understand the church-state relationship in post-Soviet Georgia, it is necessary to analyze history with particular focus on the period of each president.

3.2 Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his Presidency in the Early Years of Post-Soviet Georgia (1991-1992)

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's main election promise was to establish a Georgian Republic, independent from the Soviet Union. With the support of the Georgian nationalists, he was elected as first president of the newly independent Georgia in 1991 with 86.5 percent of the vote, although his struggle with ethnic conflicts and the resulting civil war brought a swift end to his presidency. As the civil became more violent and spread throughout country, he was compelled to flee to Armenia in January 1992, just 10 months after taking up office. In the following period, Eduard Shevardnadze took up position at the head of the Military Council, which was transformed into the State Council in March 1992, and one year later, Shevardnadze was elected second president of independent Georgia in 1993 (Hille, 2010: 243).

The rise of nationalism in Georgia, or more precisely, the rise of ethno-religious nationalism, occurred not only during Gamsakhurdia's presidency of the Georgian Supreme Soviet, but also during his presidency of independent Georgia. Gamsakhurdia tried to unite Georgians around ethno-religious nationalism, but discriminated against those not of the Orthodox faith, and so it can be argued that his form of 'nationalism' established a close link between ethnic Georgian and Orthodox Christianity (Vachridze, 2012: 84). One cannot understand the current state of Georgian nationalism and the significance of the GOC and its ongoing influence on Georgia's ethnic minorities without considering Gamsakhurdia's understanding of nationalism that was developed in the Soviet period.

Gamsakhurdia was one of the most influential Georgian political actors in Georgia's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union, founding the Georgian Helsinki Group in 1976 with Merab Kostava, one of the key figures in the Georgian national movement. The Helsinki Group operated separately of the Moscow Group, being dedicated to the preservation of Georgian culture and protecting it from the Soviet ideology. The Group played an important role in the preparation of the ideological background for a newly 'Independent Georgia'. Furthermore, Gamsakhurdia and his followers went on the found the Georgian Popular Front in 1988, and would support Gorbachev's reforms and tried to gather information about the developments of Soviet-Georgia in implementing the Soviet reforms on the purpose of gaining independence from the Soviet Union (Wheatley, 2005: 42).

Nationalist inclinations were on the rise not only among Georgians in the country, but also among the ethnic minorities in the final phase of the Soviet Union, and it can be said that the different groups triggered each other's nationalisms. In this sense, the rising nationalism among the minorities played a significant role in the strengthening of Georgian nationalism. Different ethnic minorities within the borders of Georgia, such as the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, sought independence from the

Georgian SSR,[28] and it was as a result of these requests that Georgian nationalism flourished (Aydıngün and Asker, 2012: 132; Ağacan, 2011: 58). Against this backdrop, Gamsakhurdia intensified his nationalist commitment to Georgianness, reacting strongly against the demands for independence of the different ethnic communities within the country. He saw them as potential traitors to the country, and developed a rigid nationalist discourse aimed at preventing their secession from Georgia (Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006: 10).

One event that saw Gamsakhurdia take a firm stance in defending and empowering Georgian nationalism was the demand for independence of the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1989. The Abkhazian leaders sought to declare self-determination, signifying secession from Georgia, which was met with a negative response from Georgians. Street demonstrations by Georgians in front of the government building in Tbilisi were quashed by the Soviet Army on April 9, 1989, and 20 protestors lost their lives. After the April 9 events, the Georgian national movement became more radical, and the idea of Georgian independence gained strength among Georgians (Slider, 1991: 65-66). In this period, Gamsakhurdia strongly defended Georgian nationalism against Abkhazian nationalism, and he and his followers put pressure on the Georgian Supreme Soviet to enact a law preventing region-based parties. In this way, the potential effects of the Abkhazia Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic's involvement in the 1990 elections in Georgia were eliminated (Suny, 1994: 325).

Soon after this, South Ossetia voiced its desire or independence, with the Ossetian Supreme Soviet declaring independence from the Georgian SSR and requesting the Soviet Union's annexation on December 11, 1990. The president of the Georgian Supreme Soviet at the time was Gamsakhurdia, who did not recognize this

[28] In 1989, Abkhazians constituted 1.8 percent of the population of the Georgian SSR, while Ossetians accounted for 3 percent. These groups were uncomfortable with the policies of the Georgian government against them, complaining that they were subjected to economic and cultural discrimination by Georgia (Slider, 1991: 75).

declaration of independence. Despite being threatened with economic sanctions by the Soviet Union, Gamsakhurdia abolished the autonomous status of South Ossetia keeping it firmly under Georgian control (Slider, 1991: 74-77).

These two secessionist movements that developed in the final phase of the Soviet Union remained as the main problems of independent Georgia, and Gamsakhurdia's strict understanding of Georgian nationalism deepened the related conflicts in the early years of post-Soviet period. Accordingly, Gamsakhurdia's term in office can be considered as the period in which a rise of Georgian ethno-religious nationalism occurred, and as a result, Georgia had to protect its territorial integrity from secessionist movements. It can be argued further that no significant improvement was experienced in the Georgian nation-state building efforts during Gamsakhurdia's term in office. According to Nodia and Scholtbach (2006: 11), the ouster of Gamsakhurdia was perceived as a new start for Georgia by most of the Georgian public.

3.2.1 Church-State Relations during the Gamsakhurdia Period

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many Georgian politicians were deeply worried about the success of the Georgian nation-state building efforts. There is no doubt that replacing 70 years of Soviet dominance with an independent Georgia would be a difficult task for the government, and the Gamsakhurdia government had to first legitimize itself in the eyes of the Georgian people for the consolidation of its power. The historical significance of the GOC and its symbols that pertain to Georgianness became a wealthy source for legitimation for the government (Eastwood, 2010: 61). It can be argued that the increasing activities of the GOC caused the emergence of a new perception of a strong state among Georgians in the post-Soviet period which, according to them, had sought to destroy the Georgian culture and assimilate it into Soviet culture. In these circumstances, the GOC became a symbol of opposition to the Soviet regime, and in this regard, the struggle for

independence from the Soviet regime went hand-in-hand with the promotion of Orthodox Christianity (Balsytle, 2015: 34; Serrano, 2014: 76).

It can be argued that Gamsakhurdia's general attitude towards Orthodox Christianity encouraged the presence of the GOC in Georgian public life. In his first speech as the president of Independent Georgia in 1991, Gamsakhurdia spoke about the importance of Orthodox Christianity for Georgians and the relationship between the Church and state:

> The Georgian national movement has been, and is genuinely and closely united with a religious consciousness and in the bosom of the church. The contemporary movement, in its essence, is a popular-religious movement, as it gains understanding not only with the manifestation of national-political purposes, but also envisions a moral rebirth with the assistance of Christian faith and consciousness. The national regime will work to resurrect the traditional unity between church and state … (cited in Crego, 1994).

In the same speech, Gamsakhurdia also emphasized the need to declare Orthodox Christianity as the state religion during the restoration of independent Georgia (Chitanava, 2015: 42; Gavashelishvili, 2012: 119; Crego, 1994).

During his period in office, Gamsakhurdia continued to emphasize religious pluralism, although he had highly controversial opinions. Although he gave importance to protecting the rights of religious minorities and treating all of them equally, Orthodox Christianity was *primus inter pares*. Furthermore, according to Chitanava (2015: 42), Gamsakhurdia considered all religions other than Orthodox Christianity to be a threat to Georgian morality.

Although Gamsakhurdia recognized the importance to Orthodox Christianity, he opposed and criticized Ilia II. According to Chitanava (2015: 41-42), Gamsakhurdia saw Ilia II as a threat to the security of the Georgian state, labeling him a betrayer

and a red clerk who still pursued the Soviet ideology in Georgia. One can thus argue that Gamsakhurdia felt uncomfortable with the growing significance of Ilia II, and so tried to marginalize him. Despite this, the Church gained ideological recognition thanks to the religious rhetoric of Georgian nationalists and religion-based nationalism in his period. In short, it can be said that in the period of Gamsakhurdia, Orthodox Christianity became an inseparable part of the Georgian national identity (Aydıngün, 2013: 816; Ivekovic, 1997: 27). This provided the GOC with the opportunity to intervene in politics.

3.3 Eduard Shevardnadze Period in Post-Soviet Georgia (1993-2003)

After the ouster of Gamsakhurdia in a 1992 military coup**,** Shevardnadze took the chair of the governing body that was founded in the following period (Aydıngün, 2013: 816), and was subsequently elected president in 1993. Shevardnadze sought to develop good relations with regional and global powers, and tried to apply a policy of a balance in his first years as president. This led Georgia to become a member of Commonwealth of Independent States in 1993, and within the scope of its membership, he opened Georgia's land to the Russian Federation (RF) aiming to ease the civil war in Georgia. Furthermore, he saw that an economic partnership with the RF was vital for Georgia in its efforts to enhance sustainable economic development. Shevardnadze also tried to improve relations with countries in the West, including the United States, in a bid to protect the country from potential Russian domination. He also sought to gain international economic and political assistance for Georgia's post-Soviet nation-state development, and succeeded in gaining access to international funds, especially from the United States, in this regard. In addition, Georgia joined several European Union programs aimed at improving the food security, transport infrastructure and political capacity of Georgia. It can be argued that thanks to international assistance, Shevardnadze was able to accelerate the policies and reforms in the economic and political spheres with relative success in his early years as president. What is more, being closer to the

West was perceived by the political elite as a requirement for national security and brought the country worldwide recognition (Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006: 33-34).

Shevardnadze's foreign policy efforts were coupled with major precautions to ensure internal security (Curtis, 1995: 73-74). As had been the case in the Gamsakhurdia period, secessionist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as in Javakheti, were important issues that had to be dealt with, and while Shevardnadze was able to stop the war in Southern Ossetia, the tension in Abkhazia could not be calmed, despite the intervention of the Georgian Army in August 1992. The defeat of the Georgian Army in Abkhazia saw the region fall fully outside the control of Tbilisi, and in the aftermath, Shevardnadze was unable to bring an end to the country's ethnic conflicts and consolidate his power over entire Georgia till the end of the 1995 (Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006: 12). In this regard, the ongoing political instability in the country continued, to a large extent, throughout the early years of the Shevardnadze presidency (Çelikpala, 2012: 7).

In order words, prior to 1995, the authority of the state was weak, despite being seen as restored, and corruption and rent-seeking patron-client networks continued. Furthermore, public institutions were neither centralized nor coordinated, since Shevardnadze's political authority did not extend far outside of Tbilisi (Berglund, 2013). This led him to take an important step with the establishment of the Constitutional Commission in 1993, in a bid to stamp his authority across the entire country. The Constitutional Commission began making great efforts in the preparation of a Constitution for Georgia, and the final text of draft proposed by the Constitutional Commission was approved on August 24, 1995, and entered into force on October 17, 1995 (Aydıngün and Asker, 2012: 137). This new legislation resembled the familiar pattern seen in Western countries in terms of its social, economic and political regulations, drawing criticisms from some of the president's opponents. There is little doubt that the new legislation was aimed at meeting European standards, and indeed it opened to door to Georgia for membership of the

Council of Europe in 1999. This was a remarkable success, achieved entirely during Shevardnadze's period (Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006: 12).

The period leading up to the mid-1990s saw some notable achievements both at home and internationally under the presidency of Shevardnadze, but the positive trend seen in his early years would be reversed in the period that followed. Georgia began to experience problems with unemployment and corruption, and Shevardnadze was still identified with the corruption of the Soviet-era, and his presidency was perceived by many Georgians as a continuation of the Soviet corruption in Georgia, being, after all, a Soviet ruler and a Foreign Minister from the Gorbachev period (Cheterian, 2008: 693). Widespread corruption, a poorly performing economy and rising unemployment led to a decline in trust in Shevardnadze among Georgians, with many believing that Shevardnadze's administration was doing little to resolve these problems. As a result, the government began to lose legitimacy in the eyes of the people (Kukhianidze, 2009: 221-222).

Despite his setbacks, Shevardnadze was re-elected in the Presidential Elections of 2000, although the 2003 Parliamentary Elections were a breaking point for his political legitimacy. The election results announced by the Central Election Commission of Georgia contradicted those of such international observers as the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy and the National Democratic Institute of the United States, with the former making an official declaration that Shevardnadze's party had won, and the latter putting the party of Mikhail Saakashvili in first place. This led to allegations of vote-rigging among the electorate (Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006: 19).

The resulting street protests forced Shevardnadze to announce early presidential elections, but Saakashvili entered Parliament with protesters holding a rose in his hand, forcing Shevardnadze to leave the building and announce his resignation (Hille, 2010: 244-245). This event, known as the "Rose Revolution", can be seen as a reaction to the failures of the Shevardnadze period, and was a confirmation for many

Georgians that Georgia could only overcome its problems through integration with the West (Cheterian, 2008: 694).[29]

Overall, it can be argued that remarkable achievements were made in the early years of Shevardnadze's rule, and it was a result of his efforts in building a democratic regime that the country gained international acceptance. This gave him access to international funding that allowed him to strengthen his authority, despite the ongoing civil war and political opposition. In time, however, the worsening economic situation, widespread corruption and nepotism that plagued the second half of the 1990s set back the development of post-Soviet Georgia, leading to a drop in support from the West, particularly after the electoral fraud of 2003. Under these circumstances, Saakashvili was able to mobilize international support and become the new president of Georgia.

3.3.1 Church-State Relations during the Shevardnadze Period

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the GOC started to increase its influence at the beginning of the 1970s. Shevardnadze, in the position of First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party (1972–1985), had a comparatively softer approach to the GOC, although the pressure of the Soviet Union on religion continued, and he maintained this tolerant attitude after being elected as the second president of independent Georgia in 1993 (Filetti, 2014: 224).

In Shevardnadze's period, the 1921 Constitution of the Georgian Democratic Republic was revived and reapplied, in which it was stated that the Church and state should be separate. A new Constitution was prepared and adopted in 1995 containing an article about freedom of religion and the status of the GOC. Article 9/1 states:

[29] For detailed information on the process of the Rose Revolution see (Gürsoy, 2011: 52-55).

