

Authoritarization and Resilience of Democratic Evolution of Georgia



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ABSTRACT: Untill recently Georgia was a leader of the euro-atlantic integration process among the formal soviet republics. But in 2022 unlike Ukraine and Moldova, it was denied the status of candidate member of EU. Despite the fact that she received candidate status in 2023 it is not clear whether the development of the country to democracy had stopped or not. This determined the purpose of the article to reveal the resilience of the democratic evolution of Georgia, which has not been studied yet.

The article is founded on the contextual holism. Using cyclical approach, by means of case study and historical chronological methods the democratic evolution of Georgia is studied. Uninterrupted character of it indicates the high resilience of this evolution. It has been continued even under the conditions of authoritarian regimes. Three cycles of democratization and three cycles of authoritarization is discerned and their chronological frameworks are determined. High resilience of democratic evolution is explained by the higher level of the democratic potential of Georgia, which stopped the strengthening of authoritarian pressure. Geographical proximity to Europe and Christianity

Added values of the article are : the detection of high resilience of the democratic evolution of Georgia and contribution of authoritarian regimes to the democratic evolution; investigation of the role of democratic potential and westernization in this process. Cycles of democratization is distinguished and their chronology established and the present phase of the transition to the democracy is identified. Variables of resilience of democratic evolution and authoritarianization are revealed. Influence of invasion of Russia in Ukraine on democratization is studied.

KEYWORDS: democracy, democratization, regime, authoritarianism, authoritarization

I. INTRODUCTION

Untill recently Georgia was considered a leader in the pursuing a policy of Euro-Atlantic integration in the post-Soviet space. It signed an association agreement with the European Union in 2014 and had better scores on freedom house scale than Ukraine and Moldova. But unexpectedly, these indicators deteriorated, and in 2022 Georgia, unlike Ukraine and Moldova, was denied the status of a candidate member of the European Union. Georgia has clearly been affected by the third wave of authoritarianism, but it is not clear whether it stopped moving towards democracy or not. This determined the purpose of our article: to determine the resilience of democratic evolution of Georgia.

Democratic optimism is changing with pessimism in the face of strengthening of authoritarian tendencies which some researchers identifies with the third wave of autocratization(Boese, Edgell, Hellmeier, Maerz and Linberg 2021; Gershewski 2021). But unlike the first two waves in third one democracy loses its features gradually under the veil of law long before the breaking down. To observe the gradual disappearance of democracy Luhrmann and Lindberg offer new method identifying autocratization episodes, which is relied on the Electoral Democracy Index (Luhrmann and Lindberg 2019). The states affected by the third wave remain much more democratic than their predecessors in the first two waves (Luhman and Lindberg 2011). In our view, this can be explained by the increased level of democratic potentials of present societies, which resist autocratization and hinders its deepening. This can be observed in Georgian case.

Democratic potential of society includes not only democratic institutes, but also corresponding behaviours and moods, economics, culture, intellectual, psychological and moral climate of society cumulative effect of which is responsible governance. Abovementioned approach to the identification of autocratization process has institutional character. It makes it possible to discern process of disruption of democracy by observing the erosion of its institutions. But it says nothing about its causes. It doesn't answer the question "Why?". To answer this question, it is necessary to take into account societal context of democratic institutes. Revealed deficiencies of institutional approaches to the investigation of democracy in the case of CEE, put on the agenda the investigation

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of contextual aspects of democracy, and “need for an interdisciplinary sintezis”, by means of “contextual holism” (Cianetti, Dawson and Hanley 2018, 256). This is of particular importance for the study of new regimes that emerged as a result of the collapse of communism. Collapse of real socialism means the implementation of total changes in all spheres of public life which goes far beyond the concept of democratization and form a significant context which influences it. This determined our interdisciplinary approach to the investigation of democratic evolution of Georgia in the large societal context by means of contextual holism.

The conflict between democratic and authoritarian vectors of development determined the features of the political development of modern Georgia which took pendulum like character.

Vectors of development we defined as direction and strength of change. Due to the abovementioned conflict Georgia periodically moved from the democratization to authoritarianism and returned back to the democratization. In our view, in the course of more than thirty years of its independent, Georgia has gone through two cycles of democratization and three authoritarianisms. Since 2012 Georgia functions in the third cycle of democratization under the strengthening pressure of autocratization. According to the chronological data the duration of authoritarian cycles significantly exceeded the duration of the first two democratization phases. *In this regard question arises of how this pendulum like development is connected with democratization and whether or not the country stopped democratic development under authoritarian regimes.* We will try to answer these questions using cycle approach to the investigation of the development of political regime of Georgia. We define political cycles as the recurrence of definite mode of interaction between authority and society. But in contrast to Hale (Hale 2005) who considers the recurrence of authoritarian rules in the post-Soviet space as simple mechanical change of one government with another, *we prove that the swing of the political pendulum to the autocracy does not mean the end of the democratic development. The every swing from the democratization (except of Gamsaxurdia’s rule) led to the increase of democratic resources and enlarged democratic potential of the country.* Using case study we discern different cycles of political development of the country, their features and influence on the democratic evolution.

We define Democratic resources as totality of all the means necessary to establish public control over the government and the functioning of responsible government- political parties, NGO-s, democratic legislation, corresponding behaviours, and etc. Democracy is the only regime where a legitimate struggle is permanently going on publicly with the participation of the broad masses of people. Democratic resources contribute to such struggle. Their quality and quantity form democratic potential of society. Resilience of democratic evolution of Georgia is determined by the high level of its democratic potential, which we operationalize by the variable- level of westernization- indicator of which is Westernization index on the westernization scale of Strategisteast, which shows dynamics of westernizations of the formal soviet republics, except of Russia. Level of democracy is operationalized by the level of the freedom in the society, indicator of which is dynamics of freedom indexes on the Freedom House scale.

Added values of our article are: the detection of the resilience of the democratic evaluation of Georgia and its source-comparatively high level of democratic potential; investigation of the role of the authoritarian regimes in the increase of democratic potential of the country and the role of the westernization of the country in the resistance to the authoritarian pressure; discerning the phases of democratization in the contemporary Georgia and their chronology.

II. WESTERNIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Democratization is not only the result of bargaining between elites or constitutional engineering but, first of all, the value orientations of society. They lead people to demand from government to respond to their requests. The sources of such behaviour are self-expression values. In the Inglehart and Welzel views, “because effective democracy is what people are actually seeking when they emphasize self-expression values, we expect these to be even more closely linked with effective democracy than with formal democracy” (Inglehart and Welzel 2005,12). Democracy requires definite mode of behaviour of society which is closely associated with the modernization, which means convergence with western civilization- westernization. Strategisteast have elaborated Westernization index which measures the level to which post-Soviet countries and societies with the exception of Russia, have adopted, accepted, or were permeated by Western culture. It assesses the adoption and implementation of the Western model by looking at five key areas, which in the view of the organization are most critical to examine: 1. Political Westernization; 2. Economic Westernization; 3. Legal Westernization; 4. Language and cultural Westernization; 5. Lifestyle Westernization (Strategisteast 2022, 8). The index is limited to the most critical five areas, but it doesn’t include all the elements which are important for the more precise measurement of the Westernization. Therefore the areas of the observation could be expanded for a more perfect analyzes.

