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Master's Thesis

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The Nature of the European Union Discourse Articulated by the  
Georgian Orthodox Church

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## **Abstract**

This Master's thesis uncovers the discourse of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) towards the European Union on two dimensions: the official discourse of the GOC and the ongoing discourse among its members (churchmen). The discourse analysis is applied as the methodological tool. In order to find the official discourse, statements of the GOC and its Head Patriarch Ilia II are analyzed. For the identification of the internal discourse the GOC members are interviewed about the topical issues related to the Europeanization of Georgia. Theoretical basis of this research project is formed by analysis of the literature on Normative Power Europe, the role of religion in politics and Constructivism. Empirical data clarify that the general discourse of the GOC is pro-EU, although the internal discourse is heterogeneous and varies between pro-EU and pro-Russian narratives. Based on the interview results, this thesis also suggests the methodological approach for the future research to the in-depth study of the internal discourse of the GOC.

*Keywords: Discourse, European Union, Normative Power Europe, Georgia, Georgian Orthodox Church, Constructivism, Russia, Foreign Policy, Religious Discourse.*

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## Introduction

Georgia and the European Union (EU) are expanding and forging their relations. After signing the Association Agreement, including the agreement on the deep and comprehensive free trade area, Georgia anticipates granting of visa liberalization, which will be the next step in deepening of its European integration.

It should be noted that the results of the public opinion polls show support of the Georgian society to the foreign policy of the government towards Georgia's membership in the European family (National Democratic Institute, 2016). Nevertheless, in academic sphere, it is argued that on the way of Europeanization Georgia faces an obstacle coming from the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). This is the institution which is followed by approximately 84% of Georgians (National Statistic office of Georgia, 2014, p. 8) and the level of trust to the GOC is as high as 91% (Baltic Surveys/The Gallup, 2015) within the Georgian society.

In academic discussions the GOC is described as having negative attitude towards the issues of the European integration (Kapanadze, 2015, p. 177) and as being the soft power tool of the Russian Federation (Kakabadze, 2015, p. 4).<sup>1</sup> In addition, according to Chitanava (2015), the GOC expresses pro-Russian sentiments emphasizing that Georgia and Russia have the 'same-faith. The discourse is about the importance of "traditional orthodox values" and "traditional families", for which the acceptance of the Western values will be an existential threat.

Even though these authors present the GOC as an anti-European<sup>2</sup> institution in Georgia, their assessment leaves the room for skepticism, because the statements of the Patriarch of Georgia and the other members of the GOC show that the GOC articulates pro-European stance. The most vivid example is the commercial on the official TV channel of the GOC where the Patriarch Illia II expresses support of the GOC on the way of Georgia's European integration with the following statement:

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this thesis does not aim to research whether or not the GOC represents the soft power tool of the Russian Federation. This is just one of the examples how the GOC is described in the academic sphere by one of the scholars.

<sup>2</sup> In the thesis anti/pro-European is used as pro/anti-EU. In addition, European means the EU.

“The European Union is a well-known organization for Georgian people and we are doing everything to become a full member of this big organization. I would like to assure you that Georgian Orthodox Church will do everything for realizing this idea” (TV channel of the GOC - Unanimity, 2016). At the same time, the above-mentioned authors emphasize that the GOC is anti-European institution. Therefore, such mutually exclusive messages make it harder to uncover what kind of discourse is articulated by the GOC and among its members.

The past experience shows that the GOC is able to form public opinion and resist the government in adopting particular laws. For example, there was a huge discussion about adoption of the law concerning to the elimination of all forms of discrimination. The same happened in case of the law on local self-government. In addition, demonstration evaluated in mass media as led by priests on 17<sup>th</sup> of May for hindering another demonstration related to the celebration of international day against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia, has made it clear how influential the GOC is within the Georgian society. As the level of confidence in the Patriarch Illia II and the GOC itself is high, they can turn their societal power into the political one and impact on the decision-making of the government. From this logic, it can be argued that the study of the GOC discourse has critical importance.

Considering that the research is about the religious institution and its discourse, in the theoretical part, the role of religion in the international relations will be reviewed.

As the major part of the GOC discourse is about the value struggle and normative difference within the society, this study employs constructivism as a theoretical framework, which “is about human consciousness and its role in international life” (Ruggie 1998, p.856 as cited in Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 392). As a socio-analytical approach, constructivism claims that:

- ideational factors form the human interaction;
- the most significant ideational aspects are broadly shared within the society and these aspects cannot be narrowed to individuals;
- international actors’ interests are based on these shared beliefs; (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 392)

In addition, this research also uses Manner's notion of Normative Power Europe (NPE). Manners (2002) applies a new approach to identify the EU's role in the international system. His concept of normative power makes completely new viewpoint about the international identity of the EU by distancing from the pre-existing approaches focusing on the material gain and/or military purposes. According to Manners, the most significant aspect in shaping the role of the EU is not "what it does or what it says, but what it is". The EU represents the normative power based on the treaties, agreements and etc. which also binds the EU itself. Therefore, these conditions make the EU act in a normative way, in accordance with the values and principles recognized internationally even if its actions negatively affect on its own strategic interests (Manners, 2002, p. 252; Diez & Manners, 2007, p. 175).

It should be noted that the concept – normative power Europe has generated a debate in the academic field and, according to various assumptions, its validity has become questionable. However, scholars agree that the EU definitely represents a normative power for the countries aspiring the EU membership (see for example Larsen, 2014; Diez, 2005).

As the role of religion is increased in international politics, Larsen (2014) underlines that the religious discursive context represents an important aspect in studying of the EU as a normative power. His contribution will be further discussed in the theoretical part of the paper.

For the purpose of this research the following questions are important to be answered: What kind of discourse the GOC has towards the EU? What kind of discourse prevails in the GOC towards the EU?

The thesis will study and analyze the discourse of the GOC towards the EU and the discourse dominated among the GOC members with regard to the EU. In order to answer the research questions qualitative research method will be applied. In particular, discourse analysis of the statements, speeches and interviews of the Patriarch Illia II, also the official statements of the Patriarchate of Georgia will be used to answer the first research question. As for the second one, interviews will be conducted with the members of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

It should be noted that in his statements directed to the internal audience – the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece and the primate of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece – Christodoulos emphasized the EU as the threat because for him this institution represented the source of moral degradation. But in case of the statements directed to the external audience, the Archbishop of Athens was more cautious and tried to avoid criticism of the EU (Tsuladze, et al., 2016, p. 153). It can be assumed that the GOC has the similar stance and having the pro-EU position does not exclude the possibility to have the pro-Russian sentiments. Nevertheless, in order to depict the full picture, in the thesis, besides studying the nature of the discourse of the GOC towards the EU, the statements of the Patriarch Ilia II labelled as the examples of pro-Russian attitude will also be reviewed. Thus, the answers of the research questions might be that the GOC has both pro-EU and pro-Russian discourses. The same applies to the discourses, prevailing within the GOC members, which will be revealed based on the interviews.

The main limit of this thesis is the probability from the potential interviewees of denying the participation in the interviews, thus it will be challenging to identify the prevailing discourse in the members of the GOC towards the EU in a comprehensive way. In addition, the interviewees might avoid giving sincere answers to the sensitive questions which is why the questionnaire contains carefully formulated controlling questions as well.

The outcome of this thesis will make a contribution in understanding of the connection between the religious institution and normative power Europe. Based on the case study, it is expected that the interviews will uncover previously unobserved discourses of the GOC members and it will be possible to see if the GOC really represents an obstacle for the European integration of Georgia.

In order to reach the objectives and answer the research questions, structurally, the thesis is divided in five main parts.

In the first chapter, the reviews of the literature about the role of religion in International Relations, the theory of constructivism, and one of the approaches related to the EU's international identity - Normative Power Europe are provided.

The second chapter outlines the methodological tools applied in this research, in particular, discourse analysis and one of its dimensions - discursive psychology. This section of the thesis also provides information about the choice of sample for the interview.

After providing the methodological outline, the focus of the thesis shifts to the empirical section divided in three main parts.

The first chapter of the empirical data is devoted to the illustration of the examples which reveal the influence of the GOC over the politics in Georgia.

The next chapter of the thesis, is about the discourse of the GOC, and is divided in three subchapters. The first subchapter reviews the discourse of the GOC towards the EU. As for the second one, examples of the GOC statements labelled as the expression of pro-Russian attitudes in media sources and academic papers will be shown. The final subsection of this chapter summarizes the results of analysis about the nature of the discourse articulated by the GOC towards the EU.

The last main chapter of the dissertation outlines the results of the interviews conducted with the members of the GOC, and is followed by four subdivisions. Before analyzing the interviews, description of the respondents and the brief outline of the questionnaire are provided. After that, analysis of the interview results is conducted, which gives the opportunity to uncover the ongoing discourse of the GOC members towards the EU. In the end of this chapter, overall results of the interviews are summarized.

The research ends by providing the final conclusions after reiterating the initial aim of the thesis and the way of its implementation. It also outlines main findings of the analysis and clarifies the way the research objectives have been reached.

# **Theoretical Framework**

## **Role of Religion in International Relations**

Historically, religion has been playing a considerable role in international relations. Religious factors determined the actions of the empires and in many cases wars broke out based on religious grounds.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century can be evaluated as the turning point since when the separation of politics and religion has started. In particular, in 1648, the Peace of Westphalia was signed which ended the Thirty Years War which had religious motives. While the religion was discussed as the reason for violence, wars and bloodshed, the European nation-states made the shift towards adoption of the secular norms and recognized them on the state level. (Lynch, 2014, pp. 278-279).

Since religion was assessed as the causal reason of ferocity, the study of the religion and its role in IR was not perceived as rational. Since then, in the Western world, the state has become the main focus of IR studies while the role of religion diminished (Sandal & James, 2010, pp. 5-6).

Spreading of the secular and liberal values made religious rules and their influence on politics insignificant again. If before, the religious institutions had an influential role on political life and in IR, by the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of religious rules were not significant, neither at national nor at international political levels (Aguilar, 2006, pp. 316-317).

Nevertheless, soon, the role of religion has become again an influential factor in IR. According to Lynch (2014), the end of the cold war and the 9/11 terrorist attacks created fertile ground for re-emergence of religious factors in shaping the political actions.

The re-appearance of religion in IR was centered again to the violent actions, such as religiously and ethnically inspired conflicts in Central Asia and Balkans. Moreover, in 1992 Samuel Huntington proposed the idea of 'The Clash of Civilizations', claiming that the next large scale conflict would be among civilizations based on the religious grounds (Lynch, 2014, p. 285).

According to Thomas, “bringing culture and religion back into IR is part of a wider effort to bring ideas, values, and more broadly, ideational factors back in ’to the study of IR” (Thomas, 2005, p. 69).

In contemporary International Relations, scholars agree that religion matters in politics and religious factor is recognized as a significant element of conflicts and conflict resolution mechanisms (Sheikh, 2012, p. 365).

According to Sheikh, religion has influence over the issues which are important for the study of IR. For example, religion impacts on the “behavior and foreign policies, the conditions of peace, order and security, and not least the outbreak of war.” (Sheikh, 2012, p. 373)

Fox argues that religion has influence over the political actors in the following three ways: “First, foreign policies are influenced by the religious views and beliefs of policymakers and their constituents. Second, religion is a source of legitimacy for both supporting and criticizing government behavior locally and internationally. Third, many local religious issues and phenomena, including religious conflicts, spread across borders or otherwise become international issues.” (Fox, 2001, p. 59)

According to Sheikh, “if religion has ever been silent in world-political matters, it is increasingly clear that religion will be speaking in this century, not only to the departments of theology or religious studies, but perhaps more loudly, to the departments of IR” (Sheikh, 2012, p. 392).