> The state shall declare complete freedom of belief and religion, as well as shall recognise the special role of the Apostle Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia and its independence from the state.[30]

This could be considered recognition of freedom of belief and religion in Georgia, which is a necessity for a secular state; however, the Constitution also recognized the special role of the GOC in Georgian history. In short, although freedom of religion is guaranteed, no mention is made of any religion other than Orthodox Christianity, no any institution other than the GOC. This could be interpreted as a challenge to equality of religion in the country.

Article 9/2 was added to the Constitution on March 30 2001, in which it was stated how relations between the Georgian state and the GOC were to be regulated. It reads as follows:

> The relations between the state of Georgia and the Apostle Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia shall be determined by the Constitutional Agreement. The Constitutional Agreement shall correspond completely to universally recognised principles and norms of international law, in particular, in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms.[31]

According to Nodia and Scholtbach (2006: 70-71), following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there were two leading views among Georgians about the place of the

[30]"The Constitution of Georgia", Accessed 27 July, 2017 http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf,

[31]The Constitution of Georgia", Accessed: 27 July, 2017 http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf,

GOC in the legislation. One was that the GOC should be granted a higher status than other religions, while the other defended the strict separation of Church and state and the guarantee of freedom of belief. The 1995 Constitution was seen as a combination of these two views, in that it recognized the special role of the GOC, but also provided freedom of belief. However, in the second half of the 1990s, taking advantage of the decreasing influence of Shevardnadze, the defenders of the GOC pressurized Shevardnadze to upgrade the GOC's status to 'State-Church'. A number of politicians were also engaged in intense efforts to make sure that the GOC became a legal entity, and they also requested compensation for the discriminations experienced in the Soviet period. These demands resulted in the preparation of the Constitutional Agreement, known also as the *Concordat*, which was signed between the Georgian state and the GOC in 2002. The idea of such an agreement between the Georgian state and the GOC had its origins in the early 1990s, and was inspired by the *Concordat* signed between Vatican and numerous different states. Since no quasi-state entity existed that represented the Orthodox Church of Georgia, it was not possible to replicate Vatican's agreement. Furthermore, as mentioned before, there was the idea that the rights of the GOC that were destroyed in the Soviet era should be compensated (Tsintsadze, 2007: 763-764). Considering these, the existing model of church-state relations in Europe did not satisfy the demands of the GOC. This prepared the ground for the signing of the *Concordat*.

The *Concordat* granted the GOC status of 'legal entity of public law', and provided certain privileges to the GOC. These included exempting ecclesiastics from military service and granting them the authority to perform marriages, allowing for ownership of property used by the GOC, providing tax exemptions to the Church, permitting access to prisons and promoting the existence of the GOC in public schools.[32]

[32] "Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church", Accessed 27 June, 2017 https://forbcaucausus.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/concordat.pdf

For detailed information, see (Asker, 2011).

Although the GOC enjoyed these privileges, it was not granted the status of the 'State-Church' (Aydıngün and Asker, 2012: 145).

The final years of Shevardnadze's presidency also witnessed a growing intolerance of the state and the public towards "non-traditional" religions.[33] According to Nodia and Scholtbach (2006: 71), there was a common perception shared by a large majority of Georgian society that the activities of non-traditional religious groups constituted a threat to the Georgian national identity and the GOC. In this sense, curbing their activities came to mean preserving Georgianness, and many Georgians believed that the activities of "non-traditional" religious groups should be limited by the law. Shevardnadze's reluctance to initiate such a law resulted in a wave of religious intolerance, especially towards Jehovah's Witnesses, that lasted from 1999 to 2002. Basil Mkalavishvili, who would be defrocked by the GOC, was a leading figure in the physical violence perpetrated against religious minorities, being involved in the destruction of places of worship and the burning of sacred religious literature. Such violence towards religious minorities was all but unknown until the arrest of Mkalavishvili in 2005, and there are potentially two reasons why news of these attacks remained all but unknown. The first of these is that although Mkalavishvili was suspended by the GOC, he was known to have been encouraged by many priests, while the second reason is that Shevardnadze's government was reluctant to carry out an investigation of his activities due to the negative perception of religious minorities shared by many Georgians.

3.4 Mikhail Saakashvili's Period (2004-2013)

[33] In general, "non-traditional" religions can be regarded as the denominations that arrived later to Georgia, in particular following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, including Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals. "The traditional" religion, in fact, refers to the religions that have existed for several centuries in Georgia, including Catholicism, Judaism, Islam and the Armenian Gregorian Church.

After the Rose Revolution, Mikhail Saakashvili came to power in 2004 with 96 percent of the vote (Mitchell, 2006: 674). His pre-electoral campaign had been supported by the Soros Fund, other international contributors and the United States, though one could argue that in supporting Saakashvili, the United States aimed to reduce the influence of Russia in Georgia by promoting Western values and the idea of integration with the West. For many Western countries, Saakashvili was a Western oriented politician who would implement a pro-Western policy once in power, thus distancing Georgia from Moscow (Köktaş, 2015: 98).

In the first years of Saakashvili's rule, this expectation was partially realized, with Saakashvili's efforts to reclaim Abkhazia and South Ossetia causing tension in Georgia's relations with Russia in 2004. Following Georgia's military intervention in South Ossetia, relations between Georgia and Russia took a turn for the worse (Nodia, 2007: 16). In 2005, the Georgian government demanded Russia remove its military bases from Batumi and Akhalkalaki. The process to close down the Russian military bases started in May 2006 and was concluded in 2007 (Aydıngün and Asker, 2012: 140), although Saakashvili was keen to maintain relations with Russia. According to Markedonov (2007: 12, 16), Saakashvili was a pragmatic politician who was able to utilize the power of Russia to bring an end to secessionist movements, and for this reason, he argued that Georgia's demands regarding the reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia were welcomed by Russia. The policy of balance that Saakashvili wanted to develop did not last long. Saakashvili's cooperation with the United States and other Western countries rather than Russia, and his aspirations to take Georgia into NATO prepared the ground for the Russian invasion of 2008. The Russian intervention in 2008 brought an end to Saakashvili's policy involving Russia's contribution to the reintegration of South Ossetia into Georgia, and the intervention also spread to Abkhazia. The 2008 conflict, known as the August War, ended on August 12 with the mediation of the European Union, and following the ceasefire agreement, Russia's forces retreated from Georgian lands, aside from South Ossetia. On August 26 2008, Russia

recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, legitimizing its decision with the recognition of the independence of Kosovo (Köktaş, 2015: 100).

Although Saakashvili was elected president of Georgia for a second term in January 2008 with 56.2 percent of the vote, his authority had been significantly reduced, due in part to his failure to complete the promised reforms as a result of the 2008 war (Nichol, 2008: 3). Following the Russian intervention in 2008, Georgia's economy began to witness a severe crisis, leading Saakashvili tried to attempt to improve Georgia's economic ties with the neighboring states. He sought international funding for the construction of a highway from Armenia to the Black Sea coast of Georgia to facilitate international transportation, and he also made a five-year agreement with Azerbaijan for the supply of natural gas, aiming to reduce Georgia's energy dependency on Russia. In addition to the regional alliances he made to overcome the country's economic problems, he also received international funding, especially from the United States.[34]

In June 2009, Saakashvili also started the process of comprehensive constitutional reform, motivated by the Council of Europe, and this constitutional change would come into force in 2013, coinciding with the end of Saakashvili's presidency. The primary goal of this new Constitution was to regulate the distribution of political power between the president, government and Parliament, giving less power to the president and increased power to the prime minister and parliament. The role of the president, as defined in the new Constitution, was as a mediator between the executive and legislative branches. Although the president retained the highest status in representation of the country abroad, he required government approval for all matter related to external affairs, while the prime minister was given authority in the determination of national and international policies (Jackson, 2010: 1). The prime minister also gained authority in forming the cabinet and in the appointment of

[34]"White House Unveils $1 Billion Georgia Aid Plan", Accessed: July 28, 2017 http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/04/world/europe/04cheney.html.

regional administrators. With these changes mentioned above, it can be argued explicitly that the lead role of the president in Georgian political affairs was transferred to the prime minister.[35] Many have argued that Saakashvili aimed to retain political power as prime minister following the constitutional change, however the failure of his party in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections would prevent him from succeeding in this regard.

Briefly, it can be said that Saakashvili sought to secure the territorial integrity of Georgia by consolidating democracy with a strong affiliation with the West and developing a powerful economy, while at the same time ensuring fundamental civil rights. Although Saakashvili was partially successful in realizing his aims during his first term, his political authority was challenged with the outbreak of the August War in 2008. Furthermore, the economic problems beset the nation in the aftermath of the war further challenged his power. All of these factors contributed to Ivanishvili's victory in the Parliamentary Elections of 2012. The event that concluded Saakashvili's 10 years of rule was the Presidential Elections of October 27 2013, in which there were 23 candidates. In the end, Giorgi Margvelashvili won with 62.11 percent of the vote, becoming the fourth president of the Georgian Republic (Nichol, 2013: 3-5).

3.4.1 Church-State Relations during the Saakashvili period

After coming to power in 2004, Saakashvili concentrated his efforts on adopting Euro-Atlantic values to turn Georgia into a modern country in which Western values were dominant, and to this end, Georgia became a signatory country to several international organizations and agreements. As mentioned previously, the main turning point for Georgia was its membership to the Council of Europe in 1999 under

[35]"Constitutional reform in Georgia: changing to stay the same?" https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2010-10-20/constitutional-reform-georgia-changing-to-stay-same Accessed: July 27, 2017.

Shevardnadze. Georgia signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) in 2005, ensuring the rights of minorities in Georgia, including religious minorities, but it was the programs organized by the Council of Europe in particular that motivated Georgia to protect the rights of its religious minorities. Accordingly, religious minorities started to feel relatively secure in Georgia, although the Western oriented reforms, aimed at improving secular Church-state relations, caused unrest in the GOC. Saakashvili was able to allay the GOC's fear, to some extent, combined the symbols of Orthodox Christianity with Georgian nationalism in a bid to gain the support of the GOC. Saakashvili's need of GOC support was never greater than when thousands gathered in the streets of Tbilisi in 2007 in protesting against him, and in the following year, Georgia's disastrous defeat in the 2008 August War deepened the need for the legitimation of Saakashvili's government. These developments gave the GOC the support it needed to increase its influence not only in the public space, but also in politics (Serrano, 2014: 86-87).

Even before coming to power, Saakashvili was forging closer ties with the GOC. The day before entering office he received a blessing from Ilia II in the Gelati Monastery, a symbolic house of worship built by King David the Builder during the Golden Age of the Georgians. Being blessed by Ilia II could be conceived as a symbolic recognition by the GOC of Saakashvili's political authority, and the Saakashvili's pledge to the GOC to maintain the territorial integrity of Georgia, as King David had achieved in the 11th century (Metrevelli, 2016: 699-700; Serrano: 2014: 77).

In another symbolic act, after coming to power in 2004, Saakashvili replaced the existing Georgian flag with the one that had been used between 1918 and 1921, as the new national flag of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. This national flag features a large red cross, dividing the white background into four parts, each containing a smaller red cross. This was the flag used by the Georgian kings in the Middle Ages, and in this sense, one could argue that the flag serves as a reminder of the Christian past of Georgia, and indicates a desire to secure Georgia's place within the world's Christian societies (Cheterian, 2008: 696). There is no doubt that the

national flag emphasizes Orthodox Christianity in Georgia, and this opened the door to the GOC to increase its influence. That said, for some, the flag is not embracing, but discriminative, considering the many Georgian citizens who are not Orthodox Christian (Aydıngün and Asker, 2012: 142).

Despite Saakashvili's recognition of the significance of the GOC, he also took steps that were perceived as a challenge to the dominance of the GOC in Georgia, not just by the GOC, but also the majority of the population. One of these was the adoption of the Law on General Education in 2005, the main aim of which was to develop a Western model that took religion out of public schools. The adoption of the law resulted in massive protests in Georgia, and left the Saakashvili government in a position in which it could not implement it, resulting in the GOC continuing to hold influence in public schools. What was more, Saakashvili had to pass a law granting the GOC exemption from taxes, seen as compensation for the law related to the consolidation of secular education (Metrevelli, 2016: 701-702).

Amendments to the Civil Code promulgated in 2005 and 2011 can be considered as a challenge to the privileged position of the GOC in Georgia. In 2005, Saakashvili ratified the amendment to the Civil Code that allowed religious minorities to register as non-governmental or no-profit organizations. While this amendment did not grant minority religions with the status of 'legal entities of public law', the amendment ratified on July 5, 2011 resolved this issue. This amendment is as follows:

> The National Agency of Public Registry within the Ministry for Justice of Georgia may register as a legal entity under public law a religious denomination having a historical link with Georgia, or a religious

> denomination recognized as a religion by the legislation of the member states of the Council of Europe.[36]

This amendment brought other religious organizations the same status of legal entities of public law granted to the GOC, which was a move that led the GOC to organize protests in opposition, seeking to prevent the amendment from coming into force (Serrano, 2014: 81).

Despite the granting of legal status to other religious organizations, the GOC was still able managed to increase its influence in society, especially after the 2007 protest and the 2008 August War. The public started mounting protests in Tbilisi against the Saakashvili government, criticizing his authoritarian attitude starting with 2007, as mentioned before. After the government used the police to quash the protests, Ilia II made moves to reduce the tension by bringing the two sides together for dialogue. In this conjecture, he undertook a mediator role, and strengthened the GOC's pledge for peace in the eyes of public (Grdelidze, 2010: 167). Ilia II also played a significant role during and after the 2008 August War, working bring calm to society, and also made efforts to rebuild the GOC's relations with the Russian Orthodox Church at a time when diplomatic relations between Russia and Georgia had been severed (Serrano, 2014: 87-88). These developments gave Ilia II room to criticize Saakashvili, questioning the policies that had resulted in war with the Russian Federation. After the 2007 Protests and the 2008 War, the government dramatically increased its contributions to the GOC from the state budget in both 2008 and in 2009 in order to retain the GOC's support for Saakashvili's political authority (Metrevelli, 2016: 702-703).