On the Westernization scale, Georgia is in the group of middle ranking countries together with Moldova and Ukraine, which occupies space between most westernized and least westernized formal soviet countries. Leader group of westernization includes three baltic republics. Other seven formal soviet republics significantly lag behind the middle group. All the members of leader group are members of EU, represent consolidated democracies and are far ahead of the middle group on the Westernization index.

In June 2022, Ukraine and Moldova became candidates for membership in the European Union, despite the fact that Moldova is a member of Commonwealth of Independent States. Georgia, which was a leader in the implementation of the policy of European integration in the post-Soviet space, was awarded only a European perspective. This makes it relevant to compare Georgia’s achievements in the westernization and democratization with Ukraine and Moldova.

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A. Dynamics of westernization and freedom indexes of Georgia

In 2018, Georgia ranked fourth among the former Soviet republics in terms of westernization with 62 points out of 100. Estonia was first with 93 points, second Lithuania (85) and third Latvia (82). Moldova ranked fifth after Georgia with 56 points, Ukraine sixth (54). (Strateast 2022, 14). Armenia ranked seventh with 48.5 points. The westernization index of Georgia during two years (2018-2020) increased by two points from 62 (2018) to 64 (2020), Ukraine by 4.5 from 54 (2018) to 58.5 (2020), Moldova by 3 points from 56 (2018) to 59 (2020). This indicator increased also in Armenia from 48.5 (2018) to 51 (2020). In 2020-2022 Georgia's westernization index was not changed and remained the same -64. If the scores of Georgia stopped growing, the indexes of Ukraine and Moldova continued to increase. Moldova outstripped Georgia by 1.5 points and occupied its position with 65.5 points. Georgia moved back and occupied fifth position together with Ukraine, whose index improved and became equal to Georgia's (64). Westernization of Armenia weakened by three points from 51 to 48 in 2022 (Strateast 2022, 14).

From the above data, it can be concluded that in 2018-2022 the westernization index of Georgia increased, but due to the fact that the pace of this growth lagged behind the pace of strengthening westernization of Moldova and Ukraine, Georgia lost leadership among these republics and occupied second place together with Ukraine after Moldova. Over these four years, the westernization of Moldova has increased by ten points, Ukraine by 9.5, and Georgia by 2.

Georgia's 2018 westernization index 62 approached index of freedom of the same year on the Freedom House scales-63. Georgia's freedom index was one point ahead of its westernization index. But already in 2019, the freedom index of Georgia fell by two points and became 61 ([Freedom House 2020](#)).

In 2020, the freedom index of Georgia continued further worsening, but its rate was decreased by one point from 61 to 60. In 2021 the rate of fall of the freedom index accelerated again by two points from 60 to 58 and stopped there. The index of 2021 wasn't changed in 2022 and remained at 58 (Freedom House 2023). Comparison of dynamics of the westernization and freedom indexes of Georgia show that the westernization index changed in the opposite direction to the freedom index. Georgia's freedom index decreased while the westernization index increased. The freedom index of Georgia for four years (2018-2022) decreased by five points and after that its change stopped. During the same period (2018-2022), the westernization index increased by two points. But this growth occurred in the first two years (2018-2020) and stopped at the same level in the next two years (2020-2022). Comparison of the directions of dynamics of westernization and freedom indexes make it possible to assume that there is a certain relationship between the level of westernization and the level of freedom and suggest that the fall in the freedom index was stopped by a relatively high level and growth of westernization. Deterioration of the freedom index means an increase of authoritarian pressure, and the growth of westernization index indicates an increase of the democratic potential of Georgia. Comparatively high level of democratic potential stopped the moving of the country to the authoritarian regime.

B. Comparison of the Main Components of Westernization of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

The features of democratic potential of Georgia can be detected by a comparison of such characteristics of the former Soviet countries as 1. Political westernization; 2. Number of speakers of English, French, German, Spanish; 3. Positive public attitudes toward the West; 4. Westernization of law; 5. Independence of the judiciary; 6. Number of pro-Western parties represented in the parliament; 7. Constitutional compliance with the requirements of the Venice Commission; 8. Human rights legislation; 9. Number of acquittals. Especially interesting is comparison of Georgia – the country of European perspective with the candidates for membership in the EU – Moldova and Ukraine.

Political westernization. The three Baltic republics are leading on the scale of political westernization. Estonia and Lithuania ranked first with 22.5 points from 25; Latvia second (21.5), Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova third (18.5), Armenia fourth (11.5). As we see on the scale of political westernization, Georgia has equal points with Ukraine and Moldova and together with them ranks third. These three republics are significantly ahead of the rest of the post-Soviet republics. Their lagging behind the leaders is much less than the lagging behind other republics from them.

Number of speakers of English. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine ranked second in terms of the number of speakers of English, French, German and Spanish with 3.5 scores out of 6, after Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (5). Armenia and Belarus were slightly behind Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova and ranked third with 3 points. (Strateast 2022, 34).

Georgia, together with Ukraine and Moldova, ranked second in terms of knowledge of European languages. They are at 1.5 points lagged behind the leaders - the Baltic republics and slightly ahead of Armenia and Belarus by 0.5 points.

Positive public attitudes towards the west. In terms of positive public attitudes towards the west, Georgia, together with Latvia and Estonia, ranks second with 6 points out of 7 and is half a point behind Lithuania, which ranked first with 6.5 points. Ukraine and Moldova rank third with 5 points (Strateast 2022, 23).

In terms of positive public attitudes towards the west, Georgia is ahead of Ukraine and Moldova.

Number of pro-Western parties. Georgia, together with Ukraine and Moldova, is ahead of all the former Soviet republics except for the Baltic ones in terms of the number of pro-Western parties represented in parliament. According to this parameter, they received 6.5 points and are half a point behind Latvia and Estonia, which received 7 points out of eight. Estonia ranks first with 7 points. Armenia, which ranks 2.5 is 4 points behind Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova.

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In terms of representation of pro-Western parties in parliament Georgia has equal scores with Ukraine and Moldova.

Westernization of law. In terms of westernization of law Georgia ranks fourth after the Baltic republics with 14 points out of 25. First ranks Estonia (23), second Latvia (20.5), third Lithuania (20). Georgia is half a point ahead of Moldova, which ranks fifth with 13.5 point and Ukraine ranking sixth with 13 Point. Armenia ranks seventh with 11.5 point, Uzbekistan eighth (8.5), Kirgistan ninth (8), Kazakhstan tenth (5.5), Azerbaijan and Belarus eleventh(4), Tajikistan and Turkmenistan twelfth with 3 point. (StrategEast 2022, 23).

In terms of westernization of law Georgia is ahead of Ukraine and Moldova.

Independence of the judiciary. In terms of independence of the judiciary, Georgia has fourth position after the three Baltic republics with 3.5 points out of 7 and was ahead of Ukraine and Moldova by half a point. Both republics rank fifth with 3 point. Between three Baltic republics Estonia ranks first with 7 point out of seven, Lithuania ranks second (6.5), Latvia third (5.5). (StrategEast 2022, 24).