If the religious influence and its role in IR is no longer controversy among scholars, the definition of religion is quite debatable. Philpott claims that “religion is a set of beliefs about the ultimate ground of existence, which is unconditioned, not itself created or caused” (Philpott, 2002, p. 68). In addition, he argues that ideologies have influence over people, determine their behaviors and in some cases, motivate them to proceed bloodshed. But, ideologies differ from religion in the sense that they are not about ‘the ultimate ground of existence’ (Bosco, 2009, p. 94).

According to Hanson’s definition, religion is the “pattern of beliefs and activities that expresses ultimate meaning in a person’s life” (Hanson, 2006, p.71; as referred in Bosco, 2009, p. 94). If Philpott (2002) differs ideologies and religion,

based on the latter definition, religion and ideologies do not differ from each other as they all can depict 'the ultimate meaning in a person's life' (Hanson, 2006, p.73; as referred in Bosco, 2009, p. 95).

Generally, the major debate about the definition of religion is between functionalists and substantialist views. According to functionalist approach, since religion and other ideologies, such as nationalism, marxism and etc., have common characteristics, they are comparable. The major focus on the study of religion is about its function, in particular, capability of religion in producing psychological, sociological or economic outcomes (effects). As for the substantialist point of view, religion is studied as beliefs, practices, institutions, prayers, churches and rituals. Followers of this approach claim that religion should not be compared to other sociocultural phenomena and, from this logic, they criticize the advocates of functionalist approach. (Sheikh, 2012, pp. 371-372)

Unlike the above mentioned scholars, Fox and Sandrel (2006) agree on the point of view of Brian Turner, who claims that definition of religion is exceedingly difficult. Rather than trying to define what religion is, Fox and Sandler accept the statement that religion has influence and determines the behavior of humans. In addition, they claim that it is better to have focus on what religion does and not on what it is. From this logic, it will be easier to avoid the challenging discussion about the definition of religion and to pay the attention to the principal matters of the social sciences, activities of humans, which in some cases are based on religious beliefs. (Bosco, 2009, p. 98)

This suggestion is supported in this research and instead of applying the definition of religion, it is accepted that the GOC has influence over the society. Thus, it is interesting what the GOC does, in particular, what kind of discourse it has towards the GOC. As it is argued above, the legitimacy of accepting and supporting or rejecting and critically assessing the actions of the government, comes from religion and if the GOC has negative attitudes towards the EU, with the high probability it will affect on the EU image-creation within the Georgian society.

Regarding the religious influence and Europeanization, for example, in Poland, "the discourse of the Pope John Paul II about the pro-EU choice had a

positive influence over the society. It should be noted that in statistical terms, connection between religious engagement and pro-EU attitudes has never been confirmed. Although, the statements of the Pope, on the one hand, decreased the frequency of the anti-EU claims from the representatives of the Polish Catholic Church, but, on the other hand, the Pope's statements strongly influenced the discourse of the anti-EU TV channels" (Tsuladze, et al., 2016, pp. 152-153). From this logic, the attitudes of the GOC about the Georgia's pro-EU choice are interesting for examination.

### Constructivism in International Relations

Constructivism is about studying social relations. It is completely different from the "materialistic" approach in explaining the nature of international reality. If, for instance, neorealism and neoliberalism emphasize the significance of material capabilities and military forces as the constitutive of the concept of "power" which itself is one of the most important factors in studying the international politics (Hurd, 2008, p. 300), constructivism draws an attention to, for example: the role of culture, knowledge and ideas in shaping the nature of international reality. (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 391). The shared ideas and assumptions among people represent 'intersubjectivity', which is the core ideational element for the constructivists (Jackson & Sorensen, 2006, p. 166).

According to constructivism, existing reality is not a given condition by nature, on the contrary, human beings are the main aspects of the social and political world constructed based on their understanding (Jackson & Sorensen, 2006, pp. 162-164). The authors state that constructivism includes aspects of social theory and also some fundamental theories of IR. Adler (1997) argues that in the theories about international relations, constructivism takes the middle stance between interpretive and rationalist approaches and offers new dimensions for empirical and theoretical examination. Furthermore, the author claims that constructivist approach is an effort of building a connection link between idealist and positivist philosophies of social science (Adler, 1997, p. 323). Therefore, this theoretical approach does not stand alone and exist independently from other approaches, on

the contrary, constructivism is built on the other disciplines and represents the synthesis of them.

Onuf (1989) applies the viewpoints of international law in order to explain the influence of persuasion and the rule-based conduct in international relations. For this study, rule-based behavior represents an important aspect, which will be discussed below in further details.

According to Onuf (1998), people are made based on the social reality, which itself is created by people. The society and people make each other and the nature of their relation can be described as an ongoing process, where the rules are the connecting link between these two components. On their behalf, the rules make it obvious what should be and should not be done, what can be the consequences of breaking the rule and etc. People's attitude towards the rules shapes practices. In other words, practices are the results of human interaction, who on their behalf act based on their own beliefs, ideas and understanding (Adler, 1997, p. 325). In addition, rules specify the active members of the society, which may be called agents. Moreover, the rules clarify in which situations and to what extent who is an agent (Onuf, 1998, p. 59). Practices and rules together, form the patterns, named as institutions. The activity of agents sometimes is followed by unintended consequences and in that way, all these above-mentioned aspects compose structure of a particular society (Onuf, 1998, pp. 60-61).

In regard of the theories of international relations, Cox separates theories as 'critical' and 'problem solving.' From this perspective, constructivism can be viewed as both. "It is critical in the sense that it stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how the order came about. But it is also 'problem-solving', in the sense that, once institutions and practices are reified, 'it takes the world as it finds it . . . as the given framework for action'". (Cox, 1986: 208-9, as cited in Adler, 1997, p. 334)

The theories of international relations discuss the aspects shaping actors' national interests, policy directives and etc. Thus, it can be described as the mundane method of acting in international arena in order to get worldly outcomes.

In case of the religion, in particular the Orthodox religion, rules and tenets show how to live for getting otherworldly outcomes.

Finnemore claims that international norms supported by the international organizations can affect the states and finally make them to adopt these norms in their nationwide strategies (Jackson & Sorensen, 2006, p. 170). This argument may not be valid when it comes to the state where religious institution has high level of reliability. From constructivists logic, agents have a desire to achieve goals and these goals shows the needs of people. (Onuf, 1998, p. 60) As the rules are created by people and as the majority of the population in Georgia is Christian orthodox, it is not surprising if their rule-based behavior is coming from orthodox culture. According to constructivism, agents' actions have influence over each other. In this regard, the action of the GOC may have influence over the state authority. Therefore rule-based conduct of Orthodox believers on a national level will affect over the government's policy and if the GOC truly represents an anti-Western institution in Georgia, the study of its discourse is important in the sense that the followers of the GOC may as well share their attitudes towards the Georgia – EU cooperation, and this can be the ground for modification of Georgian foreign policy.

#### The Concept of Normative Power Europe

In the social sciences, the phenomena can be explained from different viewpoints. Theories and approaches are used to elucidate the essence of international actors, the ways they act worldwide and the reasons why, how and under what circumstances different policy measures are implemented.

While evaluating the European Union as a political entity, it is emphasized that the mixture of supranational and international approaches of governance makes the EU a different actor on international level, which can be described as “beyond to Westphalian principles.” (King, 1999, as referred in Manners, 2002)

International actorness, capabilities to acquire and exercise power and the forms of influence the EU has are examined in various ways. For instance, Duchene (1972, 1973) described the EU as a Civilian Power, while Bull (1982) emphasized the significance of military power.

In 2002, Manners elaborated the new approach to understand the international identity of the EU - the Normative Power Europe, emphasizing that the EU implements its actions in relation with its member states, and also with the rest of international actors, in accordance with the universal values and principles. In addition, the EU's normative foundation makes it a political entity which is vastly different from actors, and as Manners states, the concept of 'Normative Power Europe' claims to neglect 'Westphalian' principles. (Manners, 2002, p. 239)

All actors have their own norms and interest in the international relations, but the distinctiveness of the EU's normative basis stands on its "historical context, hybrid polity and political-legal constitution" (Manners, Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction In Terms?, 2002, p. 240). According to Manners, the purpose of the EU's actions is not material gain (Manners, Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction In Terms?, 2002, p. 253). Moreover, it should be emphasized that even when the normative foundation of the EU is in contrast to its material interests, this institution still takes measures in accordance with the universal values and principles (Diez & Manners, 2007, p. 175). Therefore, in compliance with its normative basis, the EU has acquired to shape what is normal in international relations. Keene refers that "an essential dimension of Normative Power Europe is the EU's ability to construct for itself an international identity that embodies a highly distinctive way of being in the world, of organizing both domestic political systems and relations between states" (Keene, Social status, social closure and the idea of Europe as a 'normative power', 2012, p. 949).

The new theoretical concept has raised numerous questions and has caused ongoing debate about whether or not the EU is a normative power, why it is a normative power, how it is different from other political actors and why some actors perceive the EU as a normative power, while others attribute to it another type of power.

According to Diez (2005), the concepts of 'normative and civilian power' are not distinct from each other, on the contrary, Diez claims that 'normative power' is the part of 'civilian power', while the latter also represents and specifies "particular kind of 'normative power'" (Diez, 2005, p. 635).

In response to the criticism of Diez, Manners refers to the reasons which differentiate ‘normative power’ from ‘civilian power.’ The latter notion emphasizes the importance of economic power, national strategies and/or interests, in addition, ‘civilian means’ are employed in favor of the one who implements them; while the former concept claims that the EU has no material aims, acts not necessarily based on its own interests and norms but in a cosmopolitan way (Manners, 2006, p. 176). Moreover, “the Normative Power thesis is an attempt to escape civilizing missions by countering the neocolonial discourses of claims implicit (or explicit) in civilian power” (Manners, 2006, p. 175).

Unlike Diez, who stressed attention on the similarities of ‘civilian’ and ‘normative’ powers, Larsen (2014) and Forsberg (2011) put an emphasize on the importance of subjective and objective understanding of the EU as a ‘normative power.’ Larsen reviews the researches related to the external perceptions of the ‘Normative Power Europe’ in different geographical areas. According to the results of the research projects analyzed by Larsen, it is clear that the EU is not commonly accepted as a ‘normative power’ and the characteristics attributed to the EU vary in different parts of the world (Larsen H. , 2014, pp. 902-904) .

Keene (2012) tries to figure out, what makes the EU the ‘normative power’ and uses subjective rather than objective understanding. All actors have norms and values but they do not make those actors ‘Normative Powers’. In order to analyze the concept of ‘normative power’ in a more comprehensive way, Keene puts an emphasis on social, political and moral aspects of ‘normative power.’