It can be said that Saakashvili did not need the support of the GOC during the early years of his presidency, as he had gained massive public support on his own account

[36]"Law of Georgia Civil Code of Georgia", Accessed 30 July 2017 https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/90468/118660/F999089720/GEO90468%20Geo.pdf

from the Rose Revolution (Metrevelli, 2016: 697). In this regard, Saakashvili's relationship with the GOC in the early years of his presidency could be considered relatively symbolic and balanced, but the events of 2007 led to him having to turn to the Church to provide legitimacy for his rule. Consequently, one can argue that Saakashvili was unable to establish a fully secular state, his efforts in this regard being limited to a few actions, such as the promulgation of the Law on General Education in 2005 and the 2005 and 2011 Amendments to the Civil Code.

3.5 Giorgi Margvelashvili Period in Post-Soviet Georgia and the Church-State Relationship during his Period (2013-)

Following Saakashvili, Giorgi Margvelashvili came to power in 2013, who continued with the pro-Western orientation for Georgia. There is little doubt that integration with the West, as seen earlier in the Shevardnadze and Saakashvili periods, was viewed as one of the main driving forces of development for Georgia.[37] Furthermore, potential integration with Europe was seen as a guaranteed way of breaking the cultural dominance of Russia. In his interview with a journalist from France 24, Margvelashvili said:

> We are culturally a very European nation. That means ... having traditions or some kinds of values, but at the same time giving another person the right to have free choice on anything that matters for them. Of course, we are coming from a very closed empire, the Soviet empire, and the emancipation of personal freedoms takes time. But we are a European culture.[38]

[37] "Georgia's European Way - Ensuring Regional Stability Conference Opens in Batumi" http://georgiatoday.ge/news/7024/Georgia%E2%80%99s-European-Way---Ensuring-Regional-Stability-Conference-Opens-in-Batumi Accessed: July 31, 2017.

[38] "Margvelashvili Says Georgia Will Never Accept Russia's Annexation of S. Ossetia", Accessed July 31, 2017 http://georgiatoday.ge/news/3624/Margvelashvili-Says-Georgia-Will-Never-Accept-Russia%E2%80%99s-Annexation-of-S.-Ossetia

In addition to the importance he attributed to European values, Margvelashvili emphasized the significance of Orthodox Christianity for the Georgian identity. Like his predecessors, he stressed the importance of a close link between national identity and Orthodox Christianity,[39] and in a speech celebrating the 100th anniversary of the restoration of independence, he stated: "Georgia preserved its identity together with religion, and the restoration of the Georgian Orthodox Church's autocephaly is a prerequisite for restoration of freedom of the country."[40] One can thus argue that he sought to develop good relations with the GOC.

The most important act by Margvelashvili in support of religious minorities during his presidency was the establishment of the State Agency for Religious Issues in 2014. As stated on its website, this institution aims to foster peaceful coexistence among Georgia's religions, to cooperate with stakeholders in the preparation of recommendations for the state, to develop a legal framework to fill legislative gaps, to promote consciousness in the idea of freedom of religion and belief, and to evaluate Georgian's attitude towards religion.[41] In addition, this institution is responsible for allocating funds from the state budget to the four different religious groups defined as traditional in Georgia (Muslims, Armenians, Catholics, and Jews) to compensate for their losses during the Soviet era.[42]

Overall, it can be argued that the GOC has increased its ability to intervene in politics since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, depending on the legitimacy of the power of each president. Ethno-religious nationalism in Georgia paved the way for the GOC to consolidate its power in the Gamsakhurdia period. During

[39] "Georgian Church marks 100th anniversary of restoration of independence", Accessed: June 31, 2017 http://www.pravmir.com/georgian-church-marks-100th-anniversary-restoration-independence/

[40] "We started to outline our identity after Georgia adopted Christianity - Giorgi Margvelashvili" Accessed: June 31, 2017 http://www.interpressnews.ge/en/society/85841-25-march-is-day-of-restoration-of-autocephaly-of-georgian-orthodox-church.html?ar=A

[41] "Mission", Accessed: July 31, 2017 http://religion.geo.gov.ge/eng/mission

[42] "Georgia creates State Agency on Religious Affairs" http://agenda.ge/news/8170/eng Accessed: July 31, 2017.

Shevardnadze's term in office, the 1995 Constitution gave special status to the GOC, while the *Concordat,* signed in 2002, defined the GOC as a legal entity under public law. This can defined at the period in which the legal status of the GOC was completely defined. Although the GOC was relatively passive in the social and political spheres during the early Saakashvili period, it became a source of legitimation for Saakashvili after 2007. Looking at the current situation in Georgia under Margvelashvili, it would be fair to say that the GOC maintains significant power, and has come to constitute an inseparable part of the Georgian national identity. Despite the several minor ups and downs, the GOC has been able to consolidate its power since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and this process has been facilitated by the failure of politicians.

CHAPTER 4

DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE GROWING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA (1991-2017)

4.1 Introduction

This discusses the relationship between the Church and state, and the growing significance of the GOC in post-Soviet Georgia. The analysis is based on fieldwork data collected in Tbilisi in May 2015 and April 2017 and in Batumi in October 2015, and from related official documents (such as Constitutions and laws related to the status of religions in Georgia). Further data is obtained from such NGO reports as the Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI), Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI), Democracy, European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI). The annual reports of the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia are also taken into consideration, as well as relevant statements from the Patriarch and high ranking priests.

The fieldwork included interviews with government officials from the State Agency for Religious Issues, a representative from the Patriarchate, NGO representatives, academicians and leaders of different religious communities, with the aim being to understand the status of the relationship between the Church and state, and the growing significance of the Church. The interviews uncovered certain themes that are elaborated in this chapter, such as the tendency among interviewees to confirm the growing significance of the church in the post-Soviet period, and the level of trust felt for the Patriarch. The tension between the Church and the European values was

another common theme among the interviewees, while some spoke about the hierarchy that exists among the different religions in Georgia, referring to the interventions of the GOC and the establishment of the State Agency for Religious Issues. During the field researches, it became clear that there are different and contrasting views related to the situation of different religions in post-Soviet Georgia. The fourth important theme that became apparent was the GOC's interventions in politics, which was considered especially by many NGO experts as a challenge to secularism. Accordingly, the nature of this intervention of the Church and Church-state relations is elaborated in this chapter. In brief, this chapter elaborates upon the four different themes that were put forward by the interviewees. It is important to note that there is a strong correlation between the reports compiled by national and international NGOs and international organizations and the garnered fieldwork data.

4.2 Growing Significance of the Church and Trust in the Patriarch

As mentioned in previous chapters, the significance of the GOC in Georgian history is clearly apparent. Although the GOC faced many difficulties in the 19th century under the rule of the Russian Empire, it managed to secure a place for itself in the Georgian nationalist movement at the beginning of the 20th century. The GOC gained its autocephaly in 1917, before the Georgian state declared its independence, although aside from in the final years of the Soviet Union, the GOC was severely damaged by the anti-religious policies imposed by the Soviet regime from 1921 to 1991. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, like other socialist republics, Georgia faced economic, social and political problems. Huntington (1996: 125) states that "filling the vacuum left by the collapse of ideology, religious revivals have swept through these countries, from Albania to Vietnam", and Georgia is no exception to this among the post-socialist and communist states. The GOC succeeded in taking the place of the communist ideology, filling the ideological vacuum left behind after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Surmava, 2014: 34). The GOC has also become a crucial marker in the formation process of the post-Soviet Georgian

national identity, and has thus become an inseparable part of daily life for Georgians. One academician, emphasizing the importance of religion (Orthodox Christianity), said:

> Religion is part of our tradition, intertwined with history. Before, there was no country. Even language was not everywhere, but the religion was; and its power of unification against other religions made people come together.[43]

This was confirmed by a priest from the GOC during the interview.[44]

The influence of the GOC in society started to increase when Shevardnadze became first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party in 1972. Even as the Soviet regime was continuing to implement strict anti-religious policies, Shevardnadze took a tolerant approach to the GOC. It was at this time in 1977 that Ilia II became Patriarch of the GOC, taking office at a time when the capacity of the GOC was very low, with only five priests in all of Georgia (Surmava, 2014: 3). For this reason, Ilia II's personal efforts were focused on increasing the limited capacity of the GOC to reach the Georgian public, giving priority to the usage of the Georgian language rather than Russian in religious rituals. In addition, he worked to resolve the internal problems that were plaguing the GOC, such as corruption, and so gained the trust of the Georgian people (Jones, 1989b). Following Shevardnadze, Gamsakhurdia was appointed head of the Communist Party in 1985. With Gamsakhurdia's understanding of nationalism, a close link was established between Orthodox Christianity and national identity; and then with Gorbachev's soft policies towards religion, the GOC solidified its significance in Georgia. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the GOC became the only institution in Georgia that maintained the trust of the public. According to an expert from the Caucasus Institute for Peace,

[43] Interview, Tbilisi, May 26, 2015.

[44] Interview, Tbilisi, May 29, 2015.

Democracy and Development "the Church was the most trusted institution, because the other institutions were not trusted at all".[45]

From 1991 onwards, trust in the GOC was being felt both by the political authorities and the general public. While the governments saw the GOC as a source of legitimation of their political authority, the general public regarded it as the most trustworthy of all official institutions. According to data from the Georgian National Study, carried out by the International Republic Institute in 2012, 94 percent of the Georgian population stated that they had confidence in the GOC.[46] In addition, the Caucasus Barometer survey carried out by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in 2013 and 2015 found that over 80 percent of the interviewees defined themselves as Orthodox Christian, and the majority said that they regularly attended religious rituals (at least once a month). The same research found the GOC to be the most trustworthy institution among Georgians.[47]

According to surveys by the International Republic Institute in 2016 and 2017, the most favorable institution in Georgia was the GOC, with nearly 88 percent of the respondents viewing it positively.[48]These researches carried out by different NGOs between 2012 and 2017 show that the vast majority of Georgians rely on the GOC.

[45] Interview, Tbilisi, May 28, 2015.

[46]"Georgian National Study in 2012" Accessed: 04 August 2017, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2012%20August%2020%20Survey%20Georgian%20Public%20Opinion,%20June%2026-July%204,%202012.pdf

[47]"Religion: Respondent's Religion" Accessed: August 04, 2017, http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013ge/RELGION/

"Research Reports" Accessed: August 04, 2017, http://www.crrccenters.org/20129/Research-Reports

[48]Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia" Accessed: August 01, 2017 http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/georgia_2016.pdf

Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia" Accessed: August 01, 2017 http://www.civil.ge/files/files/2017/Iri_Poll_2017.pdf

An expert from Transparency International Batumi office said, "If you stay in Georgia and go to church on Sundays, you can see how popular the church is."[49]

Patriarch Ilia II is the key factor in the public trustworthiness of the GOC, and this dates back to the Soviet era. He became a symbol of Georgian nationalism by opposing the policies of the Soviet Union and as a result of his promotion of the Georgian language. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia entered into civil wars with the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, and went to war against the Russian Federation in 2008, and in the aftermath, the country suffered severely from the consequences of the political, economic and social transformation after gaining independence. Experiencing all these instabilities mentioned above, the Patriarchate of Georgia, and the Patriarch himself, provided a sense of stability to the general public and were seen as symbols of stability.[50] A Priest from the Patriarchate said:

> It is the success of our Patriarch. After the Soviet regime, people were desperate and lacked religion. As a result of his high spirituality, people returned to the Church. This was his success. With his good education, honesty and kindness, he united society under the roof of the Church. He sacrificed himself to dedicated service.[51]

One outcome of the public trust in Ilia II is an increase in the number of births in Georgia since 2008. In 2007, Ilia II announced that would baptize all newborns of Orthodox families' who already have two or more children, thus encouraging Georgian families to address the low birth rate issue in the country.[52] Accordingly, in

[49] Interview, Batumi, September 28, 2015.

[50]"Patriarch Ilia II: 'Most trusted man in Georgia", Accessed: August 07, 2017, http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/04/23/georgia.powerful.patriarch.ilia/index.html

[51] Interview, Tbilisi, May 29, 2015.

[52]"Georgian Patriarch will baptize 600 babies in mass ceremony" Accessed: August 07, 2017, http://agenda.ge/news/22051/eng

an eight year period, the birth rate per 1000 persons in Georgia has not dropped below 12.7, a rate not seen since 2001, and the GOC has regularly organized mass baptisms at the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi.[53] Ilia II spoke about his contribution to the increase of birth rate in Georgia, "Parents decided to have these children because they had the chance to be the Patriarch's godchildren."[54] This is clear evidence of public trust in the Patriarch and the love people have for him. Although Ilia II's encouragement to families to have more than two children can be seen as an intervention into the private lives of the public, as one expert from an NGO in Tbilisi said:

> Most ordinary Georgian people think that it is mandatory that the GOC should control everything, and that it must be so. They think that they are Orthodox Christians, and that the GOC can control people … They do what Orthodox priests say.[55]

The Patriarch also managed to strengthen public trust in him through his mediating role during political crises, such as the 2007 anti-government protests in Tbilisi and the restoration of Georgian-Russian relations after the 2008 War. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Patriarch invited brought the two sides in the crisis to the table to negotiate, and although there was no significant outcome to the negotiations, he had shown his value in his ability to mitigate the tension the between political authorities and the opposition (Surmava, 2014: 51-52). He played a similar role in rebuilding relations with the Russian Federation following the 2008 War. At a time when no diplomatic relations existed between the two countries, a delegation from

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[53]"Births" Accessed: August 07, 2017, http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=1091&lang=eng

[54] "Patriarch Ilia II: 'Most trusted man in Georgia", Accessed: August 07, 2017, http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/04/23/georgia.powerful.patriarch.ilia/index.html

[55] Interview, April 3, 2017.

the GOC made an official visit to Moscow in November, 2008. One month later, Ilia II attended the funeral Alexy II, the Patriarchate of Russian Orthodox Church, and during this visit he met with the then Russian Federation President Dmitry Medvedev. Speaking about their meeting, he said:

> I have met with President Medvedev. He is very well disposed towards the problems that we have. I think we will have good results.[56]

After returning to Georgia, he stated:

> I met with President Medvedev in Moscow, and we had quite positive and good discussions, but this needs continuation, and a very careful and diplomatic approach. I think that our authorities will continue it, we will have good results.[57]

Based on these statements, it can be understood that the Patriarch played a significant role in rebuilding relations with the Russian Federation. After making this first positive step, he passed responsibility to the Georgian authorities for the continuation of relations with the Russian Federation. An expert from an NGO in Batumi detailed the role of the GOC following the 2008 War:

> In many cases, the Church resolves the problems that politicians cannot resolve. For instance, during the 2008 War, Georgian politicians were unable to access the bodies of the Georgian martyrs in the occupied territories. One

[56] "Head of Georgian Church Meets Medvedev" Accessed: August 07, 2017, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20105

[57] "Head of Georgian Church Again Speaks of 'Positive Agreements' with Medvedev" Accessed: August 07, 2017, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20145

> of our Metropolits went there and talked to the Russians, and it was thanks to his effort that the bodies of the soldiers could be buried.[58]

The significance of the Church became all the more apparent when the Patriarch went to Germany for health reasons in 2017, and a high-ranking priest was arrested after cyanide was found in his luggage when travelling to Germany to visit the Patriarch.[59] Interviews conducted in Tbilisi in 2017 revealed that Georgians were shocked by this event, and could not imagine how anyone could target the Patriarch. The interviews also demonstrated that the question of who will be the next Patriarch is a hot topic in certain circles in Georgia. An interviewee in Tbilisi said:

> Why did this priest want to kill Ilia II? The Patriarch is old and ill. He will die anyway. This attempt to poison Ilia II is thought-provoking. In my opinion, this reflects the internal struggle of different groups within the church to promote their candidate and to discredit the other candidates for the patriarchy. The priest who was arrested is a reliable man of the head of Batumi and Lazeti Eparchy. He is also the Patriarch's nephew. He is a powerful candidate for becoming Patriarch, but he lost his popularity after this. [60]

Overall, it can be argued that Orthodox Christianity is important for Georgians and for the Georgian identity. An expert from the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development said:

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[58] Interview, Batumi, October 26, 2015.