In terms of independence of the judiciary Georgia is ahead of Ukraine and Moldova.

Constitutional compliance with the requirements of the Venice Commission. Georgia had the lower indicators in the field of constitutional compliance with the requirements of the Venice Commission. By 3 points it lags behind not only the three Baltic republics and Moldova and Ukraine, but also Armenia, which by 5 points took third position together with Ukraine and left behind Moldova (4.5), which came out in fifth position. Estonia and Lithuania with 6 points rank first, Latvia second (5.5), Armenia and Ukraine third (5), Moldova fourth (4.5), Georgia sixth with 3 points. (StrategEast 2022, 23).

In terms of constitutional compliance with the requirements of the Venice Commission Georgia lags behind Ukraine and Moldova.

Human rights legislation. In field of human rights legislation Georgia ranks fifth with 3.5 out of 6 together with Moldova. They lag behind Ukraine which ranks fourth with 4 points. Latvia rank first with 5.5, Estonia second with 5, Lithuania third with 4.5. Armenia was half a point behind Georgia and Moldova and was in sixth position with 3 points (StrategEast 2022, 25).

In the field of human rights legislation Georgia lag behind Ukraine but has equal scores with Moldova.

The number of acquittals. In terms of the number of acquittals, Georgia ranks second with 4 points out of 6 after Estonia (5). Latvia ranks third with 4 points, Lithuania fourth (3), Moldova fifth (2.5), Armenia, Kirgizistan, Uzbekistan rank sixth with two points; Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine rank seventh with 1 points; Tajikistan and Turkmenistan rank eighth with 0.5 points. (StrategEast 2022, 26).

In terms of acquittals, Georgia is ahead of Ukraine and Moldova.

Among abovementioned nine characteristics of the westernization, in four cases Georgia was ahead of Ukraine and Moldova: positive public attitudes towards the west, independence of the judiciary, westernization of law, number of acquittals.

In three cases- political westernization, knowledge of European languages, number of pro-Western parties represented in parliament – Georgia has equal scores with Moldova and Ukraine. In one case - index of Westernization- Georgia lags behind Moldova, and in one case - human rights legislation- it lags behind Ukraine. As abovementioned statistics show, despite the fact that Georgia lags behind Ukraine and Moldova in terms of the pace of westernization, it is ahead of them in terms of some significant indicators of westernization. *The leadership in the field of positive attitudes toward the West as well as independence of judiciary are of particular importance, which determines active resistance of the society to the authoritarian pressures.*

It should be noted that, in 2022, Georgia had higher indicators of democracy compared to the candidate countries for membership in the European Union. (Silagadze 2022).

The relatively high level of democratic development of Georgia, as well as Moldova and Ukraine, can be explained by their geographical location, proximity to Europe. The successes of democracy in the three Baltic republics show the importance of this factor for democratic development. Location on the shores of the Black Sea and Christian culture contributed to the development of contacts with the West, the dissemination of information about the West in Georgia. This increased the cultural influence of the West on Georgia where the source of democratic development is the Westernization of society. Westernization strengthens the influence of the democratic vector of development on the political system of the country. Its influence at different stages of the development of independent Georgia was not the same. It was weaker in the early stages of post-Soviet Georgia's history, during the first cycles of democratization and authoritarianism.

III. POLITICAL CYCLES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGIA'S DEMOCRATIC POTENTIAL

Independent Georgia emerged as a result of the liberalization and democratization of the USSR. This was the result of a long historical process of the decomposition of real socialism, which took place in all spheres of society: economy, culture, socio-stratification system, politics and represented a totality of interconnected and mutually influencing anti-systemic changes, as a result of which the liberalization of the regime occurred, which turned into democratization when the CPSU lost its constitutional status (March 1990) and the first democratic elections were held in Georgia (October 1990). Under the conditions of perestroika and glasnost, which can be identified as a liberalization phase of the regime transformation process, democratic trend of development emerged, which strengthened in independent Georgia. During this period, such significant resources of democracy as the self-

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organization of society in an autonomous mode, freedom of the media, the weakening of political control over society, the legitimization of a public mass peaceful struggle for power, the institutionalization of a political conflict, etc., were formed.

The first cycle of democratization of Georgia lasted only 14 months (March 1990 - April 1991) and transformed into the authoritarianism, which entered Georgia into the long period of authoritarian regimes led by the charismatic leaders.

Development of new forms of political regimes determined the proliferation of new terms and concepts, which rises possibility of conceptual stretching. Therefore it is necessary to avoid excessive proliferation of new terms and concepts (Collier and Levitsky 1997, 451). But at the same time we can't refuse creation of them to distinguish new regimes. One of the such concept is electoral authoritarianism, which corresponds to the features of Georgian authoritarian regimes.

There is a consensus among the researchers, that electoral authoritarianisms are not transition phases, but regime types (Bogaards 2009, 423). But they may facilitate gradual processes of democratization by elections and lead to democracy through sudden collapse of authoritarianism (Scheldler 2006, 15). This we can observe in the case of Georgia.

A. First and Second Cycles of Authoritarianism and Transition to the Second Cycle of Democratization

Each subsequent cycle of authoritarianism weakened the influence of the Soviet past on the political system of Georgia. After the end of one cycle of authoritarianism, the country moved into another cycle of democratization. But political and electoral cycles do not coincide with each other. Elections performed the function of legitimizing authoritarian rule, the source of which was the high expectations of the electorate and the charisma of national leaders. As a result of their weakening, the political system was moving into another cycle of democratization. At the same time it should be noted that such authoritative leaders as Shevardnadze and Saakashvili pursued a policy of European integration, which contributed to the development of the country's democratic potential. But the implementation of such a policy was possible only under conditions of a certain level of Westernization of society.

The first cycle of authoritarianism - the conservative authoritarianism of Z. Gamsakhurdia (April 1991-December 1991) replaced the first cycle of democratization (March 1990- April 1991). It started with the election of Gamsakhurdia as a president of Georgia by the Supreme Soviet in April 1991 by the indirect elections. Second time he was elected by the direct elections. In 26 May of 1991 with 87% of the votes.

Gamsakhurdia hindered Georgia's movement towards democracy, but at the same time created the first structures of an independent Georgian state and transferred the development of the society toward the independence. Under the conditions of weak state Gamsakhurdia couldn't overcome resistance of democratic potential of the society. As the result of this he lost his power and another cycle of authoritarianism began under the leadership of Ed. Shevardnadze (1992-2001). He comes to power by a coup d'état and a civil war. The unconstitutional seizure of power and the violence that was the result of the coup d'état slowed down the transition to the stage of democratization, as a result of which the political transformation of the country stopped at the phase of liberalization - liberalized electoral-authoritarianism emerged. It corresponded to the first phase of transition from authoritarianism to democracy - the liberalization, which in the transition precedes second phase of transition - the democratization, which may be transformed into democracy or returned back to authoritarianism. It was regime of electoral authoritarianism, with strong democratic vector. This explains many features of the rule of Shevardnadze.