First of all, for promotion of own values, they should be morally reasonable, rationally and logically valid, subsequently these factors will make the potential recipients eager to absorb new values. In case of political aspect, the ability of persuasion is significant, and it should be supported by technical expert knowledge, otherwise persuasion would not be enough for the acquisition political advantage. (Keene, 2012, pp. 943-944)

In order to clarify social aspect of ‘normative power’ Keene applies to Weber’s method of “class, status, party” (Weber 1968, as referred in Keene, 2012, p. 945). In regard to the EU, ‘class’ indicates to material resources, while ‘status’

points to the specific lifestyle, as for the 'party', Keene presents the EU as a 'bureaucratic power', but without further elaboration of its meaning (Keene, Social status, social closure and the idea of Europe as a 'normative power', 2012, pp. 945-947). The social element of 'normative power' is counted as crucial as it clarifies that, eventually, 'normative power' of the EU "depends on its ability to establish itself as a prestigious, high-status actor in international politics" (Keene, Social status, social closure and the idea of Europe as a 'normative power', 2012, p. 949).

Manners (2002) refers to the EU as a normative power, but without precise explanation of the words 'normative' and 'power.' Instead of explaining what 'normative' means, Manners points out core norms – peace, human rights, liberty, the rule of law and democracy, coming from the treaties and declarations. In addition, four secondary norms, such as – sustainable development, anti-discrimination, social solidarity and good governance, are elaborated (Manners, 2002, pp. 242-243).

Forsberg (2011) reviews two types in understanding of norm. On the one hand "norm" is usually defined as a principle of right action that can be approached from various ethical perspectives" (Forsberg, 2011, p. 1190), and on the other hand, 'norm' refers to 'being normal', which does not necessarily refer to the positive understanding of acting normatively. 'Being normal' depends on the context: international actors have different norms and they are able to act normatively according to their own understanding which may contradict the first definition of acting as a normative power (Forsberg, 2011, p. 1190).

In regard to the notion of 'power', in the international relations explaining the power in different concepts is critically important (Guzzini, 2005, p. 508), although, in his seminal article, Manners is not explicit in defining power he provides the tools how the 'normative power' is exercised. The following ways are used by the EU for spreading its norms:

- Informational diffusion - through declaratory and strategic communication;
- Transference – includes trade relations, which also involves financial aid and/ or imposition of sanctions;

- Contagion – expansion of norms and ideas in an unintentional way;
- Overt diffusion - the EU is physically presented in the third actor, state or organization and etc.;
- Procedural diffusion – through regulation of relationships with third parties;
- Cultural filter – promotion of the norms, for instance, human right issues and democratic values.

In addition to these methods for exercising the ‘normative power,’ Manners stated that the ‘normative power’ represents the power of ideas and the central part of this theoretical concept is “the power of ideas of the common good” (Manners, 2009, p. 562) where the ‘common good’ means “general wellbeing shared by all members of a society” (Manners, 2009, p. 563).

Larsen (2014) points on the characteristics of ‘soft power’ and ‘normative power.’ Despite the fact that both of them, to some extent, share common features, Manners mentions that normative power is a theoretical concept, which involves the necessity to perceive normative practice and social diffusion, while the ‘soft power’ is an empirical concept related to the debate regarding the power of the US (Diez and Manners, 2007, as referred in Forsberg, 2011, p. 1195).

Even though ‘normative power’ stands on the power of ideas (Manners, 2009, p. 570), it still leaves the space for employing military means, but one condition should be satisfied: “military power (...) should be (...) subordinated to the more fundamental normative ethos” (Diez & Manners, 2007, p. 187).

On the basis of the fact that the ‘normative power Europe’ has nothing in common with Westphalian understanding of power, Keene indicates that ‘normative power’ represents “an innovative move in evaluating and classifying powers” (Keene, 2013, p. 277).

Forsberg (2011) suggests four mechanisms – persuasion, invoking norms, shaping discourse and the power of example for exercising of ‘normative power Europe.’ (Forsberg, 2011, pp. 1196-1197). In addition, he indicates some of the norm diffusion mechanisms, which are incompatible with the idea of ‘normative

power Europe.’ For example, according to Manners, ‘transference’ includes the use of the economic means while expanding norms and values, hence, it can be identified as a form of economic power rather than normative; as for the ‘overt diffusion,’ it happens when the EU is physically presented in the third country but it is not elaborated whether the above-mentioned mechanism is distinct or it is an efficient way to disseminate information and to persuade others (Forsberg, 2011, p. 1196).

Some scholars refer to the literature which certify that the EU is not seen as a normative power in different geographical areas. For instance, to some extent, the EU is viewed as ‘normative power’ in Africa and also in the part of Asia, while the states as Russia, India, China and etc. do not perceive the EU as a ‘normative power’; Moreover, in relations with the above-mentioned states, economic interests prevail (Larsen, 2014, p. 903, see also Forsberg, 2011, p. 1194). Nevertheless, an important geographical exception should be emphasized. Researches make it obvious, that in case of the following countries – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the EU’s normative agenda is viewed in a positive manner and the EU is most likely able to ‘shape conception what is normal.’ (Larsen, 2014, p. 904; see also Diez, 2005, p. 616). In regard to the above-mentioned international actors, the context is that they are deepening their relations with the EU and some of them even strive to become full members of the European Union after meeting the requirements stipulated by the EU, for instance, Copenhagen criteria. Therefore, it is not fortuitous that the EU is viewed as a normative power in the recently mentioned countries.

Manners refers that “normative power is a discursive formation that relies on legitimacy, coherence, and voluntarism for its influence” (Manners, 2009, p. 570). Although, as Larsen (2014) mentions, Manners did not discuss the importance of discursive context while evaluating the EU as a normative power. Since “the politics of religion represents an important area of study, and the role of religion in international politics is widely seen as being increased during the last 10–20 years”, Larsen argues that it is significant to study the religious discursive context while evaluating the EU as a normative power.

Larsen (2014) focuses on the study of the NPE from the external perception. It is argued that the NPE is not something that the EU has as 'taken for granted', but the external perception has the vital importance in this context. It is necessary precondition for the NPE to be taken by the local actors, otherwise the EU's identity as a normative power will become questionable.

In case of the current research, it is the fact that the main foreign policy aim of the Georgian government is the full membership of the EU. From this logic, it can be argued that the authorities accept the EU as a normative power and strive to meet the requirements of the EU. Besides the political elite, the aspects of the NPE should be attracted by the society, and since the GOC is more popular and reliable institution than the government within the Georgian society, the EU also needs to be trusted by the GOC. The reliability level can be positively affected by the seminars for the members of the GOC organized by the government. This is what happens in Georgia, the government in cooperation with the NGOs organizes the seminars about the EU-Georgia relations for the members of the GOC in different parts of the country (see for example (Odishi.ge, 2015) (Center for Development and Democracy, 2015)).

Moreover, besides the Georgian government, the EU also perceives the GOC as an important actor and its clear demonstration was the meeting about the importance of Georgia's Europeanization between the representatives of the GOC (the official delegation) and the EU in Brussels in November 2016 (Center for Development and Democracy, 2016).

These examples clearly demonstrate how much not just the Georgian government but also the EU value the role of the GOC in creating the positive image of the EU integration. Thus, the GOC can be identified as an important actor in strengthening the EU normative power.

## **Methodology**

### Discourse Analysis

The following study applies the qualitative research method, in particular, discourse analysis. Discourse is “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 1). Discourse analysis is separated into various types explaining the social phenomena from different viewpoints and they have the methodological approach typical to each of them for studying and analyzing the empirical data. It should be noted that discourse analysis does not represent a stand-alone technique, rather it is a collection of interdisciplinary methods for investigating the particular social realm. This approach claims “that language is structured according to different patterns that people’s utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social”, [...] and [...] “‘discourse analysis’ is the analysis of these patterns (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 1).

Generally, types of discourse analysis such as critical discourse analysis, poststructuralist discourse analysis and discourse psychology are based on social constructionism, the theory which critically looks at the knowledge as the taken-for-granted phenomenon. From this respect, the world does not exist itself, but it is created through the discourse of human beings; in addition, this approach claims that social interactions form knowledge, and people’s understanding of social reality is created through social processes.

These claims are quite similar to Onuf’s description of agents, patterns and, in general, how the world is constructed. Therefore, social constructionism and social constructivism have common features, and it can be argued that the above-mentioned discourse methods are appropriate for both.

Jørgensen & Phillips clarify that the types of discourse analysis share some core assumptions. For instance, all of them state that people’s thoughts, actions and perceptions play a crucial role in creating the world as it is. In addition, all of them apply critical research. But, at the same time, they have features which completely differ from each other’s approach, such as the selection of data for the analysis and

the way the individual is perceived in a particular discourse method. For example, poststructuralism discusses an individual as a subject of analysis, while discourse psychology perceives it as a producer and a product of discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 7).

The point of departure for discourse analytical approaches is the study of language, which makes it available for human being to have an access to the social reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 8). As the focus of this thesis is the identification of the discourse of the GOC towards the EU, the discursive psychology will be employed as a methodological tool.

According to discourse psychology, socially constituted world does not exclude the existence of material feature. On the contrary, physical reality exists outside the discourse but the meaning of physical reality is discursively created (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 103). To simplify, in the context of this research project, the EU as an institution does exist physically, but, the perception and/or the meaning of the EU for the GOC is the product of its discursive practice.

Discourse psychology argues that the ways people perceive the world vastly depend on historical and social factors (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 99). In this thesis, the unit of analysis is the perception of the EU which, according to the logic of Jørgensen & Phillips, also depends on social and historical factors taking place in Georgia. From historical factor, the orthodox church has always had an important role in Georgian history. As for the social factor, as it is already mentioned, absolute majority of the Georgian population is Orthodox.

#### Data Sampling

The main issues, on which the GOC and the government expressed conflicting positions, were related to the adoption of the law about the elimination of all forms of discrimination, the law on local self-government and the plan of the Ministry of Education of Georgia about introducing the new subject at school – “I and Society”. In addition to these concerns, the GOC was labeled as organizing the anti-LGBT demonstration, and consequently, restricting the freedom of expression for the minority group celebrating the 17th of May in 2013.

The following paragraph will explain why all of these issues are connected to the EU and important to be included in this research.

Within the framework of the roadmap to visa liberalization for Georgia, the Georgian government was responsible to adopt the law about the elimination of all forms of discrimination (Transparency International - Georgia, 2014). As for the law about the local self-government, it was initiated in order to deepen democratic process and promote good governance. The concept of good governance can be counted as the value of the EU, consisting the following five principles as its basis: openness, accountability, coherence, effectiveness and participation (European Commission, 2001). The Minister of Infrastructure and Sustainable Development of Georgia argued that the new law on local self-government “will give us different self-government” [...] and [...] “only under such circumstances will it become possible to effectively manage services and to carry out actual decentralization” (Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia).

In case of the school subject “I and Society”, the Ministry of Education of Georgia stated that this subject would provide civic education for the III-IV grade pupils. Dissemination of the information about this subject caused the diversity of assessments regarding its benefits for the target audience.

The 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration in 2013 was evaluated as the restriction of freedom of expression by the demonstration led by orthodox priests (Civil Georgia, 2013). The right of the freedom of expression represents the basic right of human and as the priests were named as the organizers of demonstration which turned out to be the source of the restriction of the freedom of expression of another group, the GOC was evaluated as being anti-Western institution, and against the European values. Therefore, the study of the GOC discourse, also the prevailing discourse among the GOC members, about these issues and, in general, about the EU is the key to understand which stance is taken by them. It is also possible that the GOC and some of its members perceive some aspects of the European values as unacceptable for them but this does not necessarily make the GOC as anti-EU institution.