[59] "Georgian priest charged with conspiracy to murder senior cleric" Accessed: August 07, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/13/georgia-priest-charged-conspiracy-to-patriarch-iliaii-orthodox-church

[60] Interview, Tbilisi, April 4, .2017.

> The simplest way to find a new identity after the Soviet Union is to go back and embrace the older one. Many people thought and felt this way. According to our nationalists, they fought for the sake of Orthodox Christianity. I do not think religion was very important 30 years ago, but now its importance has increased.[61]

Despite the importance of Orthodox Christianity and the GOC for Georgians, there is a controversy related to the will of Georgians to integrate with the West. This integration process is observed carefully by the Patriarchate, which at times has been critical of the development of close relations between Georgia and Western countries and organizations. The GOC opposes certain values, claiming that they constitute a threat to the Georgian culture, and the power of the Church. In this regard, the continuation of the significance of the GOC (in the future, and after Patriarch Ilia II) continues to be a subject of debate in different segments of the society.

4.3 Tension between the GOC and European Values: A Challenge to Integration with the West

Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe in 1999 was a milestone in the relations between Georgia and the West, and was considered by many Georgians to be indicative of Shevarnadze's European orientation (Nodia and Scholtbach 2006: 34). Relations with Europe would intensify following the Rose Revolution of 2003, and the international support that flowed in, especially from Western countries, played a huge role in the realization of the Rose Revolution and Saakashvili's efforts to become president. This support led Saakashvili to initiate Western-oriented policies and reforms as soon as he came to power in 2004, and led Georgia to become signatories to the European Neighborhood Policy in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership in 2009. Even though Georgia's participation in these European organizations did not lead to Georgia's accession to the European Union, they

[61] Interview, Tbilisi, May 28, 2015.

certainly motivated Georgia to carry out significant reforms in the economic, social and the political spheres (Charles, 2012: 3). Following Saakashvili, Margvelashvili has also applied pro-Western policies since 2013, aiming to build closer relations with the European Union. In his annual address to the nation, he said:

> Georgia's current goal is to return to the European family and become an EU member with strong democracy, stable institutions, human rights protection, rule of law, economic development and a European legal system.[62]

It can be argued that the pro-Western policies of the last two governments (of Saakashvili and Margvelashvili) have received the support of the vast majority of the Georgian population. According to the key findings of a survey commissioned by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF), and conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) in 2013, 83 percent of Georgians would vote to join European Union in the event of a referendum.[63] The same survey conducted in 2015 revealed that most Georgians consider there to be a strong link between the European Union and democracy, and they see the European Union as an organization that supports the democratization process of the countries that are not members. Some 61 percent of Georgians voiced their support of Georgia's European Union membership, mainly because they think that it will improve the economy of Georgia, will protect the country from external threats, and will help ensure territorial integrity.[64]

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[62] "President Margvelashvili: Georgia's current goal is to return to European family" Accessed: August 02, 2017, http://en.apa.az/world-news/europe/president-margvelashvili-georgia-s-current-goal-is-to-return-to-european-family.html

[63] "Knowledge and the Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Changes and Trends 2009-2013." Accessed: August 01, 2017, http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Knowledge-and-Attitudes-towards-the-EU-in-Georgia-_-Changes-and-Trends-2009-%E2%80%93-2013-survey-reportENG.pdf

[64] "Knowledge and the Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations 2009-2015" Accessed: August 01, 2017, http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Knowledge-of-and-Attitudes-towards-the-EU-in-Georgia_Trends-and-Variations-2009-2015-survey-report-ENG.pdf

A comparison of the results of the two surveys by EPF, one in 2013 and the other in 2015, reveals a decrease in the percentage of the Georgians supporting EU accession dropping from 83 percent to 61 percent. According to the 2015 survey report, there are two main reasons for this decrease. The first is that Georgians have developed a more realistic attitude towards EU membership after becoming more knowledgeable of what is required, and the degree to which Georgia has fulfilled these requirements; and the second is that there is a fear that Georgian tradition will be damaged as a result of the adoption of European values.[65]

As the most trusted institution for Georgians,[66] and its perceived role in maintaining Georgian tradition, the GOC's perspective on EU and European values has been crucial for Georgians. It is clear that the attitude of the GOC towards Europe and European values is not straightforward. While it would appear that the Church's public attitude towards EU accession is positive, the interviews reveal that the GOC's true attitude towards the adoption of European values has significant concerns related to the preservation and maintenance of the Georgian culture.

Ilia II has made several positive statements related to the potential accession of Georgia to the European Union. For example, in a 2014 meeting with Stefan Fule, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Ilia II said:

> We are very pleased that Georgia, which has gone through a difficult period under the Communist regime, is today heading towards the European structures. The European Union is an organization that is well known by the

[65]"Knowledge and the Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia: Trends and Variations 2009-2015" Accessed: August 01, 2017, http://www.epfound.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Knowledge-of-and-Attitudes-towards-the-EU-in-Georgia_Trends-and-Variations-2009-2015-survey-report-ENG.pdf

[66]"Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia" Accessed: August 01, 2017 http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/georgia_2016.pdf

> Georgian people. We will do everything to make Georgia a fully-fledged member of this large organization.[67]

In the same meeting, he opposed the idea that the Church is a barrier in the way of Georgia's accession to the EU, stating:

> I want to say that incorrect information is being disseminated in some countries claiming that the Georgian Church is hindering this process (European integration). I want to assure you that the Georgian Church will do everything it can to realize integration.[68]

Speaking in 2016 on the "Unanimity" channel, the official TV channel of the GOC, Ilia II again emphasized the Church's support of Georgia's potential membership to the EU and promoted its integration with the West (Gordeziani, 2016: 39). The Patriarch underlined the need to preserve Georgian culture in the European integration process while giving the traditional Sunday Sermon at Sameba (Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi) in 2015. He said:

> I would like to remind you once again that the European structures are necessary, but at the same time, we should not lose our values – meaning our Georgian, historical, cultural, spiritual and scientific values. We must do everything to show Europeans that Georgia's culture had developed earlier than that of Europe. Georgian science and spirituality are so strong that many foreign countries can learn from Georgia.[69]

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[67] **"**Patriarch: 'Church will Do Everything to Make Georgia EU Member" Accessed: August 01, 2017, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27008

[68] "Patriarch: 'Church will Do Everything to Make Georgia EU Member" Accessed: August 01, 2017**,** http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27008

[69]"Ilia II - We must show Europeans that Georgia had high culture earlier than Europe" Accessed: August 01, 2017, http://1tv.ge/en/news/view/103105.html

Ilia II expressed his satisfaction after the European Commission released a positive report in 2015 related to Georgia's reforms towards visa liberalization,[70] and high-ranking representatives of the GOC made official visits to EU institutions to discuss Georgia-EU relations and the role of the GOC in this regard.[71] Furthermore, after the European Parliament adopted the proposal for visa liberalizations for Georgians in 2017,[72] the Church participated actively in the celebrations.[73] All of these factors point to a positive attitude in the GOC's towards the EU and to the recognition of the power of the GOC by the EU institutions.

That said, there are also significant examples of how the GOC's positive attitude to the European Union has been reversed when European values come into conflict with the conservative values of the GOC. One such is the reaction of the GOC to the 2011 Amendment to the Civil Code that regulates the status of religious organizations, and grants all traditional religions the status of legal entities under public law. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the GOC was strongly against the law and organized protests to oppose it,[74] showing its clear opposition to the European requirement for equality of religion in Georgia.

Another example of the reluctance of the GOC to adopt European values is related to the events of May 17, 2013, when a group of gay rights activists gathered to take part

[70]"Patriarch: EU's Decision on Georgia Great Achievement" Accessed: August 01, 2017, http://georgiatoday.ge/news/2418/Patriarch%3A-EU%E2%80%99s-Decision-on-Georgia-Great-Achievement

[71]"Georgian Orthodox Church visits EU institutions in Brussels" Accessed: August 01, 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters

[72]"European Parliament grants Georgia visa-free travel" Accessed: August 02, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/european-parliament-grants-georgia-visa-free-travel-170202133759696.html

[73] Interview, Tbilisi, April 7, 2017.

[74]"Georgia adopts a new law on the status of religious organizations" Accessed: August 02, 2017, http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/16973.html

in the International Day Against Homophobia. This peaceful march was attacked by thousands of people, including many priests from the GOC, and many activists were injured.[75] Patriarch Ilia II released a statement on the same day in which he acknowledged that some priests behaved "impolitely" when they came face-to-face with the activists, but stated that the thoughts of the LGBT activists were completely unacceptable in Georgia.[76] One year later, Ilia II went on to state that Georgia should celebrate May 17 as a 'Day of Strength of Family and Respect for Parents'.[77] Overall, the May 17 events show that in the name of preserving Georgian traditions, the GOC is able to mobilize Georgians to demonstrate against European values.

IIia II, during a meeting with Stefan Fule, said that the GOC was not an obstacle in the way of Georgia's accession to EU; but paradoxically, as soon as the new anti-discrimination law was adopted in 2014 as part of Georgia's visa liberalization pledges, the GOC voiced concerns, given that the law had been prepared to prevent discrimination in Georgia, including discrimination against LGBT people (Kakachia, 2015: 5). Ilia II expressed his opposition as follows:

> Proceeding from God's commandments, believers consider non-traditional sexual relations to be a deadly sin, and rightly so; and the anti-discrimination bill in its present form is considered to be propaganda and legalization in favor of this sin.[78]

[75]"Homophobia, Church, and State in Georgia" Accessed: August 02, 2017, http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/homophobia-church-and-state-georgia

[76] "Ivanishvili and the Georgian-Orthodox Church: An Alliance Starting To Sour?" Accessed: August 02, 2017, http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12743-ivanishvili-and-the-georgian-orthodox-church-an-alliance-starting-to-sour?.html

[77]"Georgian Church Calls for 'Family Day' on May 17" Accessed: August 02, 2017, http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27221

[78]"Georgian Church Speaks Out Against Anti-Discrimination Bill", Accessed: August 03, 2017, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27175

He went on:

> The EU represents a diverse space, unifying different nations and religions, and declares that it recognizes the cultures and traditions of various people, and is ready to take into consideration and respect our values, however the provisions of this bill are in conflict with these principles.[79]

The adoption of the 2011 Amendment to the Civil Code, the events of May 17, 2013, and the reaction of the GOC following the adoption of the anti-discrimination law in 2014 show that although the GOC presents itself as in favor of Georgia's accession to the European Union, it has opposed the adoption of European values. Thus, one can argue that the GOC is at times a hurdle in the way of integration with the West, and this view was supported by one respondent, a representative of an NGO in Tbilisi, in 2017:

> Given the common perception among Orthodox priests that integration with the West means becoming distant from Orthodoxy and closer to Catholicism, they do not want to be integrated with the West. For this reason, the GOC tends to seek closer relations with the Russian Orthodox Church rather than the Western Catholic Church.[80]

According to an expert from the Georgian Democratic Initiative (GDI), the GOC is aware of the fact that integration with the West may decrease the trust of Georgians in the GOC. For this reason, although the GOC seemed to be pleased by the visa liberalization, it is actually worried about the adoption of European values in Georgia through projects that bring Europe and Georgia closer together. [81]

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[79] Georgian Church Speaks Out Against Anti-Discrimination Bill", Accessed: August 03, 2017, http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27175

[80] Interview, Tbilisi, April 3, 2017.

[81] Interview, Tbilisi, April 7, 2017.

4.4 Hierarchy of Religions in Georgia: Contrasting views of minorities, the GOC, the State Agency for Religious Issues and NGOs

It is stated in Article 9/1 of the 1995 Constitution that the state guarantees complete freedom of belief and religion, and while the state recognizes the special status of the GOC, the Constitution guarantees the separation of the Church and state.[82] Although no other religions have been granted a special role throughout the history of Georgia, Article 9/1 can be considered a guarantee of protection of other religions. In contrast, the *Concordat* gave the GOC a unique status and the state does not share with any other religion in Georgia. Legally, the GOC maintains a privileged position, and with the entry into force of the *Concordat*, it became entitled to compensation from the state. As mentioned in Article 11 of the *Concordat*:

> The State shall acknowledge material and moral damage to Church during loosing state independence in XIX-XX centuries (especially in 1921-1990). Being factual owner of part of bereft property, the State shall take responsibility to partly compensate material damage.[83]

The *Concordat* also freed the clergy from compulsory military service, and gave the Church the right to purchase state property, exempted it from tax, and granted it a consultative role in issues related to education and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the GOC was granted the status of 'legal entity of public law'.[84] It can thus be claimed that the adoption of the *Concordat* did not remove the hierarchy of religions in Georgia that resulted from the 1995 Constitution, but, as mentioned by Chelidze

[82] "The Constitution of Georgia" http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf, Accessed: July 27, 2017

[83] "Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church" https://forbcaucausus.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/concordat.pdf Accessed: June 27, 2017.