His regime radically changed the face of Georgian society as a result of privatization and Westernization policy. The activity and influence of the non-governmental sector increased significantly, which acted energetically, became diverse, influential and aggressive. The influence of the NGO on the formation of the agenda has increased. In this the cooperation of the non-governmental organizations with the media and political parties played a significant role. They lobbied for significant bills and shaped public opinion. Non-governmental organizations filled in the vacuum created by the weakness of political parties by the proposal of a well-defined agenda and basic ideas, that influenced the behaviour of the political elite. Investigative journalism and practice of democratic coexistence developed, which was expressed in the growth of publicity and social activity and their institutionalization. Shevardnadze pursued policy of liberalization of the society. In the period of his rule Soros foundation and other international organizations started their activity in Georgia. They played significant role in the development of civic society and social activity. The process of changing public opinion and building a democratic state began. Democratic and liberal constitution was adopted, government censorship disappeared, and self-censorship was significantly weakened, a constitutional court was created and began to work actively. As a result of all this, Georgia entered the second cycle of democratization (2001-2003), when the ruling party lost the municipal elections, lost control over the Georgian capital Tbilisi and the constitutional majority in parliament, and Shevardnadze refused to run for the presidency for the third time.

B. "The Rose Revolution" and the Third Cycle of Authoritarianism

This second cycle of democratizations was terminated by the so-called "rose revolution" which brought M. Saakashvili and his party, the United National Movement (UNM) to power. The third cycle of authoritarianism (2004-2012) began. Saakashvili beefed up the army and police, which became strongholds of his regime; significantly restricted the freedom of the media, established strict control over the courts, almost completely subjugated the parliament, brutally suppressed peaceful public protests, pursued an anti-union policy, restricted the freedom of labor and strikes (the organizers of the strike of Kutaisi metallurgists were arrested), a labor code was adopted that significantly limited the rights of those employed for the benefit of employers. Saakashvili pursued a

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tough criminal policy, as a result of which all criminal authorities were forced to leave the country. He significantly limited corruption in the lower and middle levels of government, but elite corruption remained.

On the one hand, Saakashvili strengthened his personal power and suppressed the democratic trend of development, but on the other hand, he strengthened the democratic potential of the country. This was facilitated by a course towards European integration, which contradicted the policy of strengthening his personal power. Such a policy significantly changed the ideological situation in the country, which did not correspond to the policy of strengthening authoritarian rule. The country's dependence on the United States and the European Union and the pro-Western political elite significantly limited Saakashvili's ability to completely destroy Georgia's democratic potential.

Despite the fact that Saakashvili pursued a policy of strengthening personal power, he contributed to the development of the democratic potential of the country: he strengthened the state potential of the country, which is of great importance for democratic development: "no democracy can work if the state lacks the capacity to supervise democratic decision making and put its results into practice" (Tilly 2007, 15). Under his rule, public consciousness has changed significantly as a result of the spread of democratic and liberal values in society, especially among young people. The reform of higher and secondary education played a significant role in this. *Of particular importance was the introduction of state funding of political parties.*

IV. THIRD CYCLE OF DEMOCRATIZATION

The policy of the strengthening authoritarian rule was at odds with the democratic potential of the country. Therefore in 2012, political party of Saakashvili, the United National Movement (UNM) lost its majority in parliament and went into opposition. As a result of this, third cycle of democratization began. This was of historical importance in terms of developing the democratic potential of Georgia: the former ruling party, for the first time in the history of post-communist Georgia, did not collapse, retained its electoral base and became the main opposition party. It controlled the strongest television company Rustavi 2 and the presidency until 2013, when Saakashvili's presidential term ended. This was facilitated by the ruling party Georgian Dream (GD), which pursued the policy of co-habitation with the UNM. Despite the fact that after 2012 there was no change of government in Georgia, the country still develops in the third cycle of democratization. *In our opinion, the criterion for the transition from this cycle to democracy should be considered not the number of changes of governments as a result of democratic elections, but the very fact of holding democratic elections, as a result of which significant political positions are taken.* Even in democratic countries, the same party can be in government for a long time. For example, the Christian Democratic Party in the Federal Republic of Germany was in government for 16 years until it was defeated in 1998 (Hancock et al. 2007, 232). In closed democracies the cost of removing the government from power turn out to be so high for voters, that such a change doesn't occur for decades (Mau et al. 2007, 5-6). Because of this, in our view, while identifying regimes we must take into account not number of the cases when the government lost power but all features which describe the political system wholly and how the elections reveal real configuration of the political forces and people's attitudes to them. As Richard Snyder notes, "literature on democratic regimes places an overwhelming emphasis on the electoral process and thus overlooks other fundamental dimensions that are critical for analyzing regimes" (Snyder 2006, 220). But in the view of Przeworski a regime should not be classified as democratic if ruling party never loses elections. Without this, according to Sheldler, we can not know whether a ruling party would be willing to give up office peacefully in the case of electoral defeat (Sheldler 2006, 10). *To avoid such perspective it is necessary to hold the elections under the conditions of foreign pressure of democratic states, sufficient level of democratic potential and neutral state, which may be achieved during the peaceful and the legitimate conflict which precedes the elections during the previous period of time.*

A. First Elections in the Third Cycle of Democratization

For more than thirty years of the existence of independent Georgia, there has been a change of government three times. Except for the short-term rule of Gamsakhurdia, all other governments were in power for quite a long time. Shevardnadze's rule lasted 11 years (1992-2003), Saakashvili and the United National Movement governed 9 years (2003-2012). The Georgian Dream has been in power from 2012 to the present for 12 years (2012-2023). As the observing of elections showed, the winning of elections became more difficult from one election cycle to another for the Georgian Dream and resistance of the opposition increased. In our view Georgian elections approximately represent real proportion of influence of each party. Georgian Dream's candidate G. Margvelashvili won October 2013 presidential elections in the first round. He was congratulated by the candidate of the main opposition party United National Movement D. Bakradze and incumbent president M. Saakashvili. But 2014 Tbilisi mayoral elections were the first mayoral elections in the history of modern Georgia in which second round had to be held. It was determined by 50% threshold, which none of the candidates could pass. In the first round candidate of the Georgian Dream received 46.09%, Nika Melia from the United National Movement was second with 27.97%. Second round was won by Narmania who received 72.47 of the votes, Melia - 27.53%.

The position of mayor of Tbilisi is a politically important position. Its elections showed that the strategic situation in Georgia has changed: the charismatic leader, who always acted against the democratic vector of development, disappeared from the political

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scene and the process of depersonalization of politics begun; the importance of the independent behavior of the electorate increased significantly, as a result of which the government candidate could not win in the first round.

B. 2018 Presidential election

In 2018 Georgian opposition candidate nearly won the presidential election. In the first round ruling party candidate S. Zurabishvili received 615571 (38.64%) and couldn't pass 50% threshold. Opposition candidates G. Vashadze (UNM) and D. Bakradze (European Georgia) received 601.224 (37.74) and 174.889 (17.97) respectively. If UNM and European Georgia managed to nominate common candidate, the result of the first round might be different. Zurabishvili with 59.52% votes defeated Vashadze in the second round, who received 48.48% (Central Election Commission).