In order to figure out the attitude and discourse of the GOC towards the above-mentioned issues and also to the EU, the statements of the Patriarch of all Georgia Ilia II, the decisions of the Holy Synod and other respective members of the GOC, for example, the person who takes high position in the department of education within the GOC, will be applied. The discourses of these persons labelled as articulation of pro-Russian attitude will also be discussed.

In order to clarify who speaks for the GOC and whose statements can be identified as influential, in the following paragraphs the structure of the GOC will be briefly outlined.

The Holy Synod of the GOC represents the highest branch of church authority, but in between of Holy Synod meetings the Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia II is the supreme authority and governor of the GOC. In addition, the Patriarch is the chairman of the Holy Synod (Patriarchate of Georgia, 2016).

The Holy Synod is represented by 47 members. Among its members, 26 are metropolitans, including the Patriarch who is also archbishop, 13 of them are bishops and the rest 8 are archbishops. The members of Holy Synod are the head of eparchies in Georgia and abroad. There are 40 eparchies in Georgia and 7 in the following geographical areas:

- Eparchy of Western Europe;
- Eparchy of Great Britain and Ireland;
- Eparchy of Belgium and Netherlands;
- Eparchy of Germany and Austria;
- Eparchy of North America;
- Eparchy of South America;
- Eparchy of Australia; (Patriarchate of Georgia, 2016)

Decision-making in the Holy Synod is based on the majority voting, but if the voting results are equal, then the decision is made according to the Patriarch's opinion and the resolution of the Holy Synod is obligatory for the all members of the GOC (Patriarchate of Georgia, 2016).

There are three levels of degrees among churchmen, the lowest one is deacon, the middle one - priest and the highest is high priest. These degrees are divided into different sub-degrees, depends on the type of 'white and black clergy'. For example, the middle degree consists of three different sub-degrees in white clergy: the priest, the archpriest and protopresbyter. The last degree is the highest in the white clergy. As for the highest degree in the 'black clergy', it is metropolitan (Megrelishvili, 2003, as referred at Orthodoxy.ge).

Considering the persons who can speak for the GOC, the first one is the Patriarch of Georgia, then other members of the Holy Synod, followed by the priests, mostly protopresbyter and archpriests. The heads of the eparchy, bishop, archbishop or metropolitan with the high probability have the influence over the churchmen serving within their eparchies. Protopresbyters are the heads of cathedral churches and the archpriests are the heads of the temples. Within the 'black clergy', after the first three highest degrees mentioned above, the degree of archimandrite is represented who supervises the heads of the monasteries.

To return to the methodology, discursive psychology is interested in the production of meanings, in particular, how they are produced within discourses, (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 119) and as this thesis tries to study the prevailing discourse among the GOC members towards the EU, the research focus will be on the GOC members discursive construction of the EU based on the interview method.

Generally, interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews are mainly used during quantitative research while in case of the qualitative study, semi-structured or unstructured interviews are exercised (Edwards & Holland, 2013, pp. 2-3). The semi-structured interviews have the following central characteristics:

- Interactive dialogue;
- topic-centered method, meaning that the interviewee has issues which should be covered during the interactive dialogue;
- "Meanings and understandings are created in an interaction, which is effectively a co-production, involving the construction or

reconstruction of knowledge.” (Mason, 2002, p. 62, as cited in Edwards & Holland, 2013, p.3)

Within the discursive psychology unstructured or semi-structured interviews for studying the language are applied. It is noted that mostly it is enough to use a selection of few empirical data, for instance, less than 10 interviews. This happens because the main center of the study is language use, and based on few people, it is possible to identify, form and maintain the particular discursive elements. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 120-121)

The following study desires to conduct interviews with about 10 members of the GOC. It is preferable to include as many hierarchical levels as possible and to manage meetings with the GOC members from deacon to metropolitan. Though, it should be acknowledged that from the sensitivity of the topic of the interviews, potential respondents might refuse to participate.

The questionnaire for the respondents will cover the following issues: law about the elimination of all forms of discrimination, the subject “I and society”, the case of 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration and issues related to the freedom of expression, the attitude of the GOC towards the EU and issues the respondents may identify as unacceptable for them and for the GOC.

## **The Influence of the GOC over the Politics in Georgia**

In the following chapter, examples of the GOC influence, not only over the majority of Georgian society (voters) but also over the politicians, will be illustrated.

In order to depict the picture of the church acceptance and popularity, the results of different surveys will be applied. In particular, the opinion polls conducted by the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute. Before illustrating the results of the opinion polls, it should be noted that approximately 84% of Georgians are Christian Orthodox (National Statistic office of Georgia, 2014).

According to the opinion poll results about the level of trust in different institutions in Georgia, the GOC is ranked at the first place with 91% (Baltic Surveys/The Gallup, 2015). In addition, the GOC is an institution in Georgia, which is capable to mobilize the most people compared to the other political groups or institutions in Georgia (Chitanava, 2015, p. 52). Furthermore, the outcome of the public opinion poll published by the National Democratic Institute clarifies that approximately 35% of voters make their election decisions based on the viewpoints of the priest and parish (Tabula, 2016).

The most vivid example of the priests' influence are the pre-parliamentary election developments. Despite the fact that the Holy Synod made decision obliging the churchmen to take a neutral stance, part of the churchmen did not agree with and disobeyed the adopted resolution. They publicly shared their political sympathy for the Georgian Dream coalition and attended the demonstration organized by the main opposing political actor. In addition to their personal support, they also called the voters not to vote for the then ruling party - United National Movement. As the Holy Synod called for the neutral position, the churchmen supporting the main opposition party claimed that if it became necessary, they would even abandon their positions, being the churchmen, and undress the cassocks. As the opinion of churchmen and, in general, of the GOC was considerable, in order to increase the acceptance and popularity among the voters, the leader of the coalition Georgian

Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili was demonstrating the allegiance with the GOC. Thus, the engagement of Orthodox priests in pre-elections campaign and their support to the Georgian dream had its influence over the voters and contributed in the success of the coalition in the 2012 parliamentary elections. (Chitanava, 2015, p. 49)

In general, since the Orthodox church is considered as the influential institution in Georgia, politicians and, mostly, political elite try to create the image of themselves as being closely associated with the GOC and avoid its criticism (Tsuladze, et al., 2016, pp. 151-152).

It should be noted that not only Georgian politicians, but also the representatives of the EU take into consideration that role of the GOC in the societal life is significant in Georgia, and during their visit in the country, they also meet the Patriarch Ilia II. Specifically, the clear demonstrations of the above-mentioned statement are the visits, of the previous EU commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood policy - Štefan Füle and his successor – Johannes Hahn, with the Patriarch Ilia II. (Tsuladze, et al., 2016, p. 152)

Apart from the above-mentioned examples, in the following paragraphs the influence of the GOC over Georgian politicians will be illustrated. In particular, their statements regarding to the draft of the anti-discrimination law, the draft of the subject “I and Society”, the code of the local self-government and the initiation related to the empowering of the Patriarch Ilia II with the right of granting the right to pardon the prisoners.

In 2013, the draft of the new self-government code was presented to the Parliament of Georgia. According to the Patriarch, acceptance of this draft law would cause collapse within Georgia. In order to avoid the destruction in the country, Ilia II asked the Parliament for further discussion of the draft law for improving its quality (Dgebuadze, 2013).

With regard to the Patriarchs position, the then deputy chairperson of the Parliament – Manaka Kobakhidze stated the following: “I would be interested to go deeper and figure out what kind of threats the GOC sees in the draft code,” she continues that “the government listens to the Patriarch and the position of the GOC is always important” (Interpressnews, 2013). Besides the comment of the deputy

chairperson of the Parliament, Eka Beselia, the chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Civil Integration, stated that the evaluation and “the position of his holiness is important”. Finally, because of the Patriarch’s criticism, the hearings of the then draft in the parliament were suspended and the appropriate body of the government was obliged to make necessary amendments (Chitanava, 2015, p. 49; Vacharadze, 2015).

In case of the draft of the school subject “I and Society”, the Holy Synod presented their evaluation and emphasized that there were problematic issues which deserved to be reviewed. Specifically, the Holy Synod claimed that the topics included in the subject, such as, political theories, gender identity and etc. would have been confusing for the teachers and also for the pupils (Patriarchate of Georgia, 2015).

The Minister of Education of that time, Tamar Sanikidze said that “the Ministry cooperates with the GOC and proceeds the final consultations with the GOC in order to create standard of the subject.” (Avaliani, 2016)

Generally, in cooperation with the GOC, the draft standard of the subject was amended. In particular, based on the recommendations of the GOC, the term “I and Family” was changed to “My family” in order to avoid distancing child from family. (Netgazeti.ge, 2015)

The next topic in which the influence of the GOC can be identified is the discussions about granting the right of the amnesty to the Patriarch. In December 2015, the Prime Minister at that time – Irakli Gharibashvili and Ilia II attended the play at the theatre performed by women prisoners. After the play, Ilia II said that it would be better if he had the right of amnesty. Later, the GOC announced that the Patriarch’s position was based on the solidarity and support for women prisoners and not the demand to discuss this issue on legislative level (Tabula, 2015).

Despite the statement of the GOC, the above-mentioned issue caused various opinions. Some of the NGO’s criticized such initiation (Civil Georgia, 2015). But in the ruling party, it was evaluated in apposite way. For instance, Kakhi Kakhishvili, the Minister of Corrections, argued the following: “I think that the Patriarch should have such right, I do not know any other person wiser than

him. That is why I think that he should definitely have the right to grant clemency. In order to do that, constitutional amendment is necessary” (Civil Georgia, 2015). The administration of the Prime Minister announced the official statement and according to it “the Prime Minister thinks that the engagement of the Patriarch in granting clemency to convicts would have the positive role and calls the President and Parliament to start discussion on that matter.” In addition, it is written in the announcement that “the Catholicos Patriarch of all Georgia, his Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II is the spiritual leader and his advice is significant and valuable for everyone” (Civil Georgia, 2015).

Regarding to this initiation, Eka Beselia stated “I would have been very happy if we had accepted such political decision. Granting this special right to the Patriarch, who has the highest level of trust in the society, would have been very good and useful decision. If there is political consent, I am sure that there will be many supporters for granting this right to the Patriarch at the legislative level. I support and welcome this initiation” (Ambebi.ge, 2015).

The last issue which will be discussed in this chapter is about the discussion over the adoption of the law about elimination of all forms of discrimination. The Patriarch evaluated the above-mentioned law as the basis for legalizing the illegality (Civil Georgia, 2014).

The most concerns were about the terms of ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘gender identity’. As the non-traditional sexual relations are perceived as the deadly sin within orthodox believers, the then existing draft-law on the elimination of all forms of anti-discrimination was recognized as propaganda of this sin and its legalization. The Patriarch asked the parliament to delay the adoption of this draft-law and to provide the wider discussion about it within the Georgian society. (Interpressnews, 2014)

Before the adoption of the anti-discrimination bill, Eka Beselia had meeting and discussed the draft bill with the members of the GOC (News.ge, 2014). During the meeting, the draft bill was discussed article-by-article and after the meeting Beselia noted that the consensus with churchmen was partially reached and some amendments would be proceeded (Tsintsadze, 2014).