[84] "Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church" https://forbcaucausus.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/concordat.pdf Accessed: June 27, 2017.

(2014: 13-14), it reduced the gap between the GOC and other religions and strengthened the place of the GOC in the existing religious hierarchy in Georgia.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Saakashvili government adopted an Amendment to the Civil Code in 2005 that was aimed at decreasing the gap between the GOC and other religions, by allowing religious organizations to register themselves as non-profit organizations or foundations. This was seen as a positive legal regulation for the minority religions in Georgia after the dissolution of Soviet Union, although the GOC remained as the only religious organization defined as a 'legal entity of public law'. Following these legal changes, different segments of society expressed their views. Despite its continuing privileged position, the GOC made a statement related to the 2005 Amendment to the Civil Code, reminding of the unique status granted to it by the *Concordat*. The statement was as follows:

> A law on religions is necessary in Georgia to address the needs of religious groups. But it should not be on the same level as the Constitutional Agreement because Orthodoxy has a particular position in Georgia. When we prepared the Concordat, it had been a common decision with Catholics, Apostolic Armenians, Baptists, Muslims, Lutherans and Jews and thereby the peaceful co-existence between religions was affirmed. So those religious groups supported the Concordat.[85]

In this regard, the GOC, although recognizing the existence of other religions in Georgia, felt the need to underline its privileged position and to remind of the existing hierarchy among religions, despite the changing legal framework.

Another positive step that further decreased the gap between the GOC and other religions in Georgia, although still maintaining the hierarchy, was the 2011

[85]"Religious Minorities in Georgia: Report" Accessed: August 08, 2017, http://religiebi.info/admin/editor/uploads/files/REPORTS/Religious_Minorities_Final.pdf

Amendment to the Civil Code in Saakashvili period. According to Article 1509/1, "Religious associations may be registered as legal entities under public law."[86] Article 1509/4 stated:

> The Legal Entity under Public Law (LEPL) – National Agency of Public Registry within the Ministry for Justice of Georgia may register as a legal entity under public law a religious denomination having a historical link with Georgia or a religious denomination recognized as a religion by the legislation of the member states of the Council of Europe.[87]

This Amendment fell short of granting the status of legal entity to all religious organizations, recognizing the legal status of traditional religions (Islam, Judaism, Catholicism and Armenian Apostolic Church) under public law, but not non-traditional religions. The lack of consensus on which religions had historical ties with Georgia led to debates in society and discontent among the members of those religions considered to be non-traditional, such as Evangelical Baptists, the Pentecostal Church and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Accordingly, the *Concordat* continued to be a source of both discrimination against minority religions and support of the existing hierarchy among religions in Georgia.[88]

The Margvelashvili government adopted a law in 2014 that cleared the way for partial compensation to religious organizations in Georgia that had suffered losses under the Soviet Union. Being legal entities of public law, Islamic, Judaic, Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic religious organizations earned the right to be

[86]"Law of Georgia: Civil Code of Georgia", Accessed: August 08, 2017, https://matsne.gov.ge/ru/document/download/31702/75/en/pdf

[87]"Law of Georgia: Civil Code of Georgia", Accessed: August 08, 2017, https://matsne.gov.ge/ru/document/download/31702/75/en/pdf

[88]"Report on Georgia's Compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Rights of religious minorities in Georgia", Accessed: August 08, 2017, http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/publication_2.html

compensated for the material and moral losses they endured under the Soviet regime. The State Agency for Religious Issues was declared as the responsible institution for the allocation of compensation from the state budget,[89] having been ex-stablished to play a mediating role between the state and Georgia's different religious organizations. During an interview conducted with a representative of the State Agency, it was said:

> We do not treat the GOC and other religions differently. There are approximately 50 religious groups in Georgia, and we communicate with all of them and we know all of them. This Agency is a state institution, and like the state, we are neutral.[90]

As can be understood from this quotation, similar to the GOC, the experts of the State Agency for Religious Issues recognized the existence of different religions in Georgia, although many of them mentioned that the policy of the state excludes non-traditional religions.[91] An expert from the Public Defender Office said:

> Some of the religious groups that are classified as traditional receive compensation. But I have a problem with this term "traditional religion". Who decides which are traditional and which are not?[92]

[89] "Evaluation of the Two-Year Administration of the Government", August 08, 2017, http://gov.ge/files/454_54907_753100_366_50045_337522_NGOs2YearProgressReportFinalENG.pdf

[90] Interview, Tbilisi, May 29, 2015.

[91] Report on Georgia's Compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Rights of religious minorities in Georgia", Accessed: 08 August, 2017, http://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/publication_2.html

[92] Interview, Tbilisi, December 3, 2015.

This standpoint was echoed during interviews with representatives of the State Agency for Religious Issues, with experts stressing that compensation is only payable to traditional religions.

A representative of an NGO in Tbilisi stated, "The Agency supports traditional religions; non-traditional religions are neglected and alienated,"[93] while an expert from Transparency International Georgia stated:

> The Agency decided to give money to Jews, Muslims, Catholics and Gregorians, but not to Jehovah's Witnesses, etc. They are not part of this "game" … The Agency distributes all of the money to four traditional religions, claiming that they are the ones that suffered during the Soviet period. Evangelists also existed during that period, and they were damaged too.[94]

In addition to state's indifference to non-traditional religions in Georgia, they were also subjected to discrimination in daily life. According to the annual reports of the Public Defender of Georgia for the 2010–2016 period, non-traditional religions were exposed to severe discrimination. For example, one report of the Public Defender of Georgia in 2014 claims that there were "45 cases of persecution, physical and verbal abuse, and discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses".[95] What is more, the 2016 report stated that "persecuting and abusing representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as preventing them from conducting religious services, continued as a trend in 2016"[96]

[93] Interview, Tbilisi, December 3 , 2015.

[94]Interview, Batumi, October 28, 2015.

[95] On the Situation of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/3/3510.pdf

[96] "On the Situation of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/4/4442.pdf

Apart from the acts of discrimination against non-traditional religions, the four traditional religions other than the GOC were also discriminated against in terms of the funds they received from the Agency. According to the 2014 Georgian Democracy Initiative Report, the funds paid to traditional religions were not allocated according to a clear criterion. The report noted that the allocated funds were calculated according to the population of the religious communities, the number of the religious officials and the existing religious buildings, but did not take into account the real losses experienced during the Soviet period.[97] While the GOC's annual funding is nearly 20–25 Million GEL, the Agency allocated a total of only 3.5 million GEL to the four other traditional religions in 2014.[98] According to the Georgia 2015 International Religious Freedom Report, the money given to traditional religions dropped to 1.7 Million GEL in 2014 due to shortages in the state budget.[99] In brief, one can say that the terms 'traditional religion' and 'non-traditional religion' remain controversial, and that the different funding allocations to traditional religions serve to consolidate the already existing hierarchy among the nation's traditional religions.

It was apparent from the interviews that members of the traditional religions in Georgia are unhappy with the Agency's policies towards them. For example, the leader of a Muslim minority group stated:

> This agency was created to control the Muslim community. In order to disguise it, other small communities were given money as a sort of retribution. If it was the case, Lutherans were one of the most suffered groups

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[97]"Report on Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia " Accessed: August 08, 2017, http://gdi.ge/uploads/other/0/242.pdf

[98]"Assessment of the Needs of Religious Organization in Georgia" Accessed August 08, 2017, http://www.una.ge/uploads/publications/19/needs_assessment_TDI.pdf

[99]"Georgia 2015 International Religious Freedom Report" Accessed: August 08, 2017, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/256403.pdf

in the past. But they think that 'if we give money to Muslims, we can control them and we can then protect them from the influence of foreign countries.'[100]

The reports of different NGOs also noted that the Agency had failed to resolve the problems faced by Muslim minorities.[101] To illustrate, a group of Orthodox Christians protested the opening of a Muslim boarding school in Kobuleti in 2014, hanging a pig's head on the school door,[102] and according to a 2014 report by the Georgian Democracy Initiative, the Adjarian government overturned the decision that allowed the opening of the school. The Agency was also unable to implement proper policies to protect the rights of Muslim minorities.[103] According to a 2016 report by the Public Defender of Georgia, the investigation into this incident is still continuing.[104] Another example of the existing intolerance of the Muslim minority is the Mokhe incidents of 2014, when the Muslim minority in Mokhe protested the government plan to construct a library in a building that had previously been a mosque. The police used excessive force to quell the protest, and several Muslim

[100] Interview, Tbilisi, May 28, 2015.

[101]It was not only the Muslim minorities that were subjected to discrimination in Georgia, as Armenians, Jews and Catholics were also affected. According to the 2014 Report of the TDI (2014: 23), the Georgian Patriarchate confiscated many of the Armenian churches belonging to the Armenian community. Negotiations between the Armenian Church and the Georgian state related to the restoration of old Armenian churches are continuing still today, with no concrete results in sight. As for the Jewish community, in 2014, ownership of only nine of the 15 synagogues in Georgia was transferred to the Jewish community. It can be argued that they have also faced difficulties in securing the return of their historical buildings. See https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/256403.pdf. According to the 2016 Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, a request from the Catholics to build new religious buildings on their land was also rejected.

[102]"Scene of religious controversy in Kobuleti" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/20509.html

[103]"Report on Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia " Accessed: August 08, 2017, http://gdi.ge/uploads/other/0/242.pdf

[104] "On the Situation of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/4/4442.pdf

protestors were detained.[105] According to a report by the Tolerance and Diversity Institute, the Agency formed a commission to resolve the problem that concluded that the building had not been a mosque, but rather a club.[106] The Agency also ignored the demands of the Muslim community for the building of a new mosque in Batumi,[107] and this issue was mentioned during several interviews in Batumi in 2015. Agency officials said during our interview that the Muslim community had wanted to use their budget to construct an administration building,[108] while during interviews with Muslim community members it was said that the Agency had been unwilling to construct another mosque in Batumi. According to a 2014 report by the Open Society Georgia Foundation:

> The Coalition believes that the recent developments are a result of the State Agency on Religious Issues' ineffective policy, which is aimed at controlling religious organizations and mitigating problematic issues rather than protecting human rights. The social discontent of the Muslim community, including the self-organized group activities for the construction of a new mosque in Batumi and the current process in Mokhe, is the most obvious indicator of the inappropriateness of the Agency's policies.[109]

[105] "Controversy in the village Mokhe on religious grounds" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/20568.html

[106] "TDI on the Report and the Strategy of Religious Policy Prepared by the State Agency For Religious Affairs" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://www.tdi.ge/en/news/160-tdi-report-and-strategy-religious-policy-prepared-state-agency-religious-issues

[107] On the Situation of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/4/4442.pdf

[108] Interview, Tbilisi, May 29, 2015.

[109] "The Coalition for Equality Calls on the Government to Protect the Rights of the Muslim Community in the Village of Mokhe" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://www.osgf.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=23&info_id=4625

Gavtadze and Chitanava (2015) argue that non-binding opinions of the Agency have been an obstacle in the way of the demands of religious minorities.[110] In addition, the 2015 Tolerance and Diversity Institute report revealed that applications from religious minorities to construct new religious buildings in 2014 were generally refused.[111]

During an interview conducted with a former expert of the Agency, s/he stated:

> If the Agency continues to control the religious minorities, and does not develop a dialogue between them and the state, the Agency will increase the religion-based conflicts in Georgia.[112]

The same expert also stressed:

> The Agency frequently holds meetings, but they do not have a serious agenda. It is unable to carry out certain policies that foster dialogue between religions in Georgia … It seems to be functionless.[113]

A 2016 Report of the Commissioner for Human Right stated:

> The State Agency for Religious Issues, established in 2014, does not seem to be perceived by the concerned actors as an effective tool for the resolution of

[110]Following the establishment of the State Agency for Religious Issues in 2014, the authority to construct religious buildings was taken from local Councils, which must now obtain permission from the Agency.

[111] TDI on the Report and the Strategy of Religious Policy Prepared by the State Agency for Religious Affairs" Accessed: August 11, 2017, http://www.tdi.ge/en/news/160-tdi-report-and-strategy-religious-policy-prepared-state-agency-religious-issues

[112] Interview, Tbilisi, April 7, 2017.

[113] Interview, Tbilisi, April 7, 2017.

the aforementioned issues (religious minorities' problems) and the advancement of religious freedoms for all.[114]

The field research and interviews conducted with experts from NGOs and members of religious minorities revealed that although all religious organizations are recognized by the state, related state institutions and the GOC, their official status is different. They believe that they are not treated equally by the state and that there is a hierarchy among religions. According to the research data, while the GOC is situated at the very top of the hierarchy, both legally and in the eyes of the general public, the traditional religions of Islam, Judaism, Armenian Apostolic Church, and Catholic Church are at a second tier, while non-traditional religions are considered to be at the very bottom tier of the hierarchy.

4.5 Church-State Relations and the GOC's Interventions into Politics: A Challenge to the Secular State?

After the dissolution of Soviet Union, the newly independent Georgia entered a period of transition, aiming to form a Western style of liberal democratic and secular state. In this period, the political elite sought mostly to gain political legitimacy through the strong link that exists between Orthodox Christianity and Georgianness. This link between religion and national identity was used as one of the building blocks in the nation state-building process of post-Soviet Georgia, and this also affected other areas, such as the democratic and secular state formations. After gaining independence, Georgia faced significant instabilities, including civil war, ethnic conflict and socio-economic problems, and under these circumstances, the GOC emerged as the most stable and secure institution, becoming a source of legitimization in the eyes of politicians. During the late Soviet period, the GOC was perceived by the general public as an opposing power to the Soviet state, and as the

[114] "Observations on the human rights situation in Georgia: An update on justice reforms, tolerance and non-discrimination" Accessed: August 11, 2017, https://rm.coe.int/16806db79f)%20https://rm.coe.int/16806db79f

defender of Georgian national self. Accordingly, after independence, the political turmoil raised the status of the GOC in the eyes of the public. Knowing the importance of religion for Georgians, Gamsakhurdia used religion in order to obtain political support, making continuous ethno-religious rhetoric in his speeches, and even suggesting that the GOC should become the State Religion in Georgia. His rhetoric provided the GOC with the perfect opportunity to increase its influence both in the social and the political spheres.