How can we explain the victory of Zurabishvili? Georgia's president is head of state with limited rights, but it has the right to pardon. Because of this if the candidate of the United National Movement won, Saakashvili, the ex-president of Georgia, who was arrested could be pardoned. Saakashvili's opponents and Georgian Dream voters who were confident that Zurabishvili would win did not show up in sufficient numbers in the first round to ensure Vashadze's defeat. Georgian Dream, which did not properly assess the significance of these elections and was sure that the candidate of the United National Movement would be defeated, joined the election campaign late on the side of Zurabishvili. *The unexpected success of the candidate of the United National Movement suddenly sobered up all the opponents of Saakashvili and his party. This was apparently facilitated by the fact that Vashadze clearly promised to pardon Saakashvili in the case of his victory in the election.* This is evidenced by the exit poll data, which was conducted by the American organization Edison Research on the order of the opposition television Rustavi 2, which was controlled by the party of Saakashvili, the United National Movement: in the second round, at the five o'clock S. Zurabishvili had 55% of the votes and Vashadze lagged behind her by ten percentage points 45% (Kupreishvili 2018). In the program of the opposition television Mtavari Archi "Kviris Accentebi" in March 23, 2019, G. Vashadze explained the loss of the elections by the opposition candidate by the lack of experience and human and financial resources. In his opinion, if they united in the first round with European Georgia, the opposition would have won in the first round. According to the public opinion survey conducted by the National Democratic Institute in December 2018, the situation in the electoral districts was mostly calm and there was no intimidation of the electorate. 71% of respondents believed that there were no party coordinators at the polling stations who demanded information from voters, according to 92% of them, the polling stations were in order, they were not overcrowded (83%), the situation at the polling stations was not intimidating (90%). *The fate of this election was largely decided by independent voter turnout.* 90% of the respondents were enthusiastic about the choice they made on election day in the first round; 87% of them were enthusiastic about the choice they made on election day in the second round; 66% voted against rather than for someone in the first round; 62% against rather than for someone in the second round (NDIa, 27).

C. Violence in the Political System

At the beginning of the third cycle of the democratization the government tried to minimize the intensity of violence in the political system and made concessions. Because of this at this time the violence in the system was significantly decreased. We can distinguish several cases that testify to this. In April 2019, after the locals threw stones at the special forces and broke expensive equipment in the Pankisi valley, no one was punished and the special forces were withdrawn from the valley (Pertaia 2019). In May 2018 Minister of Internal Affairs Gakharia apologized for the police action at a rally of youth who protested police raids in nightclubs, where drug dealers were arrested and some young people were detained for resisting the police. On the second day of the meeting, all administrative detainees were released (Khachapuridze 2018).

As the rating of the Georgian dream weakens, violence intensifies. The first such incident occurred after the 2018 presidential election. The opposition had particularly acute questions regarding it. They were confident in the victory of their candidate, who was supposed to pardon ex-president M. Saakashvili. But their expectations were not met. These elections were distinguished by grave violations, but despite this, in our opinion, they did not have such a scale as to decide the fate of the election. In this case activists and backers of the UNM tried to invade central election commission (GHN 2020) and water canons were used against them in the cold autumn night, which was the abuse of the police power.

The second incident of violence, the Gavrilov Night - the events of June 20-21, 2019, had more tragic consequences, when police had to use force against the participants of the rally in front of the parliament, a result of which were the casualties among the rally participants and bystanders as well as the police. What made the Dream in this case to turn to the violence and abandon the policy of consensus and compromise? The answer to this question was given in a statement by 39 non-governmental organizations, among which were such influential as the Association of Young Lawyers, International Transparency Georgia, the Open Society Foundation (Soros Foundation), etc. They accused the opposition leaders who, according to them, called for the seizure of the parliament that gave the police a reason to intervene in the demonstration. But during the beginning and the end of the operation, the actions of law enforcement agencies went beyond the boundaries of the law (MDF 2019). From the TV screens it was possible to watch how the demonstrators pulled out individual police officers from the ranks, they took away their shields, clubs and beat them. Several hours police stood and held back the attack of the active part of the demonstrators, which consisted of a minority of the demonstrators, and only after that went on the offensive. As a result of Gavrilov's Night, Chairman of the Parliament

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I. Kobakhidze, Deputy of Parliament Z. Kucnashvili, resigned. In order to defuse the situation, the leader of the Georgian dream B. Ivanishvili announced that his party supported the introduction of a full proportional system, which was demanded by the opposition and supported by the majority of parliament (Intepress News 2019). But as soon as the situation was defused, the majority of parliament failed to pass a bill that assumed the transition to a full proportional system in 2020. This led to another round of deputies leaving the faction of the ruling party. The ranks of the majority left 12 deputies, including the first deputy chairman of the parliament, T. Chugoshvili. As a result, the faction of the ruling party was reduced from 116 to 92 people.

D. Increase of the Role of the Parliament and Dynamics of Party Ratings

During the third wave of democratization, significantly increased the role of parliament in the political life and its influence on the executive power. For the first time in the history of independent Georgia, the investigative committee of the parliament began investigating the activities of the police and prosecutors under the leadership of the real opposition. Also, for the first time in the history of modern Georgia, police officers and prosecutors were interrogated in parliament and as a result of the work of this commission, the Attorney General resigned and a person who, according to the opposition, was patronized by the government, was arrested. The parliamentary opposition forced the government to cancel the permits for the reconstruction and transformation of the Poti port into a deep-sea port, to withdraw from the parliament the bills on the appointment of judges and the production of marijuana, which, apart from the general public, was also opposed by the Georgian Orthodox Church. Control of the constitutional majority by the opposition makes it possible to determine the result of impeachment by the opposition parties. This makes president S. Zurabishvili more independent from the government and makes it possible to act against the will of the ruling party - Zurabishvili pardoned opposition journalist N. Gvaramia, continued meetings with European leaders without the permission of the government, under the conditions of the possible impeachment.