The deputy chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Civil Integration Gedevan Popkhadze supported the draft law, but if the Holy Synod were against it, he was ready for not supporting the draft project initiated by the government of Georgia. Popkhadze argues: “Orthodox values are part of my identity and no matter how strong someone may demand from me ‘to be neutral from these values while making the decision,’ I cannot act in that way and I do not lie to anyone.” (Frontnews Georgia, 2014)

Finally, despite the resistance from the GOC, the anti-discrimination bill was adopted by the parliament. The terms ‘sexual orientation and ‘gender identity’ were remained, but “the second paragraph of the article five makes clause that, none of the regulations of the bill can be defined in a way, which contradicts the constitutional agreement of the state and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church “ (Transparency International - Georgia, 2014).

## **The Discourse Articulated by the Georgian Orthodox Church**

In the following chapter the discourse of the GOC is represented in two subsections. The first identifies the GOC discourse towards the EU and the second one suggests the collection of examples of GOC statements which in academic papers and media sources are labelled as the pro-Russian sentiments.

### **The Discourse of the GOC Towards the EU**

In this section, the attitude of the Patriarch Illia II and other high hierarchs of the GOC towards the issues related to the new self-government code, 'I and Society', 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration and anti-discrimination bill, will be elaborated.

When the Georgian parliament was discussing the new code of self-governance, the Patriarch of all Georgia Illia II stated that:

“Today our parliament and authority discuss the issue of self-governance. It is rather difficult subject and its implementation will cause the collapse of our country. We (meaning the GOC) will never tolerate to it and will take every possible measure to hinder its implementation. Georgia was and will be the united nation, united country. We have to remember that when the authority was powerful the country was powerful as well.” (Dgebuadze, 2013)

He also added: “From our point of view all regions of Georgia should be directly connected to the central authorities. The government should be aware of the problems the regions face and there is no need for mediator. The government has to discuss and study what is necessary for each region of Georgia. Our authorities should try to eradicate the problem which exists in a region. Some people try to adopt this code as soon as possible. We (meaning the GOC) think that this code should be considered by the whole nation” (Kviris Palitra, 2013).

Later, the head of public relation department of the GOC, Deacon David Sharashenidze expressed the opinion of the GOC about the self-governance code, including the reasons why the draft law on self-governance was unacceptable for the GOC. According to him:

“The GOC is not against strengthening of self-governing bodies and presented draft law deserves appreciations for the countries which have less

problems with restoration of territorial integrity. In our case, many aspects should be taken into consideration. Creation of regional self-governance based on the current draft law will provide the development of disintegrational processes” (Lomidze, 2013).

It should be noted that many civil society institutions supported the government to accept the draft-bill rejected by the GOC (Civil Georgia, 2013).

Later, it was said that the then prime minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili rejected the draft-law and demanded to remove the articles related to the creation of new regional autonomies in Georgia, in addition, the possibility of creation of new municipalities in Georgia based on the ethnical element was negatively evaluated by the Prime Minister Gharibashvili (Lomidze, 2013).

The new code of self-governance was adopted in February 2014 (Transparency International - Georgia, 2014), without any more discussions and debates among the Georgian society, the Georgian government and the GOC.

The other issue which generated the debate, within civil society institutions, Georgian society and the GOC, was the draft-law about the elimination of all forms of discrimination. Generally, acceptance of this bill was the responsibility of Georgian government on its way to European integration, in particular, for fulfilling the aspects written in the roadmap of visa liberalization for Georgia (Transparency International - Georgia, 2014).

The Patriarch Ilia II emphasized that violence and discrimination is unacceptable for the GOC. In addition, he stated that according to the existing laws the rights of the citizens of Georgia were equally protected and introduction of the concepts of “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” would cause confusion in Georgian society. As the non-traditional sexual relations are perceived as the deadly sin within orthodox believers, the then existing draft-law on the elimination of all forms of anti-discrimination was recognized as propaganda of this sin and its legalization. The Patriarch asked the parliament to detain the adoption of this draft-law and to provide the wide discussion about it within the Georgian society. (Interpressnews, 2014)

Despite the resistance of the GOC, the Georgian parliament adopted the law on elimination of all forms of discrimination, without removing the notions – ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘gender identity.’ Although, the adopted code included the protection of social moral as one of the legitimated goal of the law. It happened because of the activity of the GOC. Moreover, it was shared as the political compromise from government’s side. (Kunchulia, 2014)

On the same day, when the law was adopted, the GOC made the following statement:

“We are not able to agree or disagree on the current version of the law, because we did not have possibility to analyze it. And making hasty evaluations from different priests on this serious matter would not be right” (Accept, 2014).

Later, the head of the GOC expressed his opinion about the adoption of anti-discrimination bill:

“I would like to talk about the adoption of anti-discrimination law... there are subjects which should not be allowed. How is that feasible to legalize the illegality? Legalization of illegality is a big sin and I said exactly about this, it would have been surprising and wondering if I have not said what I said. This law will not be accepted by any orthodox believer and I would like to emphasize that time will pass by and it will be surprising for us, how this bill was adopted. And I ask to the god to forgive our sins, whether intentional or unintentional.” (Civil Georgia, 2014)

The next topic which deserved extensive attention not only from the GOC but also from the Orthodox believers was the celebration of international day against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia from minority group in Tbilisi in 2013. This group was planning to organize a demonstration with the aim of attracting public attention about the existing evidences of homophobic attitude and discrimination of LGBT people (Interpressnews, 2013). The planned demonstration was widely accepted among believers as an insult for Georgian traditions and orthodox values.

The day before the demonstration, the head of the GOC addressed to the Tbilisi City Hall and governmental authorities to abolish the permission of the demonstration. He stated the following:

“On 17<sup>th</sup> of May the demonstration is planned by sexual minority and their supporters, which aims not the solving of such people’s problems, but speculation by this issue. It is fact that in our country, despite the widespread traditional thinking, people representing the sexual minority can choose and realize their private life. It is also fact that the common rules for all mankind exist, including the moral rules. All religions discuss homosexuality as disease and anomaly... Homosexuals are viewed as heavy sinners from the GOC, the people, who need support to find the right way and not encouragement, moreover, spreading the ideas of homosexuality within the society... Our citizens see this demonstration as the violation of the rights of the majority, abusive for their traditions, beliefs and in general, for moral code. I think that Tbilisi City Hall and the government should consider these circumstances and abolish the permission on the planned demonstration. I want to note that the international conventions explicitly allow... to restrict the right of freedom of expression in order to protect the right and dignity of others and to avoid crime and destabilization” (Ambebi.ge, 2013).

Some accidents and violence took place on 17<sup>th</sup> of May between opposing parties. It should be noted that many priests participated in the demonstration and this fact was evaluated as orthodox clergy-led manifestation. Furthermore, some of them took part in violent actions which made the major part of the Georgian society annoyed and the image of the GOC was disparaged.

Regarding the consequences of 17<sup>th</sup> of May, Ilia II said:

“What happened on May 17 is very regrettable... ideas which [gay right activists] wanted to install there, are completely unacceptable in Georgia”. He also added:“ it is also very regrettable that the Georgian clergy was acting impolitely and I want to call on everyone for calm” (Civil Georgia, 2013).

In addition to the Patriarch’s position, the Georgian Patriarchate published the statement related to the 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration. This statement also showed the regrets of the GOC for what happened on that day and clarified that the GOC should take the necessary procedures against the priests engaged in violent actions. As for the anti-gay manifestation, the report included components of describing the rally as having provocative nature. The first reason was widespread orthodox values

among the Georgian society, and this rally was identified as propaganda of homosexuality by them. The venue, was viewed as the second component increasing the provocative nature of the manifestation, as having “strong emotional ties” to Georgia’s “historical memory and traditions.” (Civil Georgia, 2013)

The other issue, deserving the negative evaluation from the GOC is the plan of the Minister of Education to introduce the new subject “I and society” at schools. The basic aim of this subject is facilitation of civic education among pupils.

The Holy Synod released a statement that draft of this subject involves ‘serious gaps’ and it is necessary to discuss the existing draft with the society, in order to take into consideration the opinion not only of the society, also the point of view of other traditional religious groups. (Tabula, 2015)

The following aspects, in the standard of this subject related to the political theories, such as liberalism and democratic values, the notion of gender identity, some method of psychotherapy, for instance: brainstorming and hot-seat technique, were recognized from the GOC as confusing not just for the pupils but also for the teachers. (Patriarchate of Georgia, 2015)

During the communication process between the representatives of the Ministry of Education of Georgia and the department of education of the GOC some terms were changed. For example, based on the recommendations of the GOC, the term “I and Family” was changed to “My family” in order to avoid distancing child from family. (Netgazeti.ge, 2015)

It should be noted that the GOC itself was not against teaching the subject at schools. According to deputy chairman of the educational department of the GOC, Bidzina Gunia, the problem was about the standard, on which later the subject should be built. The aim of discussions was to improve the quality of standard, creating the correspondence of the subject with the social need and etc.; that is why engagement of psychologists, teachers, parents, religious groups and scientists in discussions should have critical importance. (Bejitashvili, 2015)

To move from the policy-oriented controversies to the representation of the European Union, the following paragraphs will describe the attitude of the Patriarch Ilia II towards the EU.

During the meeting with the then commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle, Ilia II said: “We are very satisfied that today Georgia, after passing the difficult period of communist regime, takes steps towards the integration in the European structures. The European Union is a well-known organization for Georgians and we are doing everything for becoming a full member of this great organization.” [...]in addition, the Patriarch added [...] “in some countries misleading information is spread, as if the GOC hinders the process of the European integration of Georgia. I would like to assure you that the GOC will take every possible mean for fulfilling this idea.” (Civil Georgia, 2014)

Besides, he added that “there are non-governmental organizations, spreading the false information about the GOC’s attitude related to the Georgia’s Europeanization.” (Civil Georgia, 2014) Basically, these organizations emphasize that in case of values and culture, the GOC sees the threat in European integration. But, Ilia II mentioned that he “is absolutely sure that membership of the EU is quite possible based on the traditions and values of Georgians.” (Civil Georgia, 2014)

On June 27, 2014, when the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia was signed, the head of the GOC said that “now, as never before, we are approaching the European culture, but we should remember that it is not only a great honor for Georgia, but responsibility. God bless all the people who dedicated themselves for this happy day.” (Ambioni.ge, 2014)

There is the commercial on the official TV channel of the GOC where the Patriarch Illia II expresses support of the GOC on the way of Georgia’s European integration with the following statement: “The European Union is a well-known organization for Georgian people and we are doing everything to become a full member of this big organization, I would like to assure you that Georgian Orthodox Church will do everything for realizing this idea” (TV channel of the GOC - Unanimity, 2016).

In December 2015, the head of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker said that the visa free travel should be offered to Georgia (Jozwiak, 2015). On the next day, Ilia II met ambassador Janos Herman, Head of the European Union

Delegation to Georgia, and the then prime minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili. During the meeting the Patriarch said:

” We are here to celebrate what happened yesterday. The European Union adopted the resolution that Georgia took a big step towards the EU. I would like to state that this is the great achievement, the great triumph of the whole Georgian people and the Orthodox church of Georgia.” (Chaduneli, 2015)

At the same meeting, Ilia II mentioned that: “the full membership of the EU and strong connection impose the responsibility to us. We hope that the EU not only bring us lots of benefits, but also preserve our culture.” (Rustavi 2, 2015)

At the meeting with Ilia II in December 2015, the president of Austria asked him about his personal opinions regarding the European choice of Georgia and Russo-Georgian relations at both governmental and religious levels. The head of the GOC answered that: “Georgia has chosen the European way. Willing to become the part of the European democratic structures. This choice is firm and we will definitely reach our aim. As for the relations among churches, it is tough.” (Interpressnews, 2015)

#### The Examples of the GOC Discourse Labelled as Pro-Russian

In media sources and academic papers, some statements of the GOC members, including the Patriarch, are evaluated as pro-Russian rhetoric. These discourses are generalized at the whole GOC level, thus, according to such sources the most trusted institution in Georgia is viewed as anti-EU and the one ‘playing Russian game’.