After the Gamsakhurdia period, Shevardnadze came to power, and also benefited from the symbolic power of the GOC. Shevardnadze, who was baptized by Ilia II in 1992 (Chitanava, 2015: 42), saw the social capital of the GOC as a way out of the problems of corruption and economic crisis. His first significant act in terms of secular state building was the constitutional change in 1995, which guaranteed Georgians freedom of belief and religion, and also recognized the special role of the GOC and its independence from the state. The Shevardnadze period saw the Georgian Orthodox Church gaining some important privileges, spurring debates related to the neutrality of the state and the challenge to the principle of secularism. The fact that Article 9 recognized the Church's independence from the state rather than the separation of state and religion institutions was understood in certain circles to be a derogation of the neutrality principle. That said, the GOC did not become a legal entity until 2002, and the Constitutional Agreement signed in 2002 between the Georgian state and the GOC may be interpreted as recognition of the existence of a hierarchy of religions in Georgia by the state in which the highest status was given to the Georgian Orthodox Church. In this way, neutrality principle of secularism was challenged once again. After the declaration of the GOC as a legal entity of public law, the state also provided numerous privileges to the GOC and its members, while representatives of other religions were, for quite a long time, excluded from similar privileges. Briefly, after Gamsakhurdia, it was Shevardnadze who consolidated the state-Church relationship, granting an important status to the GOC through laws and the *Concordat* that facilitated its intervention both in society and politics.

After the Rose Revolution, Saakashvili came to power with a high level of public support, and his pro-Western orientation and strong political legitimacy provided him with the support he needed to develop a Western-style secular state. Political reforms were initiated aimed at developing a more secular state and decreasing the social and political influence of the GOC, and other religious organizations were also recognized as legal entities in 2011. For example, Saakashvili took steps to minimize the influence of Orthodox Christianity in the sphere of education, although these measures could not be fully implemented due to the reactions of the GOC, who had the support of a significant proportion of the public, and the worsening political situation. His policies aimed at establishing the religious neutrality of the state created tensions between the GOC and his government, and the GOC voiced its opposition to almost to all of the new laws and regulations that had the potential to challenge its power. In 2007, political protests against the Saakashvili government took place, and his political legitimacy started to decline synchronously with the increase of his authoritarian tendencies. During the ensuing protests, the GOC played a role as a mediator between the state and the protestors, further strengthening its influence, while after 2008, the war between the Russian Federation and Georgia further accelerated the decline of Saakashvili's legitimacy. Speaking about this period, one religious minority leader said:

> Saakashvili didn't know how to deal with the growing influence of the GOC. After 2007 he became weaker and the Church became popular. The Patriarch became the most popular figure in Georgia. After 2008, GOC mediated the post-war relations.[115]

In the period that followed, Saakashvili made changes to his policies, seeking to take advantage of the symbolic power of the Church and consolidate power. Furthermore, he replaced the national flag of Georgia with a new one that depicted five crosses,

[115] Interview, Tbilisi, May 28, 2015.

which was seen in some quarters as a further challenge to the neutrality principle, in that they excluded non-Orthodox Georgian citizens, thus preparing the ground for the weakening of their attachment to their state.

In brief, the Saakashvili period, in which was many Georgians expected Western values to dominate and for the power of the church to be challenged, in fact saw the Church consolidated its power and increase its influence in politics. In other words, with the weakening power of politicians, the power of the church increased and the Patriarch became the most popular public figure (Aydıngün, 2017).

During the field researches in Georgia, most of those interviewed from the leadership of the minority religions and NGOs mentioned the growing significance of the GOC in politics in the post-Soviet period. However, one expert from the Caucasian House stated:

> In Georgia, the GOC has significant influence in public life, and some say also in politics, but sometimes the influence on politics is exaggerated. I don't believe the Church is controlling everything.[116]

That said, the majority of interviewees stressed upon the importance of the GOC and its interventions into Georgian politics. An expert from one NGO in Tbilisi said:

> In Georgia, people can go to Parliament and follow the decision-making process of the government. Generally, half of the audience is composed of Georgian Orthodox clergy, while the other half is members of NGOs. The clergy put too much pressure on MPs of the Georgian Dream Coalition. Once, a cleric said to an MP, "At the next elections, you will not be on the list." [117]

[116] Interview, Tbilisi, April 6, 2017.

[117] Interview, Tbilisi, December 3, 2015.

More recently, however, although Margvelashvili follows a pro-Western policy in general, he has developed good relations with the GOC. As a result, the power of the GOC in politics remains strong, and its interventions into political life in Georgia continue. An expert from an NGO in Tbilisi said:

> Today many politicians have mentors from the Church and take advice from the Church. Thus, the GOC still interferes in Georgian politics.[118]

Overall, there is little doubt of the GOC's growing influence in politics since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although this was interrupted to some extent in the early Saakashvili period, the Church continues to be the most influential actor in Georgian politics, especially when the politicians' authority weakens and a need of legitimacy appears. This poses a threat to the consolidation of the secular state, which is based on the strict separation of the Church and state.

[118] Interview, Tbilisi, May 28, 2015.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, independent Georgia chose to integrate with the West and build a liberal, democratic and secular state. As would be expected, it required significant effort to harmonize the country's national legislation with EU laws, and this was followed by problems of implementation.[119] As mentioned throughout the thesis, the GOC became a powerful institution that filled the vacuum not only in the religious sphere but also in the political sphere in the latter years of the Soviet Union, and also after its collapse (Aydıngün, 2017). The historical significance of the GOC, its unifying power in the crisis-ridden early period of independence, its success in filling the religious and ideological vacuums throughout the nation-state building process, and its capacity to provide psychological support at a societal level paved the way for the growing influence of Orthodox Christianity and the Church (Aydıngün, 2016: 407).[120] Although the GOC suffered severe discrimination under both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, it started to gain popularity in the eyes of Georgians following War World II, and especially in the

[119] This was, in a way, the replacement of a Soviet form of modernization with the Western one. It can be said that independence for many Georgians actually meant independence from the Russians, and a bid to move closer to the West and such Western institutions as NATO. It should be noted, however, that resulting support from the West has been at times a disappointment for many Georgians.

[120] The relationship between the GOC and the Russian Orthodox Church is a subject that may be worthy of future study. It became apparent during the fieldwork that the relations between the GOC and the Russian Orthodox Church, and the states of both countries, is a complex and multilayered subject that may be clarified by further studies with a full consideration of global dynamics.

second half of the 1980s, as a symbolic institution that opposed to the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union.

In addition to the unique place of the GOC in Georgian history, the Soviet legacy is also a significant contributor to the growing significance of the Church. As mentioned in Chapter 2, religion was considered by the Soviet regime to be a destroyer of the socialist ideology, and so it was subjected to suppression throughout the Soviet period in the form of anti-religious campaigns that promoted atheism, especially before World War II. Soon after the weakening of the anti-religious campaign, the reopening of churches and the preservation of religious heritage became a priority for Georgians, which paved the way for the merging of Georgian nationalism and Orthodox Christianity (Serrano, 2010: 6). In this sense, the flourishing of Orthodox Christianity can be considered an attempt to liberate the nation from its Soviet legacy (Agadjanian, 2015: 29-30). All these prepared the ground for the empowering of the GOC in the formation the Georgian national identity following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It would thus be fair to say that the politicians in independent Georgia have sought to forge close relations with the GOC as the most trusted of all public institutions.

It can be understood from my research data that when politicians have needed to legitimize their weakening political authority, they have developed close relations with the Church. In this sense, the relative failure of politicians in building a liberal, democratic and secular nation state have contributed to an increase in trust and loyalty to the GOC among the Georgian people. As mentioned throughout the thesis, and supported by data from the field research, Orthodox Christianity became an inseparable part of Georgianness, and the strong trust in the GOC felt by Georgians gave the church the ‘right’ to intervene in political and social life of Georgia, and making it an active participant in the public space.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the process of modernization and the continued significance of religion cannot go hand-in-hand according to the modernist

approach, which assumes that under modernity, belief in religion will decline and religion will lose its significance. However, there are many countries like Georgia in which religious belief and modernity coexist, proving that secularization does not necessarily follow the modernization process. Although many Western thinkers thought initially that secularization and modernization could be expected to move forward in parallel, this caused important counter-secularization movements which are put forward by many scholars in the Western literature. In this sense, it is clear that the early Western conceptualization of secularism – the secularization thesis – was based on Western experiences, and so was more suited to explaining the experience of Western countries (in a specific historical period) and failed to explain the religious revival after 1980s in many countries of the world. Consequently, while trying to explain secularization in different countries, after 1980s or in non-Western countries it is necessary to take their unique characteristics and peculiarities into account, as they differ from those found in Western cases (Aydıngün, 2016: 6). Accordingly, in this thesis it is of vital importance to understand the significance of the GOC as the most significant peculiarity in Georgia, and to understand the Church-state relations. As seen in the findings of the research, the GOC, as the most trusted and respected institution in post-Soviet Georgia, has created itself a place in the public space. According to Casanova, this has been, as mentioned in the introduction, a rejection of "privatization" and "marginalization" of religion that he names as "deprivatization" (Casanova 1994: 41). For him, the "deprivatization" of modern religion is:

> … the process whereby religion abandons its assigned place in the private sphere and enters the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society to take part in the ongoing process of contestation, discursive legitimation, and redrawing of the boundaries (Casanova, 1994: 65-66).

The deprivatization of the GOC after it found a place for itself in the public sphere, allowed the Church to extend its influence beyond religious matters. My Research data reveals that while the GOC is able to maintain power in its interventions into the

daily private lives of Georgians (i.e. encouraging them to have more children), going beyond its religious function, this intervention is widely accepted by Georgians, and it is not perceived by Georgians as an intervention into their private lives, which can be attributed to the historical significance of the GOC and the symbolic importance of the Patriarch. The legitimacy of the power of the GOC that is recognized by Georgians gives the Church the opportunity to express its views about a broad range of social and political matters – again, going beyond its religious function.

Casanova mentions (1994), while churches have seemed to adapt to the norms of the modern secular state, they have sought to maintain their impact in the social lives of the people, expressing their opinions without challenging modernity, and so becoming active in the public sphere. This situation can also be seen in Georgia, although there are differences to the Western cases. The GOC presents itself as an institution that has accepted modernization. For example, the GOC has, in principle, accepted the modern secular state and pro-Western policies of governments, but may sometimes express openly its views against European values and political matters, sometimes challenging universal values and secularism. My research has demonstrated that these views are shared by many Georgians, many of whom think that the GOC has the right to intervene based on its historical significance. A concrete example of this can be found in the *Concordat*, in which Article 4/3 states that the GOC has the right to develop social programs in collaboration with the state. In this regard, it is apparent that in some cases the intervention of the GOC into politics is sometimes on a legal basis.

My research data has also demonstrated that the GOC intervenes in politics. As covered in the previous chapter, the GOC is able to challenge the political authorities by mobilizing Georgians engage in public protests; and can also bring protests to an end, thus providing legitimacy to politicians when needed. Such interventions, which can be viewed as a challenge to secular state, are welcomed and seen as appropriate by most Georgians, who see the GOC as a symbol of stability for the country, which is something that was mentioned in most of the interviews. In this regard, Georgia is

a country in which the state promotes the majority religion, as criticisms of the GOCs interventions into the political sphere by politically weak governments would have obvious drawbacks. Consequently, it can be argued that the legal separation of religion and state in Georgia has not brought about a decline of the significance of religion in society. Furthermore, the existence of religious belief in society does not mean that no separation exists between religion and the State (Janelidze, 2015: 66). Although the separation of the Church and state is legally binding, the principle of non-establishment may not be fully realized, and so the state cannot be defined as fully secular. This allows us to define such countries like Georgia as semi-secular (Aydıngün, 2017). Furthermore, the significance of religion is not decreasing, and the GOC has been able to avoid privatization due to its historical significance, which for the Georgian people both in society and the politics. For this reason, the separation of state and Church is blurred in Georgia, which is indicative of the complexity of the relationship between modernization and secularization mentioned at the beginning of the thesis. Casanova (1994: 60) argues that social scientists must recognize that despite attempts to push religion into the private sphere, religion continues to have a public dimension as in Georgia. From this he concludes that theories of modernity that do not take this public dimension of religion into account are incomplete. To conclude based on my research data, it is important to note that the presence of the GOC in the public sphere has difficulties in preserving modern freedom and does not necessarily contribute to the democratization of the country despite providing stability and trust to the society.

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APPENDICES

A. Turkish Summary/ Türkçe Özet

Bu tez, Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan'da kilise-devlet ilişkisini Sovyet öncesi dönemi göz önünde bulundurarak incelemektedir. Tez ayrıca Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin, Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan'da artan gücünü ve bu gücün laiklik, siyaset ve topluma etkilerini tartışmaktadır. Tezde, Gürcistan resmî belgelerinin, ulusal ve uluslararası sivil toplum kuruluşlarının ve örgütlerinin raporlarının ve Patrik'in ve üst düzey din görevlerinin demeçlerini temel alan belge araştırması yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Buna ek olarak, Tiflis ve Batum'da 2015 ve 2017 yıllarında gerçekleştirilen saha araştırmalarında yapılan 30 uzman ve elit mülakatının verisine de dayanmaktadır. Öte yandan, Sovyet sonrası Gürcistan'da kilise-devlet ilişkisini anlamada, José Casanova'nın dinin modern toplumdaki yerini anlamak üzere geliştirdiği kuramsal çerçeveden yararlanılmıştır. Özellikle, Casanova'nın dinin kamusal alana dönüşü (İng. deprivatization) ile ilgili kavramsal yaklaşımı temel alınmıştır. Modernist anlayışta, toplumun modernleşmesiyle birlikte dinin kamusal alanda görünürlüğünün ve toplum nezdinde öneminin azalacağı öngörülmüş, dinin özel alanla sınırlı kalacağı vurgulanmıştır. Casanova ise 1994 yılında kaleme aldığı *Modern Dünya'da Kamusal Dinler* (İng. Public Religions in the Modern World) kitabında özel alan ile sınırlı kalması öngörülen dinin, kendini kamusal alanda nasıl görünür kıldığını ve etkisini nasıl devam ettirdiğini anlatmıştır. Kilisenin, sanki bir sivil toplum örgütüymüş gibi özgürlük, eşitlik ve demokrasi gibi modern dünya değerlerini koruyarak, siyasi yönetimin almış olduğu kararların manevi boyutuna dikkat çekerek ve modern söylem içerisinde geleneksel yaşam şeklini savunarak kamusal alana dönüşünü meşru hale getirdiği en az üç örnekten bahsetmiştir. Bu kavramsal çerçeve, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin, Sovyetler Birliği dağıldıktan sonra, Gürcistan'ın toplumsal ve siyasal alanda güçlü bir aktör olarak var oluşunu anlamlandırmada ve bu var oluşu

Gürcistan'ın kendi tarihsel süreci içerisi içinde değerlendirmede önemli bir rehber olmuştur.