The domination of the foreign policy issues in the political agenda, seriously damages the influence of the opposition. Socio-economic issues that most concern the majority of the society and are more transparent are poorly represented in the parliament, which weakens the mobilization potentials of the opposition parties. Under these conditions the conflicts between the elite and the counter-elite, mutual accusations negatively affect the ratings of both the ruling and opposition parties. A year before the 2020 parliamentary election, in July 2019, 60% of those polled described the government's activities as bad (NDIc, 8). Despite this, the ruling Georgian Dream party enjoyed more public support than any of the opposition parties -19% of respondents considered the ruling party closest to themselves (NDIc, 26), but the number of such respondents was decreasing: in December 2018, there were 27% of such respondents (NDIa, 70), in April 2019 21% (NDIb, 29). During this period, the main opposition party, the United National Movement (UNM), lagged far behind the ruling party: only 9% of respondents considered the UNM closest to themselves (NDIc,26). In April 2019, there were 15% of such respondents (NDIb, 29), in December 2018 -12% (NDIa,70). The third place was shared between European Georgia/Free Democrats and the Alliance of Patriots, each of which was considered closest to them by 4% of the respondents (NDIc, 26). In April 2019, 4% of respondents considered European Georgia closest to them (NDIb, 29), in December 2018 -3% (NDIa, 70). In April 2019 3% of respondents considered Alliance of Patriots closest to them (NDIb, 29), in December 2018- 3% (NDIa, 70). The number of those respondents who did not consider any party close to themselves in 2019 grew. In July there were 45% of such respondents (NDIc, 26), in April 37% (NDIb, 29). In July 2019 20-21% of respondents were going to vote for the Georgian Dream (NDIc, 37), in April 20% (NDIb, 35). In July 9-10% wanted to vote for the United National Movement (NDIc, 37) and in April - 15% (NDIb,35). In 2019 during the four months (April-July) the United National Movement lost a significant part of its potential electorate (it decreased from 15% to 9%), while the ruling party managed to maintain its electoral base in the same period by 20%. During the same time, European Georgia and the Union of Patriots of Georgia were also able to maintain their electoral base (4%) (NDIc, 37). In April 2019, both parties enjoyed the same support (4%). (NDIb, 35). In July 2019, 19-17% of respondents were not going to vote for any party (NDIc, 37).

E. 2020 Parliamentary Election: How Free and Fair it Was ?

In order to strengthen democracy in Georgia, the introduction of a full proportional system is of particular importance, which can put the opposition and the ruling party on an equal footing. That is why the ruling parties had always prevented the introduction of such a system. The mixed electoral system that existed prior to the 2020 parliamentary elections unfairly distributed mandates between parties and increased the influence of money on the electoral process. They contributed to the representation of the big business in the parliament and the merging of economic power with political, the estrangement of parliamentarians from their constituents. In accordance with the old electoral system, out of 150 members of parliament, 77 were elected by party lists, 73 by majoritarian system. In 2016, Georgian Dream received 46.6% of the vote and was supposed to have 73 seats in parliament, but in fact, with the help of the majoritarian system, it received 115 seats and a constitutional majority.

The communications between the majoritarian deputies and their voters are very weak. According to the survey conducted by the National Democratic Institute, which was published on January 30, 2019, only 26% of respondents knew the name of their majoritarian deputy (JAM news). In the case of Georgia, the majoritarian system slows down the development of democratic elections. It retains the influence of the ruling party. It is this that can explain the failure of adoption of full proportional system under the conditions of declining ratings of the ruling party- Georgian Dream. This became the stimulus for a new wave of protest,

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which included US senators, who wrote several letters to representatives of the Georgian ruling elite. After this and the visit of the Chairman of the Parliament to the United States, on March 8, 2020, the opposition and the Georgian Dream at the US Embassy came to an agreement to hold parliamentary elections according to the 120/30 system, to elect 120 deputies by the proportional system, and thirty by the majority system (Gazdeliani 2020).

The 2020 parliamentary elections were held on the basis of an electoral system that was the result of a consensus between the ruling party and the opposition. The Georgian dream was forced to retreat and weaken the majoritarian component in favor of the proportional one, which was in the interests of the opposition. The ruling party also conceded on the issue of electoral threshold, which was defined as 1%. It was an unprecedented concession to the opposition. The compensation for these concessions was the retain of the majoritarian constituencies in the electoral system. But the ruling party also made concessions on this issue, and instead of 76 majoritarian constituencies, only 30 were left.

In accordance with the new system, out of 150 parliamentarians, 30 were to be elected in majoritarian districts and 120 in proportional ones. As a result of this, in the 2020 parliamentary elections, the opposition received as many seats as the ruling party - 60. *The Georgian dream achieved its superiority due to the victory in majoritarian regions.* In proportional elections the Dream got 48.22% of the votes and 60 mandates; the bloc "United National Movement - United Opposition - Strength in Unity" - 27.18% - 36 mandates; "Bakradze, Ugulava, Bokeria - European Georgia - Freedom Movement" - 3.79% - 5 mandates. "Lelo-Mamuka Khazaradze" - 3.15% - 4 mandates; Bloc "Giorgi Vashadze - Builder of Strategy" 3.15% - 4 mandates; "David Tarkhan Mouravi, Irma Inashvili - Alliance of Patriots of Georgia" - 3.14% - 4 mandates; "Girchi" - 2.89% - 2 mandates; "Aleko Elisashvili-Citizens" - 1.33% - 2 mandates; "Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labor Party" - 1.00% - 1 mandate (civil.ge). 8 opposition political parties received the same number of mandates as the ruling Georgian Dream Party - 60. If we subtract from these 60 mandates 4 mandates of the pro-Russian party - Alliance of patriots of Georgia, the opposition still had 46 seats and the possibility of controlling the constitutional majority - 113 votes. The government party won all 30 majoritarian districts and received 90 mandates, but despite this, it could not collect as many mandates as necessary to win a constitutional majority in the parliament. The Dream barely managed to win in the majority constituencies. In the first rounds, it could not even win half of them. Out of the 30 constituencies, it won only thirteen in the first round. The remaining 17 districts, the Dream won only in the second rounds under the conditions of a boycott of the opposition, which did not recognize the election results. Therefore, it is necessary to establish whether or not the election results reflected the will of the voters. But according to Linc "often particularly difficult are judgements about whether elections have been free and fair, both in the ability of opposition parties and candidates to campaign and in the casting of the votes" (Diamond 2002, 28). To resolve this problem we compare the election results with the data of public poll conducted by the International Republican institute (IRI), in August 2022, two months before the election.

In August, 33% were going to vote for the Dream; 15% for the United National Movement; 4% for European Georgia/ Free Democrats for New Georgia; For New Georgia – Strategy Aghmashenebeli 4%, 3% for Alliance of Patriots; 3% labour Party; 2% Civic Movement; Lelo for Georgia 2%; Girchi 2%; Democratic Movement United Georgia 1%; Our Georgia - Solidarity Alliance - less than one percent, Free Georgia - less than one percent; others - 1% (IRI, 42).

If we compare these data with the really received votes in the October elections, it becomes clear that the percentage of votes received in the elections by the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement significantly exceed the data received in the August polls. In the case of other parties, these two data either match or give small differences.

If in August polls 33% were going to vote for the Dream, in October elections 48.22% really voted for it. The difference between the public opinion data and the votes actually received by the Dream was +15.22 (48.22-33=15.22).

According to the August polls 15% were going to vote for the United National Movement, but in October this party received 27.18% of votes. In this case really received votes exceeded data of polls by + 12.18.

How can we explain such differences between polls data and really received votes in the October elections? It may be result of the sampling errors. But if we assume that the sampling errors were in norm, then the deviation of real votes percentages from the polls data may be explained by the election campaign and electoral fraud. But it is difficult to determine the proportion between them. This +15.22 (Georgian Dream) and +12.8 (United National Movement), are the indicators of the deviations of the numbers of real votes from the corresponding data of the IRI polls, which comprises both the election campaign and falsification effects. These two parties have much more resources to run election campaigns and to fraud them. Because of this the votes deviations from polls in their case were bigger than in the case of smaller parties.