For instance, in one of the publications, the author argues, that even after the war 2008 between Georgia and Russia, the GOC has not stopped its ‘pro-Russian game’. Moreover, the same author argues that “the Church took on anti-Western views prevalent in Putin’s Russia, took it up to the level of doctrine and has since been teaching it everywhere, in every sermon and has never missed an occasion to weave it into their public speeches. This is done at the local level, at every church, by every bishop and by every church hierarch.” (Vacharadze, 2015, p. 55)

According to Chitanava (2015), “pro-Russian sentiments are heavily emanating from the GOC” and the ‘same-faith’ discourse is actively promoted by the Orthodox churchmen. As an example, the author brings the words of the Patriarch – “Putin is a wise man” and "the love between Georgia and Russia will be eternal" (Chitanava, 2015, pp. 45,55.).

In the media sources, Gegelia (2013) notes that the GOC has the shameful rhetoric while emphasizing the friendship of two nations, Georgia and Russia (Gegelia, 2013). Muchaidze (2014), claims that the identification of Russia, as the defender of the genuine values of Christianity, and the fighter against ‘Gayropa’, have influence over the majority of Georgian population and this influence is strengthened by the statements of the high hierarchs of the GOC (Muchaidze, 2014).

Regarding the clashes taken place on 17<sup>th</sup> of May, in one of the media sources, the journalist states that “the actions of the Church and its parish on 17<sup>th</sup> of May have proved that the majority of Georgian population do not share Western values and thus the state is not ready to be integrated in the Western world. The threat of theocracy in Georgia has become vivid. There are parallels with Iran, the governing principles of Bolsheviks’, medieval centuries, which of course is in contradiction with the liberal and democratic values. What more can be meant by returning to the Russian orbit?!” (Matiashvili, 2013). From this logic, it can be argued that the role of the church regarding the 17<sup>th</sup> may demonstrations is evaluated in a way, that the GOC is against accepting of Western values in Georgia.

The discourse of the GOC related to Russia, the 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration, the draft of the anti-discrimination bill and LGBT rights were noted by Kakabadze (2014) and the author argues that there is the pro-Russian discourse in the GOC.

The following paragraphs discuss the statements of the Ilia II, based on which the above-mentioned author argues that the GOC shares the Russian discourse. His judgement is made about the consideration by the Patriarch Ilia II of homosexuality as “anomaly and disease,” and the 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration - as the “insult to Georgian traditions” (Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, 2013). In addition, Kakabadze brings another example - the Patriarch Ilia II announced 17<sup>th</sup>

of as family day, its strength and purity. The day before the 17<sup>th</sup> May demonstration in 2014, the GOC publicized the statement and in this statement, it is said that “The purity of the family and its solidity is the foundation of the state power. The encroachment of the purity of family, recognition of the perverted and unnatural relations as natural is not acceptable neither for the majority of Georgian population regardless their religious beliefs nor for the Orthodox Church. But, this does not mean that the church fights against the sinner. On the contrary the church takes care of such person and strives for their betterment. In order to avoid god’s anger; the church unfolds and fights against the sin and its public propaganda. That is why the church tries to protect the nation from legalizing the immorality and spiritual violence.” [...] in addition, by this statement the GOC says that [...] “As we are informed, part of the Orthodox believers is planning to organize demonstration. The church was and is against any kind of violence and we would like to call them for holding the demonstration peacefully.” (Civil Georgia, 2014)

According to Kakabadze (2014) the examples illustrated above “shows how discourse articulated by the Kremlin is shared by the Georgian Orthodox Church and projected onto the society. Gay propaganda, pedophilia, the West being pervert, is present in the discourse articulated by the hierarchs of the Georgian Orthodox Church, in the same way, the Russian political elite does.” (Kakabadze, 2015, p. 46)

#### Summary of the GOC Discourse

According to the presented evidences it can be argued that the most concern of the GOC regarding the EU is related to some cultural aspects accepted in the most EU member states. In this regard, the Patriarch Ilia II declared in his Christmas epistle that Georgia is the part of “Christian Europe”, though the European Union should consider the “traditions and mindset” of the country (Civil Georgia, 2014). The analysis of the discourses also showed that the recognition of sexual relations between same sex people, not as deviation, but, as normal and natural represents the controversial issue for the GOC and the Georgian society.

The articulated discourse of the GOC in regard of the anti-discrimination bill and the draft of the school subject “I and Society”, reveals that the GOC has

negative attitude towards the issues of ‘gender identity’ and ‘sexual orientation.’ Although, in all of these cases, the GOC does not represent strictly opposing actor, more specifically, as it is clarified in the statement of the GOC, “I and Society” is not unacceptable for them, but the topics included in the draft are the matter of discussion and amendments are necessary.

The draft of the anti-discrimination bill is perceived as the threat of legalizing the non-traditional sexual relations in Georgia and such relations are recognized as depravity and immorality. The same applies to the 17<sup>th</sup> of May minority demonstration.

As for the draft of the self-government law, the statements uncover that the Orthodox Church is not against the adoption of the draft *per se*, but encourages the government to conduct discussions with interest groups in order to work out the more consensual draft.

In all three cases, main concern for the GOC was that adoption of these drafts and the book, and also propagation of gay rights would damage the widely-accepted traditional family values.

It is important to mention that traditional families are strongly valued within the European Union as well and the propaganda of LGBT rights is negatively perceived. For example, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania are recognized as the countries not very welcoming to the LGBT minority rights (Sheftalovich, 2016). In Poland, the ruling party - Roman Catholic Law and Justice is recognized as anti-gay, its Chairman Jarolaw Kaczynski states that "affirmation of homosexuality will lead to the downfall of civilization" (Smith, 2016). In addition, Poland, together with Hungary postponed “an EU ministerial agreement that would have forced all EU countries to honor same-sex “marriages” wherever they were contracted in the European Union [...] they argued that [...] “this would violate their sovereign prerogative to legislate on marriage and family matters” (Gennarini, 2015).

The anti-LGBT statements are not unfamiliar for the Lithuanian society either. While working over the partnership bill, the authorities of Lithuania were discussing it with Catholic Church. It should be noted that same-sex marriage is not

included in the bill and, generally, in Lithuania, the catholic church has significantly conservative attitudes towards family issues (Kropaite, 2015).

Moreover, in the seven member states of the European Union same-sex marriage is constitutionally prohibited. For example, the constitution of Hungary stipulates the following: “Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of a man and a woman established by voluntary decision, and the family as the basis of the nation’s survival” (Hungary's Constitution of 2011). In addition to Hungary, constitutions of Slovakia, Latvia, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland and Bulgaria also define marriage as the union of one man and one woman (Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1991) (Constitution of The Republic of Poland, 1997) (The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, 1992) (Mass Resistance, 2013) (Sheeter, 2005) (Tomek, 2014). Even though these countries do not accept gay marriages, this does not mean that they are anti-EU. They are the members of the European Union and but maintain their traditional stance with regard to LGBT rights. Based on this logic, neither the GOC can be assumed as anti-EU or pro-Russian institution because of its support to defend traditional family values.

# **The Discourse Articulated by the Representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church**

## **Description of the Respondents**

In order to figure out the patterns of the discourse articulated within the GOC, qualitative research tool, in particular semi-structured interview method was applied. In the beginning, the potential respondents were selected based on the personal contact and later by using snowball method.

The initial idea was to conduct the interviews with the members expressing pro-European, pro-Russian or neutral stance regarding the foreign policy direction of Georgia. In addition, the author of this dissertation aimed to record as many interviews as possible. Only 11 persons agreed to participate in interviews out of 30. As for their age, it varies from 22 to 70. It should be noted that reaching the members of the GOC who take radical or anti-European positions was almost impossible. In addition, an interview with one of the respondents was conducted by cell phone.

The original aim was to include all the hierarchical levels and this goal was reached. Although, the representativeness of the GOC members based on the hierarchies is not equal. Eight persons out of 11 were archpriests and the rest three were metropolitan, deacon and archimandrite. Among those, who denied or did not take part in the interviews because of different reasons, 12 members were archpriests, four metropolitans, one protopresbyter and two deacons. Besides the deacon, all other members can be identified as influential.

Generally educational background of the respondents was the following: economic, journalistic, history, cinematography, psychology, theology, engineering and economics. The only one respondent have Bachelor, Master and Doctor's degree. All of them have degree in theology, in addition, some of them have educational background from other fields.

## Brief Outline of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was created based on the issues on which the GOC was evaluated as having anti-European stance according to mass media and/or non-governmental organizations.

The respondents were asked the question about the anti-discrimination law, code of self-governance, the subject – ‘I and Society,’ 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration and freedom of expression, the Georgian Orthodox Church’s attitudes towards the European integration of Georgia and etc. It should be noted that answers on the questions make it possible to figure out whether the respondents have an understanding of the EU-Georgia relations or it is completely unknown for them. In addition, answers of the respondents reveal the thoughts of the GOC members regarding the sensitive issues, such as the possibility for minority groups to freely express their thoughts and opinions. As a result, the elements of the discursive patterns within the GOC towards the EU can be identified.

### Analysis of the Interviews

On the question about the GOC’s attitude to support the European Integration of Georgia, nine respondents said that the church has quite positive stance about this issue. In addition, all of them agree on the current policy approach and they themselves support Georgia’s Europeanization. One interviewee, the archpriest, described the internal situation as heterogeneous: “On the one hand, there is group which takes pro-EU stance, while on the other hand, there is a group of people, the radical one, which does not support the policy of the Georgian government to become the full member of the EU. Generally, I would say that more people do not express the pro-EU approach. Although, it should be mentioned that their influence within the GOC is not tangible. In addition, mostly people who have pro-European approach have bigger influence compared to the above-mentioned group. In regard to the common attitude in the GOC, I think it is neutral.” In addition, he emphasized that he himself supports the full membership of Georgia in the EU. One respondent noted that some priests in their preaches positively talk about the European future of our country, while others mention cultural aspects

from the EU values, which are unacceptable for Georgians, therefore the latter distance themselves from the EU and do not support the idea of being a full member of the European family. But, he himself states that the church is not able and should not take pro-EU, neutral or pro-Russian position, because these issues are not matters of the GOC: “The only thing I can say is that, we (state) should not take one approach radically, I think that we have to live for today and then we can see what we can do in the future, but again radical choice does not seem to be beneficial.” One of the respondents argued that the choice of the GOC and its position is based on the will of society, their attitude towards the country’s Europeanization and the current situation within the country. Additionally, the interviewees were asked to roughly estimate how the supporters of the pro-EU or pro-Russian choices are distributed within the GOC. Four respondents noted that judging from their personal contacts, the distribution can be evaluated as 50%-50%. In case of one interviewee, as mentioned above, he thinks that more than 50% supports pro-Russian attitude. Five participants said that they do not have enough information and it is difficult for them to evaluate the distribution. One respondent said that he has never thought about this matter and has no answer.