Tezde sırasıyla Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Sovyet öncesi, sonrası ve Sovyetler Birliği dağıldıktan sonraki durumuna değinilmiştir. Ardından, saha araştırmasında yapılan mülakatlarda öne çıkan dört ana tema çerçevesinde, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Gürcü toplumu nezdindeki önemine ve kamusal alanda var oluş biçimlerine dair değerlendirmeler yapılmıştır. Sonuç bölümünde ise Casanova'nın kuramsal çerçevesi Gürcistan özelinde değerlendirilmiştir.

Günümüz Gürcistan Cumhuriyeti, Karadeniz'in doğu kıyısında yer almaktadır. Güney Kafkasya Cumhuriyetleri'nden biri olan Gürcistan; Rusya, Azerbaycan, Ermenistan ve Türkiye ile sınır komşusudur. 2014 nüfus sayımı verilerine göre dört milyona yakın nüfusu olan Gürcistan, birçok farklı dini ve etnik gruplara da ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Ancak, çoğunluğun Ortodoks Hıristiyan olduğu Gürcistan'da, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi toplumsal ve siyasi alanda ayrı bir öneme sahiptir.

Gürcistan, Ermenistan'dan sonra Ortodoksluğu devlet dini olarak kabul eden ikinci devlettir. Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi ise Ortodoksluk' un 4.yy'da kabul edilmesinden kısa bir süre sonra, İncil'i Gürcü diline tercüme ettirmiş ve bu dönemde, Hıristiyan filozoflar tarafından kaleme alınan diğer birçok metinin Gürcüce'ye kazandırılmasını sağlamıştır. Dahası, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, 11. yüzyılda özerk statüye erişinceye kadar, dini ritüellerde Gürcü dili kullanımını teşvik ederek Gürcü dilinin korunmasında önemli bir rol oynamıştır.

Günümüz Gürcistan sınırları içinde kalan bölge, tarih boyunca Persler, Araplar, Moğollar, Selçuklular ve Osmanlılar gibi çeşitli imparatorlukların kontrolü altında kalmıştır. Çeşitli prensliklerden oluşan ve merkezi otoriteden yoksun Gürcistan, 11. yüzyılda Altın Çağ'ın başlamasıyla beraber siyasi birliğine kavuşmuştur. Ancak, 13. yüzyılda Moğol istilasıyla beraber Altın Çağ dönemi sona ermiş, Gürcistan siyasi birliği parçalanmıştır. Bu tarihten itibaren Gürcistan, Osmanlılar ve İranlılar arasında

uzun süren bir mücadeleye sahne olmuş, bölgenin kontrolüne ele geçirmek her iki imparatorluğun da odak noktası olmuştur. 1801'de, Gürcistan'ın Rus İmparatorluğu tarafından ilhakı ile Gürcistan Rus hâkimiyeti altına girmiştir. Farklı imparatorluklar tarafından yönetilmesine ve çeşitli Gürcü prenslikleri arasında dağılmış olmasına rağmen, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi Gürcüler arasında birlik duygusunu sağlayabilen yegâne kurum olmuştur. Diğer bir deyişle, merkezi bir Gürcistan Devleti yokken bile, kilise varlığını devam ettirmiş ve Gürcüleri bir arada tutmayı başaran önemli bir simge haline gelmiştir.

1811'de, Gürcistan'ın Ruslar tarafından ilhak edilmesinden 10 yıl sonra, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin özerkliği, Rus İmparatorluğu tarafından kaldırılmış ve Gürcü Kilisesi, Rus Ortodoks Kilisesi'ne bağlanmıştır. Rus İmparatorluğu tarafından ciddi bir kontrol ve baskıya maruz kalmasına rağmen, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, Gürcüleri bir arada tutmuş ve Gürcü milliyetçiliğine eklemlenmeyi başarmıştır. Öyle ki, 1917 Bolşevik Devriminden kısa süre sonra Rus Ortodoks Kilisesi'nden ayrıldığını belirtmiş ve bağımsızlığını ilan etmiştir. Böylece, 100 yılı aşkın Rus İmparatorluğu egemenliğinden sonra, 1918'de Gürcistan'ın siyasi bağımsızlığına kavuşmasını da tetiklediği söylenebilir. 1918 yılında kurulan bağımsız Gürcistan yönetimi, Bolşevik hükümetinin Gürcistan'ı işgal ettiği 1921 yılında sona ermiş, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi de özerkliğini tekrar kaybetmiştir. Bu tarihten Sovyetler Birliği'nin 1991'de çöküşüne kadar Gürcistan, Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetleri Birliği (SSCB)'nin bir parçası olarak kalmıştır. Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi de Sovyet rejimi altında din karşıtı politikalara maruz kalmış, toplum hayatından koparılmıştır.

Sovyet rejiminin dinin kamusal alandan, hatta bireyin kişisel hayatından bile tamamıyla silinmesini amaçlayan din karşıtı politikaları, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında ve sonrasında kısmen yumuşatılmışsa da 1985 yılında Gorbaçev reformlarına kadar sürdüğü söylenebilir. Bu bağlamda, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi 1970'lerin sonundan başlamak üzere özellikle 1980'lı yıllarda Sovyet Rejiminin Sovyetleştirme politikaları karşısında, Gürcü etnik kimliğini ve özgün Gürcü kültürünü savunan önemli bir sembol haline gelmiştir. Bu sayede, Sovyetler

Birliği'nin dağılma sürecinde gittikçe yükselen Gürcü milliyetçiliğinin ve dolayısıyla Gürcü milli kimliğinin de ayrılmaz bir parçası haline geldiğini söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır.

Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından itibaren Sovyet sonrası Gürcistan'da yönetime gelen siyasetçiler, Rusya Federasyonu'ndan bağımsız bir Gürcü Devleti oluşturma çabasına girmişlerdir. Kilisenin Gürcü tarihindeki rolünü, gücünü ve Ortodoksluğun Gürcüler için önemini bilen Sovyet sonrası Gürcistan devlet başkanlarının ve siyasetçilerin, Gürcü milletini bir arada tutabilmek ve siyasi meşruiyet için Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'ni önemli bir araç olarak gördüklerini ve kullandıklarını söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Diğer bir ifadeyle, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, siyasi otorite tarafından bir meşruiyet kaynağı olarak görülmüştür. Bu sayede, bağımsız Gürcistan ulus-devlet inşa sürecinde, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi kendi gücünü pekiştirmeyi başarmış, kamusal alanda varlığını kabul ettirmiş, siyasi ve sosyal konularda söz sahibi olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, Gürcü milliyetçiliğinin ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelen Gürcü Ortodoksluğu, Sovyet rejimi sırasında büyük ölçüde kaybettiği etki alanına kavuşmuştur. Sovyet sonrası Gürcistan'daki kilise-devlet ilişkisini detaylı bir şekilde anlayabilmek için, Gürcistan yönetime gelen devlet başkanlarının incelemesi gerekmektedir.

Sovyet Sonrası bağımsız Gürcistan Devleti'nin ilk Cumhurbaşkanı Zviad Gamsahurdiya'dır. Gamsakhurdiya'nın seçim vaadi Sovyetler Birliği'nden bağımsız bir Gürcistan Cumhuriyeti kurmaktır. Bu vaadine Gürcü milliyetçilerinin vermiş olduğu destek sayesinde, 1991'de %86,5 oyla cumhurbaşkanı seçilmiştir. Gürcistan'da devam eden iç savaşın şiddetli bir hal alması ve ülke çapına yayılması sonucunda Gamsakhurdiya, göreve başlamasından sadece 10 ay sonra, Ocak 1992'de, Ermenistan'a kaçmak zorunda kalmıştır. Gamsakhurdiya'nın Ortodoksluğa karşı olumlu tavrı ve Ortodoksluğu Gürcü olmanın ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak görmesi, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin, kamusal alandaki varlığına olanak tanımış ve etkisini arttırmasına katkı sağlamıştır. Ancak, Gamsakhurdiya, Ortodoks Hristiyanlığının Gürcüler için önemini kabul etmesine rağmen, Patrik İlya II'nin otoritesine çoğu

zaman karşı çıkmış, onu eleştirmiştir. Gamsakhurdiya, İlya II'nin, Sovyet ideolojisini takip eden 'kızıl' bir rahip olduğunu ve bağımsız Gürcistan devletinin güvenliğine yönelik bir tehdit oluşturduğunu iddia etmiştir. Buna rağmen, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, Gamsakhurdiya döneminde Gürcü milliyetçilerin din temelli milliyetçilik anlayışları sayesinde ideolojik bir tanınma elde etmiştir. Kısacası, Ortodoks olma Gürcü olmanın en önemli parçalarından biri olmuştur. Bu durumun, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'ne Gürcü siyasetine müdahale olma imkânı kazandırdığını söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır.

1992'de askeri darbeyle Gamsakhurdiya'nın devrilmesinden sonra, Şevarnadze yönetimin başına geçmiş, daha sonra 1993'te cumhurbaşkanı seçilmiştir. Şevarnadze cumhurbaşkanlığının ilk yıllarından itibaren uluslararası kabul görmüş bir demokratik rejim kurma çabasına girmiştir. Bu, onun devam eden iç savaşa ve siyasi muhalefete rağmen, yetkisini güçlendirmesine izin veren uluslararası fonlara erişmesini sağlamıştır. Ancak 1990'lı yılların ikinci yarısından itibaren kötüleşen ekonomik durum, ülke çapına yayılmış yolsuzluk Sovyet sonrası Gürcistan'ın gelişimini engellemiştir. Özellikle 2003 cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimlerinde hile yapıldığının ulusal ve uluslararası sivil toplum örgütlerince kabul görmesiyle, Avrupa'dan Şevarnadze'ye gelen destek kesilmiştir. Yerini, 2003 Gül Devrimi ile ülke yönetimine gelen Batı yanlısı Saakaşvili'ye bırakmıştır. Şevarnadze döneminde oluşturulan 1995 Anayasası ile Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Gürcü tarihindeki önemine vurgu yapılmıştır. Anayasa'da Gürcistan'da din ve inanç özgürlüğünün Gürcistan Devleti tarafından garanti altına alınacağı belirtilmiş olsa da aynı anayasa Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Gürcü tarihindeki özel yerini kabul etmektedir. Kısacası, inanç özgürlüğü anayasa ile garanti altına alınmış ancak, Ortodoks Hıristiyanlıktan başka herhangi bir dinden ve Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi dışında herhangi bir kurumdan söz edilmemiştir. Bu, Gürcistan'ın ülkede var olan dinlere eşit mesafede yaklaşmaması olarak yorumlanabilir. Ayrıca, Şevarnadze döneminde, 2002 yılında, Devlet ve Kilise arasında *Concordat* olarak bilinen anayasal bir anlaşma imzalanmıştır. Bu anlaşma ile Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, Gürcistan yasalar önünde tüzel kişiliği olan tek dini kurum olmuş ve papazlara birçok ayrıcalık

tanınıştır. Bunlar arasında askerlik hizmetlerinden muaf tutulma, nikâh kıyma yetkisi, kullanılan mülklerin sahipliğini edinme, vergi muafiyeti, cezaevlerine giriş izni ve devlet okullarında yer edinme gibi birçok imtiyaz sayılabilir. Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'ne tanınan bu imtiyazlar, Gürcistan'daki diğer dini grupların hiçbirine tanınmamıştır.

2003 yılında gerçekleştirilen Gül Devrimi'nden sonra, 2004 yılında, Mihail Saakaşvili oyların yüzde 96'sıyla iktidara gelmiştir. Saakaşvili Ocak 2008'de yüzde 56,2 oyla ikinci defa Gürcistan Cumhurbaşkanı seçilmişse de siyasi gücünü kaybetmeye başlamıştır. Ağustos 2008'de yaşanan Rusya-Gürcistan savaşı ve bu savaş nedeniyle taahhüt ettiği reformları gerçekleştirememesi siyasi gücünü kaybetmesindeki en büyük etkenlerden birisidir. Saakaşvili'nin Batı'ya entegre olma hedefi çerçevesinde, Gürcistan'da demokrasinin gelişimini, azınlıkların temel hak ve özgürlüklerinin teminini, ekonominin iyileştirilmesini amaç edindiği söylenebilir. Saakaşvili, iktidarının ilk yıllarında bahsi geçen amaçlarını gerçekleştirmede kısmen başarılı olmuşsa da 2008 yılında Ağustos Savaşı'nın patlak vermesiyle siyasi otoritesi sarsılmış, dahası, savaş sonrasında ülkeyi saran ekonomik sorunlar, onun iktidarının sonunu hazırlamıştır. Bu durum, İvanişvili'nin 2012 yılında gerçekleştirilen parlamento seçimlerini kazanmasına katkıda bulunmuştur ve akabinde Saakaşvili'nin 10 yıllık cumhurbaşkanlığı 27 Ekim 2013'te yapılan cumhurbaşkanlığı seçimi ile sona ermiştir. Seçimi, oyların yüzde 62'sini alan Giorgi Margvelaşvili kazanmış ve Gürcistan Cumhuriyeti'nin dördüncü cumhurbaşkanı olmuştur. Gül Devrimi'yle büyük bir kamuoyu desteği kazanan Saakaşvili cumhurbaşkanlığının ilk yıllarında Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin desteğine ihtiyaç duymadığı iddia edilebilir. Bu bağlamda, Saakaşvili'nin cumhurbaşkanlığının ilk yıllarında Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi ile olan ilişkisi nispeten simgesel ve dengelidir. Ancak 2007 yılında cumhurbaşkanlığından istifasını talep eden sokak gösterileri ve 2008 Rusya-Gürcistan Savaşı, Saakaşvili iktidarının meşruiyetini sağlamak için Gürcü Kilisesi'nin desteğine ihtiyaç duymasına neden olmuştur. Sonuç olarak, Saakaşvili tam anlamıyla seküler bir devlet yapısı oluşturamamıştır. Seküler bir devlet inşa etme çabaları, 2005 yılında Genel Eğitim Yasası ve 2005 ile 2011 yıllarında azınlık

dinlerine de yasalar önünde tüzel kişilik statüsü verilmesine dair kanun değişiklikleri ile sınırlı kalmıştır.