According to the August polls, European Georgia was supported by 4% of respondents, but really 3.75% voted for it. Deviation = - 0.5.

Lelo received 2% in the survey, but in elections - 3.15%. Deviation = +1.15.

Block Vashadze Strategy Builder according to polls received 4%, but in elections 3.15%. Deviation = -0.85.

In August 1% were going to vote for Girchi. In October elections it received 2%. Deviation = +1.

Aleko Elisashvili-Citizens (the same Civil Movement) according to August polls had 2% of voters, but in October elections they received 1.33%. Deviation: -0.67.

According to polls Shalva Natelashvili had 3%, but in the elections he received 1%. Deviation: -2.

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Smaller parties' abilities to falsify elections as well as to preserve their votes or campaign vigorously were restricted. Therefore their votes approximate closely to the August polls.

A significant role in the success of the ruling party was played by the relatively low trust in the opposition televisions. According to IRI in August, the pro-government television Imedi had 40% confidence, Mtavari Arkhi, which was controlled by the United National Movement - 16%, the third position in the ratings was occupied by the pro-government Rustavi 2 (11%), the opposition TV-1 - was fourth (5%), "neutral" "Palitra News", opposition "Formula", pro-Russian "Objective" - 1%, "The Unenamity" - the television of the Georgian Orthodox Church - less than one percent, pro-government, Post-TV - less than one percent, the others - 19%. As can be seen from the above data, the opposition televisions Mtavari Arkhi, TV-1, Formula, Caucasus, which was in the "others", significantly lagged behind the pro-government televisions Imedi and Rustavi 2, although the opposition Mtavari Arkhi occupied second place after "Imedi". But its rating lagged far behind Imedi's trust indicator (IRI, 48).

The USA Embassy noted in the special statement, that „The U.S. Embassy shares OSCE/ODIHR's initial assessment that "Georgia's parliamentary elections were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected. Nevertheless, pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state reduced public confidence in some aspects of the process" (U.S. Embassy in Georgia).

F. 2021 Local Elections

The 2021 local elections were held under worsened conditions, despite the fact that they mattered significantly more than mere municipal elections. Their results determined the fate of the holding snap parliamentary elections, which were supposed to resolve the political tension that arose as a result of the October 2020 parliamentary election. On June 21, 2021, the legal framework for municipal elections was changed: the composition of election commissions and the methods of appointing their members were altered, a higher percentage of the proportional component in municipal elections was introduced, the time limits for resolving disputes were extended, and a mandatory repeated random recount of votes, measures to prevent voter intimidation and the illegal use of administrative resources were introduced. All of this were in the interests of the opposition.

The agreement, which was brokered by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, called for snap election if the ruling party could not get 43% of the votes in this local elections. Before the start of the election campaign, the ruling Dream party refused to fulfill this condition - it was not going to hold these elections even if it received one percent of the votes. But the opposition was sure that the Georgian Dream would be forced to comply with this condition. But despite this, it was clear from the very beginning, that the opposition would lose these elections. The 43% had to be calculated from the votes received by the party throughout the country. Out of 64 municipality, a party might submit in each a separate electoral list, as well as individual candidates in majoritarian districts and for the positions of city mayors. If the opposition party failed to submit such lists, the opposition lost a percentage of the votes. Under these conditions, only the ruling party was able to submit both individual electoral lists and candidates for the posts of mayors and majoritarian deputies in all 64 municipalities. Only five parties could submit electoral lists, but unlike Georgian Dream, none of them could satisfy all three components. In accordance with the changes in the electoral code, that were adopted in June 2021, in all municipalities were to be elected 2068 members, of which 664 by the majority system, and 1404 proportionally. Of which in the Tbilisi Municipal Assembly (sakrebulo) were to be elected 50 members, among them 10 by the majoritarian system. In addition, 64 mayors were to be elected, 59 of which were mayors of self-governing communities and four self-governing cities. The electoral thresholds was 3%. *Only Georgian Dream was able to present all 664 majoritarian candidates*, United National Movement - 536, Gaxaria for Georgia - 426, European Georgia Movement for Independence - 162, Davit Tarxan Mouravi Irma Inashvili - Alliance of Patriots of Georgia - 202, Third Force (party of Vashadze) - 173, Lelo - 156, Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labour Party - 59, Initiative Groups - 58, Independent Georgia (Zaza Xatiashvili, Kaxa Kukava, Grigol Jojua) - 46, Zurab Girchi Japaridze: Girchi More Independence - 25, Aleko Elisashvili Citizens - 21, Elene Xoshtaria - Droa ("The Time Has Come) - 4, Girchi - 4 (Machaidze 2021).

Georgian Dream had its candidates in all self-governing communities, Gakharia for Georgia in 37 communities, European Georgia Freedom Movement - 10, Lelo - 10, David Tarkhan Mouravi, Irma Inashvili - Alliance Patriots of Georgia - 10 etc. Of the eight parties that entered the parliament, only 6 parties were able to present their candidates. In twelve municipalities, only two candidates were represented - one from the Georgian Dream and one from the United National Movement. In the five self-governing cities, only the Georgian Dream, the United National Movement and the Gakharia party could present their representatives (Machaidze 2021).

After reviewing the above data it should not be surprising that the Georgian Dream won this elections. But this victory, despite the fact that these elections were held in the conditions of grave violations of electoral rules and the use of administrative resources by the ruling party, was not easy for the Georgian Dream, which at the national level in proportional elections received 46.7% of the vote, the United National Movement 30.7%, Gakharia Party for Georgia 7.8%. Of all the 622 majoritarian seats that

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were distributed in the first round, the Georgian Dream won 557, the National Movement 53, and the other parties 12 mandates. Georgian Dream won all 44 mayoral elections in the first round, where no second round was necessary, but runoffs were announced for 20 mayoral elections, as well as 42 races for majoritarian sakrebulo members in 24 districts (NDId 8).

The results of the second round were as follows: In the elections of mayors in twenty municipalities the Dream won 19, the candidate of the United National Movement won in Tsalendjikha. Out of the 42 majoritarian districts, the Georgian Dream won 27, the United National Movement 7, the Party For Georgia 6, and the parties Free Georgia and European Socialists received one mandate each. As a result of the second round of majoritarian elections, the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement in the Batumi, Zugdidi, Martvili, Chkhorotskhu, Tsalenjikha and Rustavi municipal assemblies could not form a majority on their own. (NdId 9).

In this victory of the Georgian Dream, administrative resources played their role. But it's hard to determine how decisive they were in determining the fate of the elections. As one of the newspapers wrote, it is rather difficult to analyze what results the party would have had without the use of these resources, but the fact remains that, according to the conclusion of international monitoring organizations, a growing problem is inseparability of the ruling party from the state (Melashvili 2021).

The 2021 local elections were held under the conditions of further democratized election rules: the number of proportionally elected deputies increased from 970 to 1404, the number of majoritarians decreased from 1088 to 664; the electoral threshold for majoritarians was established at 40% and for proportional elections it decreased from 4% to 3%, and in Tbilisi to 2.5% (NDId 4).