In case of the question about the reforms implemented by the government since 2012, such as anti-discrimination bill and code of local self-government, all respondents think that these actions were taken in order to get closer to the EU. Although, two of them emphasized that the law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination was adopted because of the pressure from the EU: “Our government does not have a choice, as we want to be members of the EU, they have to adopt the laws which are not recommended but super imposed by the EU institutions. If the government does not meet the strict demands of the EU, then the probability to become the EU member will become questionable.” One respondent said that he is not much aware of legislative issues and is not able to state why they were adopted. But, he stated the following: “I am not aware of the rules, codes and legislative issues, I think that the most important for our country is maintaining its connection to the EU and the US. We have to get closer to the EU. These laws are good if they give us a chance to get closer to the EU, if not then adopting of these codes will not

be a positive step from my point of view. I would like Georgia to be the part of the European Union like Romania, Bulgaria and Greece.” According to an interviewee, “the adoption of these new laws is a good step from the parliament of Georgia. I think that these laws are excellent and the adoption of them clarifies that our country is on the way of progress and development.”

The attitude of interviewees regarding to the adoption of the law on the elimination of all forms of discrimination can be evaluated as neutral. One respondent identified it as an absolutely positive step: “as the adoption of the law was part of the roadmap to get visa liberalization, Georgia successfully fulfill this responsibility and took the next step towards the EU.” Some respondents stressed that what is written in the bill is already rooted in Georgian culture and consciousness that is why they do not see the necessity for the adoption of the law. They also stated that putting on the paper what is already entrenched in our culture is not a problem. Their attitude can be summarized with the following: “we are Christians and our religion teaches us love, not hatred, kindness, not violence and with this law, the government only formalized the morally existing rules.” One interviewee mentioned that if we look at this code as the possibility to get closer to the EU, its adoption is positive, but if we look at this code from the viewpoint of our Christian values, then it can be argued that the approval of this code is negative step from the government. One respondent argued that the draft of anti-discrimination law should have been discussed thoroughly by the society, by the GOC, ethnical and religious minorities. From this perspective, he evaluates the adoption of this law as hasty. One interviewee claimed that there was no necessity to adopt this law, no social requirement for it.

Responses regarding to the development of the May 17 were mostly homogeneous. Almost all respondents stated that it was the act of sin, which is condemned according to orthodox Christianity.

In addition, before answering the questions about their attitude towards minority demonstration and the restriction of freedom of expression, almost all interviewees stated that generally the GOC members had no intention to hinder someone to express his or her opinion. Some of them mentioned that they were

participating in the demonstration and according to them, the consequences of clashes most likely would have been much more severe if priests had not taken part in manifestation and detained the aggressive mass of people, who wanted to hinder the demonstration organized by the minority group. Some respondents evaluated the development of the situation as the minority group's well-organized provocation. According to one of them, "some organizations needed to show that they were working and protecting minority rights while there was no problem with minority groups, no violation of their rights. In addition, provokers had their material purposes, because after this demonstration they would have received grants from the other organizations." Couple of respondent said that what happened at that day is a black spot and open wound for the GOC: "All thinking churchmen are worried for what happened independently from us (means churchmen) on 17th of May. The fact that couple of priests made mistakes does not mean that it is the mistake of the GOC and it shares their attitude towards minority groups. Our (the GOC) approach towards such groups is not aggressive and we do not repulse them with stool. Our god is the god of love and it is impossible from the churchman who serves the god of love, oppose anyone in a physical manner. Our attitude towards sinners will never be hostile, but we will always be merciless to sin."

Majority of respondents expressed their concerns regarding the way how 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration was covered in mass media sources and evaluated by non-governmental organizations. In particular, they showed the image of the church as anti-European, source of hatred and oppressor. All respondents said that couple of priests participating in the demonstration violated not just civil code, but also, they did the act of sin. Then the actions of these priests were widely shared through the social network and media sources. Consequently, the priests and generally the GOC was depicted as oppressors and brutal. According to one of the interviewees, "when we (the members of the GOC) have meetings with foreigners, delegations from other countries, they have bias about us based on the information provided by mass media sources, non-governmental organizations and etc. But, after the meeting they are pleasantly surprised that we are not radicals can close-minded people."

As argued by another interviewee, people representing sexual minority did not choose the right path: “Discrimination of people regarding its sexual, political or racial identity is completely unacceptable for me. But, we should not support the spread of sins and as the 17th of May demonstration from minority group was the act to propaganda of their way of life, that is why priests protested this demonstration.” In addition, the interviewee argued that “there are gathering places in Tbilisi where LGBT persons meet each other. Everyone knows these places but no one opposes them to meet. But 17<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration was not usual gathering, it was the act of sin, promotion of sin and that is why I and other members of the GOC protested it.” Another respondent argued: “what happened on 17<sup>th</sup> of May caused protest in me, there were acts of violence from some of priests and I definitely do not agree with such approach. But, it does not mean that I agree promotion of the lifestyle of LGBT people. They are sinners and we (the GOC) should definitely oppose the spread of sin, otherwise future generation of our country will be negatively influenced by such groups. Be an LGBT person but do not spread the viewpoint that the lifestyle you have is correct and there is nothing wrong with it!”

Some priests argued that as the people representing sexual minority have never had any problem within the society and their rights were not violated, there was no need to organize such manifestation. When it comes to the issue on the restriction of freedom of expression, majority of the respondents emphasized that the Georgian government should have taken into consideration the fact that more than 80% of Georgian population is orthodox and such demonstration would cause anger within the society. Judging from the existing situation, these interviewees argued that this minority group should not have had the permission of the manifestation.

Regarding the general opinion about the circumstances when the freedom of expression should be restricted, one respondent claimed the following: “When demonstration consists anti-state and ‘anti-church’ activities, it should be restricted, or even banned. Also, openly abusing the Patriarch of Georgia and offending the GOC should be restricted because such freedom of expression negatively affects on

the emotional feelings of believers, moreover, it impacts on their national and moral feelings and this is not good. Such demonstration will definitely cause resistance and tension within the society. The government should think about its population and the rule of law in the country, from this logic, the demonstrations which have the characteristics mentioned above should be restricted.” The other respondent said that “any kind of expression which serves the depravity of a human should be restricted. When the promotion of illness (being an LGBT person is an illness from his point of view) is planned on the state level, then the government should try to avoid such actions, as they represent the promotion of a particular sin. According to one of the churchmen, “the GOC cannot make compromise when the issue is about the sin. This is an abomination and we should avoid such manifestations in peaceful ways. If we do not contradict it, then it means that we agree. I, as a churchman, cannot agree on such manifestations. I think that the minority group should take into consideration the opinions of majority and the expression should never be propaganda of a particular lifestyle. On 17<sup>th</sup> of May, LGBT minority group had placard ‘be colored’ and I think that by this statement they encouraged people to become ‘colored’ and to accept their lifestyle as normal. This is exactly the propaganda which I will never accept as normal and always contradict in a peaceful manner.”

One respondent stated that, “such minorities have the right to express their ideas and opinions freely but the venue should be chosen carefully. For example, the demonstration should not be held in the city center, closer to school and etc. Otherwise it will cause anger within the majority of the society and clashes will be highly probable.” One of the interviewees said: “I have enough power to endure the demonstration organized by LGBT groups like it was 17<sup>th</sup> of May. But, others think that as such parade is a threat, it should be hindered and avoided. I think that it is not necessary to create new hot topics which cause tensions. In addition, I think that it is not correct to organize a demonstration, which is unacceptable for the majority of Georgians, and try to test if the population of the country endure spread of unacceptable lifestyle in their country. This is the transforming of peaceful situation into tensions. Thus, I do not see any necessity of organizing such demonstrations.”

One of the archpriests stated that the organizers wanted the demonstration to be provocative. According to him “the GOC and the government suggested this group another venue for the rally, but they wanted it to be provocative and finally the clashes took place. Everyone should have the right to express their opinion but majority of the people in Georgia do not like the expression of the ideas, representing the propaganda of the sin, which is perceived as a threat among the majority of Georgian population. That is why people, including churchmen, protested this demonstration.”

As for the common position within the GOC about the restriction of the above-mentioned demonstration, eight respondents said that generally the members of the GOC oppose such sort of expression, one archpriest said that he does not have enough information to evaluate the general position within the members. Two respondents stated that there are liberal minded members, who think that LGBT minority group should have the right to express their opinions freely, one of them does not agree such statement and radically oppose LGBT manifestation and the second one thinks that some conditions, clauses should be met, for example, the nature of demonstration, the place where it will take place, and then it they should have the possibility to express their views.

Regarding the draft of the school subject “I and Society”, two respondents opposed this innovation, one of them stated the following: “the draft of this subject is terrible, it is a well-wrapped trap. It seems as though the subject teaches pupils how to integrate within the society and acquire some skills but these are just façade. The real goal of this subject is to deprave pupils, for example by teaching that LGBT people and their lifestyle is ordinary phenomena and it is not a deviation. That is why I opposed the introduction of this subject.” Another archpriest claimed that the first draft of the standard needed to be revised and improved based on the evaluation of the GOC. At the same time, he thinks that there is no need of teaching this subject.

Four interviewees said that they like the idea of the subject but based on the current draft they have remarks and it seems that for them the introduction of the subject at school in the form of the current version is unacceptable. One of them

stated that “introducing this subject at school is not just recommended, but imposed by the EU and the current draft of the standard represents a threat, because it will provide propaganda of depravity among pupils.” Although, he added that the idea of the subject to enhance civic consciousness, is acceptable for him, but only after satisfying one condition – planning and implementing this project in coordination with the GOC.

One respondent mentioned that he does not agree with the idea that this subject will provide the deprivation of pupils. In addition, according to him idea of the subject cannot be a threat but the most important factor for him is adaptation of the topics and the whole subject to the target audience. From this logic, he shares the remarks of the GOC education center.

Four respondents mentioned that they are not much aware of this subject and their knowledge about this matter is based on the evaluation of center of education of the GOC: “I do not know this subject in deep details, but I know that the ministry of education and the appropriate department of the GOC worked together in order to establish the standard, on which the subject will be created. As far as I know some remarks of the GOC were taken into consideration but there still are aspects which are unacceptable for the GOC and I think that it would be better if the ministry of education takes into account the position and remarks of the GOC.”