Saakaşvili'nin ardından, Gürcistan'ın Batı yanlısı çizgisini devam ettiren Giorgi Margvelaşvili 2013 yılında iktidara gelmiştir. Daha önceki devlet başkanları gibi, Margvelaşvili'nin de Gürcü milli kimliği ile Ortodoks Hıristiyanlık arasında yakın bir bağ kurmaya devam ettiğini söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Margvelaşvili'nin devlet başkanlığı boyunca, dini azınlıkların ülke içindeki durumlarını iyileştirmek için attığı en somut adım, 2014 yılında Gürcistan Din Ajansı Başkanlığı'nın kurulması olmuştur. Kurumun internet sayfasında belirtildiği üzere, söz konusu kurumun öncelikli amaçları Gürcistan'daki dinlerin barış içerisinde bir arada tutmak, bunun için Gürcistan Hükümeti'ne tavsiyelerde bulunmak, yaşanan din temelli sorunlarda paydaşlarla iş birliği içinde bulunmak, Gürcistan'da din ve inanç özgürlüğü fikrinin ilerlemesine katkıda bulunmak ve Gürcülerin dine karşı tutumunu değerlendirmektir. Bunlara ek olarak, bu kurum, devlet bütçesinden Sovyet dönemindeki kayıplarını telafi etmek için Gürcistan'da geleneksel dinler olarak tanımlanan dört farklı dini gruba (Müslümanlar, Ermeniler, Katolikler ve Yahudiler) para tahsis etmekle yükümlüdür.

Genel olarak, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra iktidara gelen her bir cumhurbaşkanı döneminde siyasete müdahil olabilme kabiliyetini arttırdığı iddia edilebilir. Gamsahurdiya döneminde, dine dayalı Gürcü milliyetçiliği, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin siyasi ve toplumsal yapı içerisinde gücünü sağlamlaştırmasına sağlamıştır. Şevarnadze'nin görevi süresince, 1995 Anayasası Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Gürcü tarihindeki özel rolünü vurgulamış, 2002' de imzalanan *Concordat* ise Gürcü Kilisesi'ne yasal zemin çerçevesinde önemli imtiyazlar getirmiştir. Bu dönem, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin yasal statüsünün tamamen tanımlandığı bir dönem olarak da tanımlanabilir. Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, Saakaşvili döneminin ilk zamanlarında toplumsal ve siyasi alanda nispeten pasif olmuşsa da 2007'den itibaren Saakaşvili için kilise meşruiyet kaynağı haline gelmiştir. Bu bağlamda, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Gürcü siyaseti ve toplumu üzerindeki etkisini arttırdığını söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Margvelaşvili

devam eden yönetimi içerisinde Gürcistan'daki mevcut duruma bakıldığında, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin önemini ve Gürcistan milli kimliğinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olma durumunu sürdürdüğünü iddia etmek yanlış olmayacaktır. Birkaç küçük iniş çıkış olmasına rağmen, Sovyetler Birliği dağılmasından sonra Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi toplumsal ve siyasi alanda gücünü pekiştirebilmiştir.

Gürcistan'da gerçekleştirilen saha araştırmaları neticesinde, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin toplum ve siyaset nezdindeki önemine ilişkin dört ana başlık ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlardan ilki, Kilisenin Gürcüler için artan önemi ve Patrik'e duyulan güvendir. Patrik II. İlya 1977 yılından itibaren görev yapmaktadır. Göreve geldiği günden itibaren, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Gürcü halkına ulaşmasını ve Gürcü halkının da kiliseye katılımını sağlamak amacıyla dini ritüellerde Rusça yerine Gürcüce'ye önem vermiştir. Bunun yanında, kurum içindeki yolsuzluk, rüşvet gibi problemlerin çözümünde de önemli rol oynamıştır. Bu nedenle, Gürcü halkının güvenini, göreve başladığı ilk dönemden itibaren kazanmaya başladığı söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Sovyetler Birliği'nin 1991 yılında dağılması ile birlikte, bağımsız Gürcistan'ın en güvenilir resmi kurumu Kilise olmuştur. Yönetime gelen hükümetler, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'ni, sarsılan siyasi otoriteleri için bir meşruiyet kaynağı olarak görmüştür. Gerçekleştirilen mülakatlar neticesinde, Kilise'ye karşı duyulan bu güven duygusunun kilit noktalarından birinin Patrik II. İlya olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Gürcistan, Sovyet rejimi altındayken, Sovyet politikalarına karşı gelmesi, Gürcü dilini ve tarihini savunması, onu Gürcü milliyetçiliğinin de önemli bir parçası haline getirmiştir. Sovyetler Birliği dağıldıktan hemen sonra, Abhazlarla ve Osetlerle yaşanan iç savaşta ve bağımsız ülke olmanın getirdiği siyasi, ekonomik ve toplumsal sorunlar karşısında benimsediği tutum ve izlediği politikayla, Patrik kendisine duyulan güveni devam ettirebilmiştir. 2008 yılında Rusya Federasyonu ile yaşanan savaşta da iki ülke arasında kopan diplomatik ilişkilerin tekrar başlayabilmesi için arabuluculuk görevi üstlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda, Sovyetler Birliği dağıldıktan sonra ülkede yaşanan sorunlar karşısında, Patrik II. İlya'nın halka güven verdiği, istikrar havası sağladığı ve istikrarın sembolü olarak görüldüğünü belirtmek etmek yanlış olmayacaktır.

Yapılan mülakatlar neticesinde ortaya çıkan ikinci önemli tema, Kilise ve Avrupa değerleri arasındaki yaşanan gerginliktir. Gürcülerin en güvenilir kurum olarak gördüğü ve Gürcü geleneğinin korunması konusunda Gürcülere göre önemli bir sembol olan Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin Avrupa'ya ve Avrupa değerlerine karşı tutumu son derece önemlidir. Kilise'nin Avrupa Birliği (AB) üyeliği konusundaki genel tutumunun resmi söylemlerde olumlu görünmesine karşın, yapılan görüşmeler Kilise'nin Avrupa değerlerinin benimsenmesindeki gerçek tutumunun Gürcü kültürünün korunması ve sürdürülmesi ile ilgili önemli kaygılar taşıdığını ortaya koymaktadır. Kilise toplum içindeki önemi azaltabileceğini düşündüğü bazı Batı değerlerine karşı, din temelli karşı duruşunu açıkça ortaya koyabilmiş ve kamusal alanda varlığını gösterebilmiştir.

Yapılan mülakatlar neticesinde ortaya çıkan üçüncü tema ise Gürcistan'da dinler arasında bir hiyerarşisinin olduğudur. Daha önce belirtildiği gibi 1995 Anayasası'nın 9. maddesinde devletin din ve vicdan özgürlüğünü anayasal güvence altına aldığı ve kilisenin devlet işlerinden ayrıldığı belirtilmektedir. Ancak, aynı Anayasa Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin, Gürcü tarihindeki özel rolünü de tanımıştır. 2002 yılında da devlet ve kilise arasında imzalanan *Concordat* ile de Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'ne yasalar önünde tüzel kişilik olma hakkı tanınmıştır. Bu anlaşma, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'ne, Gürcistan'daki herhangi bir dinle paylaşmadığı benzersiz bir statü vermiştir. Anlaşmanın yürürlüğe girmesiyle birlikte Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi birçok ayrıcalıkla donatılmış, ayrıca Sovyet döneminde almış olduğu hasarlar için de devletten tazminat almaya başlamıştır. 2011 yılında azınlık dinlerine tüzel kişilik olabilme hakkı verilmişse de Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi *Concordat* ile elde ettiği ayrıcalıkları kullanmaya devam etmiştir. Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, 2014 yılında Gürcistan Din Ajansı Başkanlığı kurulmuştur. Geleneksel din olarak tanımlanan İslam, Musevilik, Ermeni Apostolik Kilisesi ve Katolik Kilisesi'ne Sovyet rejimi döneminde maruz kaldıkları zararın telafi etmeye yönelik tazminat verilmeye başlanmış ve devletle olan ilişkilerinin iyileştirilmesi hedeflenmiştir. Ancak, gerçekleştirilen mülakatlar neticesinde, Din Ajansı'nın bu misyonunu yerine getirmekte zorlandığı, belirlemiş olduğu hedeflerini gerçekleştiremediği ve Gürcü

Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin etkisi altında kalarak, işlevini yitirdiği dile getirilmiştir. Sivil toplum örgütlerinden uzmanlar, çeşitli dini azınlık gruplarının liderleri ve Din Ajansı yetkilileriyle yapılan mülakatlar neticesinde, Gürcistan'da azınlık dinlerinin devletten eşit muamele göremediklerini kanaatine varılmıştır. Öyle ki resmi anlamda birçok hakka sahipken, pratikte bu hakların hayata geçirilmesinde sorunlar yaşandığı belirtilmiştir. Araştırmanın verilerine göre, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi hem yasal olarak hem de halkın gözünde hiyerarşi sıralamasında birinci sırada gelirken, geleneksel dinler ikinci, geleneksel olmayan dinler ise bu hiyerarşini en alt katmanında oldukları ortaya çıkmıştır.

Saha araştırmasında ön plana çıkan dördüncü tema ise Kilise-Devlet ilişkisi ve Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin siyasete müdahalesi ile ilgilidir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra, bağımsız Gürcistan Devleti, Batı tarzında liberal, demokratik ve seküler bir devlet kurma hedefini benimsemiştir. Ancak daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, bu zorlu Sovyet sonrası dönüşüm sürecinde Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi otoritesi sarsılan siyasiler için önemli bir meşruiyet kaynağı haline gelmiştir. Böylece, siyasi hayata müdahale imkânına erişmiştir. Bu durum, Saakaşvili iktidarının ilk yıllarında kesintiye uğrasa da Saakaşvili'nin sarsılan siyasi otoritesi nedeniyle Kilise tekrar eski gücüne kavuşmuştur. Öyle ki, Saakaşvili'nin dini azınlık gruplarına çeşitli haklar sağlayan yasa çalışmaları çoğu zaman protesto edilmiş ve bu protestolar Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi tarafından desteklenmiştir. Bu bağlamda Kilise'nin özellikle siyasetçilerin otoritesi zayıfladığı ve meşruiyete ihtiyaç duyduğu dönemlerde, Gürcistan siyasetinde en etkili aktör olmayı sürdürmeye devam ettiği söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Bu durum, kilise-devlet ayrımına dayanan seküler bir devletin oluşumu için tehlike arz etmektedir.

Gürcüler için tarihsel öneme sahip olan Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, toplumsal hayatta kendine rahatça yer bulabilmiştir. Bu tarihsel önem ve Patrik'e duyulan güven, Kilise'nin etkisini dini konuların ötesine taşımasına izin vermiştir. Örneğin Patrik II. İlya 2007 yılında, iki veya daha fazla çocuğu olan Ortodoks ailelerinin yeni doğan çocuklarını vaftiz edeceğini duyurmuştur. Gürcistan'da azalmakta olan nüfusun arttırılması amaçlayan bu açıklama, Gürcüler tarafından destek görmüş, yeni doğan

çocuk sayısında artış sağlanmıştır. Kilise'nin dini işlevinin ötesine geçtiğinin önemli bir göstergesi olan bu tavsiye, Gürcüler tarafından kabul görmüş ve özel hayatlarına müdahale olarak algılanmamıştır ki bu, daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, Kilise'nin tarihi önemine ve Patrik'in sembolik önemine atfedilebilir. Gerçekleştirilen mülakatlarda, Kilise'nin toplumsal alanda etkinliğine ek olarak, Gürcistan siyasetinde de önemli bir yere sahip olduğu belirtilmiştir. Kilise'nin Gürcistan'ın Avrupa Birliği üyesi olma yolunda önemli bir yere sahip olması, geleneksel yaşam biçimine karşı olabilecek yasalarda protestolara katılması, protestoları organize edebilmesi ve siyasilerin kararlarıyla ilgili açıkça görüş bildirmesi seküler devlet anlayışına tehdit olarak görülmektedir. Ancak daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, bu tarz müdahaleler Gürcülerin çoğu için normal karşılanmakta ve kilise-devlet ayrımına bir tehdit olarak görülmemektedir. Bu bağlamda, Gürcistan'da Ortodoksluk, sekülerleşme tezinin öngördüğünün aksine, modernleşme ile birlikte kamusal alandan silinmemiş, bireyin özel yaşamı ile sınırlı kalmamış, aksine kendisine kamusal alanda bir alan yaratmıştır. Daha öncede vurgulandığı gibi, Casanova'nın dile getirdiği ve kendisinin meşru olarak değerlendirdiği dini kurumların kamusal alanda varoluş biçimi örnekleriyle örtüşmese de Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi de kamusal alandaki varlığını toplumu ilgilendiren konularda görüş bildirerek devam ettirebilmiştir. Kamusal alanda var olurken ise, tarihsel önemi ve Sovyet sonrası bağımsız Gürcistan ulus-devlet inşası sürecinde oynadığı rol sayesinde, evrensel, modern toplum değerlerini meşru bir zemin olarak kullanmaksızın, doğrudan dini değerlerden hareket ederek değerlendirmeler ve açıklamalarda bulunabilmektedir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, Gürcistan'da Kilise-Devlet ayrımının yasal olarak sağlanmış olmasına rağmen, fiilen hayata geçirildiğini söylemek mümkün görünmemektedir.

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