V. CHARLES MICHEL DOCUMENT

The results of the local elections in 2021 were greatly influenced by the "Charles Michel document". Charles Michel, President of the European Council, came to Georgia on purpose to detente the sharp confrontation between the ruling party and the opposition and create a broad consensus. This document was signed on April 19, 2021 by the 6 opposition parties, two politicians individually (S.Samadashvili from UNM, who left this party, and D. Baqradze, formal president of European Georgia) and the ruling Georgian Dream, but the main opposition party, the United National Movement, as well as Labour Party, European Georgia, Moqalageebi (Civilians) refused to sign it (Vardiashvili 2021). This document proposed the initiation of an amnesty for all violations and detentions related to protests on May 19-21, 2019; the reaction of the parliament to those sentences that were perceived as the political justice; the conduct of a broad electoral reform, which involved the holding of the next parliamentary elections with the full proportional system and with the threshold from naturally up to 2%; Local elections were to be held with a four to one ratio of proportional and majoritarian mandates in the five big cities, and a two to one ratio in all other cities, with a 2.5% threshold in Tbilisi and 3% outside that city; elections of members of the central electoral commission with a 2/3 majority of the members of parliament; carrying out an ambitious parliamentary reform.

The document significantly increased the influence of the opposition within the parliament. Opposition members were to preside over the five parliamentary committees, two of which were to be selected from the following list: procedural and rules committee, legal affairs committee, human rights and civil integration committee, finance and budget committee, foreign affairs committee. In accordance with the proposals of the Georgian dream dated April 16, if the Georgian Dream won less than 43% in the October 2021 municipal elections, snap parliamentary elections would have been held (Tskifurishvili 2021). But on July 8, 2021, the Georgian dream announced this document as annulled. One of the leaders of the Georgian Dream, Irakli Kobakhidze, explained this by the fact that the opposition parties, especially the United National Movement, did not sign this document, which his party signed on April 19, 2019 (Tabula 2021a). This was followed by a negative reaction from US Ambassador Keri Degnan and other partners of Georgia (Tabula 2021b). The United National Movement signed this document only on September 2, 2021, after the withdrawal of the Dream from the treaty (It's Time for self-government 2021).

Georgia's ruling party attempts to weaken the democratic potential of Georgia, to completely subordinate the society to its control. But the potential of democracy turned out to be so strong that the government has to retreat in the significant cases. An attempt to deprive the opposition of mass media turned out to be ineffective. The Georgian Dream succeeded in wresting control of the most influential television company Rustavi 2 from the Unified National Movement. But "Mtavari Arkhi" the equivalent of Rustavi 2 was created soon. Under the international and domestic pressure, the government was forced to release several political figures whose imprisonment by the opposition was perceived as politically motivated (Rurua, Okruashvili, Ugulava, Melia). The most obvious and strongest attack on the democratic potential of Georgia was an attempt to destroy the strong civil society of Georgia at one blow. To achieve this goal two bills were submitted to Parliament, which declared all organizations financed from abroad as foreign agents. This in March 2023 triggered massive protests of the Georgian public, which forced the government to withdraw these bills from the parliament. This was tactical retreat to decrease the waves of public protests. But elites expectations turned out to be wrong. In 2024 when it adopted the similar law getting over the presidential veto wide range of protest movement spread throughout the country. But in this case Government did not reterat. It used legal and illegal violence

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not only against the ordinary participants and activists, but also members of parliaments and politicians. Organized by the political elite, private individuals, together with the police, openly participated in settling scores with the protest participants. None of them were prosecuted, which indicates the strengthening of authoritarianism due to the weakening of the democratic vector of development.

The government has clearly gone on the offensive against the main driving forces of democracy within the country - collective direct action and civil society and an independent media. Foreign Influence Transparency Act, which was adopted by the parliament and called the Russian law by democratic forces, requires non-governmental organizations and media outlets that receive more than 20% of their funding from foreign sources to register in the register of foreign agents. The government's real goal is not transparency but to subordinate civil society and the independent media to its control so that it all appears legitimate and democratic. But the democratic public of Georgia and its Western partners, the United States and the European Union, saw in this act of attack on democracy. The intensification of violence in the political system is aimed at changing the psychological structure of society, increasing feelings of fear and hopelessness and achieving political apathy of citizens on this basis.

The strengthening of the authoritarian vector of development of Georgia can be explained by the comparative successes of Russia in the Russian-Ukrainian War and the delay in aid to Ukraine with weapons and finances from the United States and European Union countries. The Georgian elite interpreted all this as the weakening of the influence of the United States and Europe and the strengthening of the geopolitical importance of Russia. This weakened Western influence on the government which began the destruction of the democratic potential of society. Why this did happen? We will try to answer this question.

Three variables can be identified that determine the sustainability of democratic development in Georgia: 1. direct collective action; 2. non-governmental sector and independent media; 3. influence of collective West on the political elite of Georgia.

A factor of authoritarianism is government control of coercive resources which is able to restrain the influence of the first two variables of democratic development. Western influence on the political elite limited the development of violence in the political system and protected the development of democratic potential of the society. Because of this decrease of this influence strengthens authoritarian vector of development.

VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Gradual increase of democratic potential of the country is the source of the resilience of the democratic evolution of Georgia. Main variables of sustainability of democratic development are direct collective action; civic society and independent media; western influence on the political elite. Control of coercive resources by political elite is main factor of authoritarianism in Georgia. The electoral - authoritarian regimes of Shevardnadze and Saakashvili promoted gradual increase of democratic potential. But this does not mean that the resources of authoritarianism are depleted. Because of this the fourth cycle of democratization is not transformed in the full fledged democracy.

Georgia passed two cycles of democratization (1990-1991), (2002-2004) and three of authoritarianisms (1991-1992); (1992-2002); (2004-2012). Since 2012 Georgia has been on the third cycle of democratization which has been lasting for 12 years. Increase of the duration of this democratic cycle is indication of the increased resilience of the democratic evolution.

Westernization of Georgia which is determined by the Christianity and the location on the black sea shore, is main source of the resilience of the democratic potential. This makes it possible to formulate the hypothesis: more is country westernized more democratic it will be. Westernization we can observe on the dynamics of the westernization index and level of democracy on the dynamics of freedom index. From the abovementioned it follows that deepening westernization is a necessary condition for the development of democracy in the former soviet republics.

On the westernization scale all former soviet countries with higher level of westernization are located at the borders of the West, or on the black sea shore and all of them are Christian countries. Therefore we conclude that the westernization of Georgia is determined by the location on the black sea shore and Christianity.

Democratic evolution of Georgia is the result of cooperation of the foreign and inner forces of democratization. The USA and EU protect development of democratic potential and promote consensus between government and opposition.

Georgian experience shows that electoral authoritarianism can develop democratic potential of society which restricts further development of authoritarian tendencies. This conclusion directs the research of development of political regimes of former soviet countries to the investigation of their influence on the democratic potentials of these republics, comparison of these regimes as the promoters of the development of democratic potentials.

Our research revealed the urgent need of the comparison of the cycles of political development of Georgia to distinguish the features each of them. Without this it is impossible to understand the logic of the regime formation process in Georgia.

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