On the question, whether the GOC supports strong economic ties with the EU, while some of the aspects of cultural proximity are perceived as threat, absolute majority of the respondents (9) answers that this is not reality. One of the archpriest mentioned the following: “there are priests who think that some cultural aspects widespread in the EU are threat for Georgian culture. But, I cannot agree with them, I doubt that their fears are based on the lack of knowledge, they do not know the EU and its cultural elements good enough, consequently such situation causes confusion and concerns. I think that we need more communication with the EU, as a result the unreasonable fears will disappear. As for the general attitude, the GOC does support the pro-EU path of the country and does not perceive the necessity of stronger economic ties while distancing itself from cultural aspects.” Another

archpriest mentioned that “some cultural aspects can be identified as threats but this fact does not necessarily mean that, generally, cultural proximity is a threat.” In addition, he emphasized that “Georgia needs not just cultural, but also proximity in other fields as our country strives to become a full member of the EU.” One respondent argued that the GOC might be against some cultural elements widespread some members of the EU. For example, “same sex-marriage is possible in some countries of the EU, this aspect can be counted as not acceptable for the GOC. But, this is not the widely-shared component throughout the whole union. I think that the GOC does not support strong economic relations and tries to avoid the cultural proximity, on the contrary, on our way of cooperation, we need cultural exchanges, experience and knowledge sharing.” One of the respondents claims that the GOC supports the economic aspects of cooperation but identifies cultural aspects as threats. Mostly, his evaluation is based on the cultural elements which according to him will provide spread of depravity in Georgians. The other interviewee states that “some churchmen tell their parish that the EU will provide us with depravity and mental illness, but this is definitely incorrect remark, propaganda of such viewpoints is should be avoided.” In addition, one of the respondents, who also is the longtime member of the Holy Synod says that “such discussion has never taken place in Holy Synod. Romania, Bulgaria and Greece are members of the EU and I have never heard that depravity or anything like that is becoming widespread since they are members of the EU.” One of the churchmen emphasize that more economic relation and less cultural proximity is not the shared belief within the GOC: “Maybe there are members who radically oppose close cultural relations with the EU, but they are not influential enough to affect on the general GOC attitude regarding the EU-Georgia relations. I and the churchmen with whom I have contacts like the values on which the EU stands. It stands on the Christian values, equality, human rights and etc. If Georgia reaches such condition as soon as possible, we (the GOC) always welcome such a good trend of development.”

The answers on the question which foreign policy direction is better for the future development of Georgia, were quite similar to each other. Only one

respondent took a neutral position because of the following reason: “when considering the choice related to the foreign policy, I think that we should not make a decision promptly, we have to scrutinize the pros and cons of each choice. According to the history of our country, we almost always were surrounded by empires, Ottoman empire, Persian empire, Russian empire, and etc. Because of this reason, we always needed to implement policies which were in accordance with the interests of one of the empires. In that way, we survived and still exist today. According to the current situation, we have to consider our history while making a decision. I was born and grown up in communist regime and I do not remember anything significant (in a positive way) Russia did for Georgia, the same happens in case of the EU. I rather prefer to keep neutral position in a current situation, try to have good relations with every international actor, otherwise, if we make a radical choice, then with the high probability, we will pay the cost. Moreover, such choice may lead us to deadlock.” The rest 10 agree on the current political course of Georgia – the European Integration. They mentioned that we have historical experience what Russia did to us, how it destroyed our state system and occupied our regions. In addition, they underlined that the EU membership will be the opportunity for development. Although, five of them choose the pro-EU way because of the existing circumstances. In particular, they mentioned that the neutrality is the ideal way, but at the same time these interviewees emphasized that having a model of Switzerland is utopia and impossible to implement in Georgia. According to one of these respondents “we (the country) have two options, take a pro-Russian way or pro-EU way. In between of these alternatives, I definitely support pro-EU approach, because what we remember from Russia is wars and bombs, this is the state which wants disappearance of Georgia, of course we have to try to improve our relations with Russia, but it should not be our first strategic partner.” Another respondent stressed that 20% of the territory of Georgia is occupied by Russia, but this should not cause hatred towards Russia: “We have to try and solve these problems in a peaceful manner, dialog between these conflicting parties is necessary but this should not become the ground for revision of Georgia’s main foreign policy direction and softening of pro-EU position. I definitely think

that maintaining the European way is critically important.” One of the archpriests states the following: “generally, making a strategic decision about the foreign policy is difficult and quite challenging. But, in case of Georgia, we should take into consideration that Russia did lots of damage to Georgia in material, territorial and even, despite the fact that we have ‘same-faith,’ the spiritual loss. In my opinion, the best way in the current situation is to strive for the full membership of the EU and to try to have balance relation with Russia. In addition, the membership of the EU should have the following clause, having the autonomy in cultural terms.”

The rest five interviewees completely support the integration of Georgia in the EU. One of them says that the symbol of development for him is Europe (meaning the EU) and “if we want to choose and then follow the way of progress, we have to make a choice in favor of the EU.” The other churchmen states, “I have heard quite often when people, including churchmen, say that Georgia and Russia have the ‘same-faith’ and at least because of this reason the government should take the stance which is not in contradiction with Russia’s interest. I think that the ‘same-faith’ issue should not be identified as determinant in choosing the foreign policy. Yes, we have the ‘same-faith’ but at the same time, ‘the deeds speak for the faith’ and from the actions of Russia we have got a huge damage. To my mind, the EU is a possibility to develop, also improve the quality of the safety within the country and be more secured from external threats.” One of the respondents argues that “pro-Russian course will impede the development of the country, we have to follow the current pro-EU approach but, also try to solve conflict with Russia by applying peaceful methods. I think that for the EU, to expand and accept a new member, which has territorial conflicts with its neighbor and does not try to solve it with the internationally recognized peaceful principles, will not be acceptable.” One of the archpriest says: “Russia had supremacy over Georgia for almost two centuries, and still parts of the territories of Georgia are occupied by the Russian Federation and its military forces are located there. In this difficult situation, we have to manage and maintain our strategic foreign policy aim, membership of the EU. In addition, we (Georgia), should have dialogue with Russia and they have to realize that Georgia is a sovereign state with its national interest. We do not aspire the EU

membership because of obsession, we have this goal because we want progress, development and state institutions in the EU is developed, the rule of law is ensured, human rights are protected and etc. Such phenomena are not common in Russia, therefore pro-Russian position would be the steps back on the way of development.“

On the last question, what additional issues can be identified which are unacceptable from the EU values, the absolute majority of the respondents answer that they do not have other remarks, some of them say that they are not fully aware of every aspect of the EU-Georgia relations, but based on existing knowledge there are not more issues which may become unacceptable for the GOC and also for them. As, one of the respondents suggests: “we are obliged to meet the requirements of the EU in order to deepen and intensify our relations and as far as I understand these issues, there are not anything which can be unacceptable for the GOC.” The only one respondent, who point out the additional unacceptable aspect, notes that in some cases the organizations, which in his words intentionally implement the anti-GOC propaganda in Georgia, are financed from the EU institution and/or institutions of the EU member states, and this trend is unacceptable for him, “these organizations (locals) build their work on hatred and insults, they are subjective and do not reflect the reality. As in some cases they are financed from the EU/member states institutions, the general image of the EU is negatively affected.”

#### Summary of the Interview Results

From the conducted interviews, 10 respondents support integration of Georgia to the EU. Majority of them note that the European Union is the opportunity for the development of the country. Regarding Russia, the respondents recall historical examples how Russia harmed Georgia, not only to the state as a whole, but also to the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Only one respondent showed neutral position and did not support neither aspirations to Europe nor having the pro-Russian politics.

Despite the fact that the majority of the respondents wish Georgia to become the member of the EU, their choice is due to not only the attractiveness of the European Union but also to the current political developments. For example, 4 respondents argue that neutrality is the best choice for Georgia, but they also note

that this is utopia in the current circumstances, therefore two alternatives remain: European Union or Russia. And, finally, among these two choices they shift to the EU.

One of the supporters of the European integration emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural autonomy on the way to the EU.

Generally, results of the interview show that LGBT issues are the most painful and alarming because they see the threat of demanding same-sex marriage right in the context of the LGBT rights. In their opinion, all this will be spoiling the society.

Similarly to the GOC, the respondents see threats of propaganda in the anti-discrimination law, “I and Society” and the May 17th developments. Therefore, they perceive their criticism as the act of opposition against immorality and sin.

As for the pro-Russian sentiments, none of the respondents have expressed such affiliation. Although, this does not mean the absence of the pro-Russian members in the GOC.

As noted by several respondents, within the GOC members roughly 50% support pro-EU foreign policy, while the other 50% has pro-Russian stance. And, one of the interviewees, argued that even more than half of the GOC members were pro-Russian. According to the other respondent, such differentiation is the result of discussions which is a democratic process. Another explanation was given by one interviewee who argued that one of the reasons for radical opposition of some GOC members to the EU is lack of awareness about this organization and because most of them received education and have strong personal links in Russia.

Overall, based on the evidence, it can be argued that among churchmen there is no homogenous attitude either towards the EU or Russia. In addition, from the responses of the interviewees, a discursive pattern can be identified that in the GOC members, supporters to the pro-EU and pro-Russian foreign policy are equal, roughly 50%-50%.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the conducted research discussed the paradox that support to the EU in public is high, the GOC is an influential and the most trusted by Georgian population, but it is presented in academic literature as anti-EU institution. At the same time, there are examples which show pro-EU attitude of the GOC. Considering these controversies, this research aimed to figure out what kind of discourse the GOC articulates towards the EU and what kind of discourse prevails among its members. In order to answer these research questions, the discourse analysis of the statements, interviews and public speeches of the Patriarch Illia II and official statements of the GOC was applied. In addition, interviews with the GOC members were conducted to find out the ongoing internal discourse. Since anti-discrimination law, draft program of the school subject “I and Society”, the Self-Government code and the 17th of May developments were highly debatable issues in the country and position of the GOC was represented regarding these issues as the anti-EU, the data was collected mainly according to these topics.

Taking into account experience of the Greek Orthodox Church, particularly, internal and external discourses of its Archbishop Christodoulos about the EU (discussed in more detail in the introductory part), similar binary approach might have taken by the GOC in Georgia. In other words, the Patriarchate may have praised the EU outside the country, especially in Europe, while articulating more conservative discourse inside Georgia by evaluating the EU values as the source of depravity and in this way mimicking the discourse prevailed in Russia. This is why topics which are labeled as pro-Russian in the media and academic sources were reviewed in this research as well.

From the logic of Constructivism discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, the GOC is an institution which represents an ‘agent’. And the action of an agent has an influence on another agent its behavior. Therefore, as the GOC as an ‘agent’ has high trust rankings in the population and absolute majority of the Georgians are Orthodox Christians, it is capable of influencing another ‘agent’ - the government through the voters/ population. It is also evident that the government

recognizes the influential role of the GOC the demonstration of which are seminars and meetings jointly organized by the governmental as well as non-governmental institutions in order to enhance the awareness of the GOC about the benefits of the pro-Western foreign policy of the country and the EU as a whole. In addition, the role of the GOC was also recognized by the EU as well, when the high hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Georgia were recently invited in Brussels to discuss the importance of the EU-Georgia rapprochement. These meetings can be regarded as the clear demonstration that both the EU and Georgia recognize significance of the religious discursive context of the European Union.

As the result of analysis was found that the GOC discourse towards the EU, both inside and outside the country, is fairly positive. Though, in regard of the LGBT rights, it maintains its conservative discourse - emphasizes and preserves traditional family values. But, as demonstrated by the examples of the other countries which represent the members of the EU, criticism to LGBT issues does not necessarily make an institution as anti-EU.

As for the interview results, it is obvious that the discourse towards the EU is heterogeneous among the members of the GOC, but it can be argued that prevailing discourse is pro-EU. The logic is that despite heterogeneity, the pro-EU discourse is articulated on the official level. Thus, those members which support Georgia's European path, seem to be more influential in the Patriarchate. It should be noted that this thesis did not intend to elaborate the later statement, though it was identified as a pattern and can be further researched in the future works to find the link between influence of the GOC members and the official discourses of the institution. In addition to the general pro-Eu discourse, the internal prevailing discourse does not differ from the official discourse of the GOC, as it also opposes implementation of the LGBT rights to marriage, to hold a parade and promotion of their lifestyle as normal.

In relation to the Normative Power Europe, as the GOC supports the European choice of Georgia and the only thing is uncovered unacceptable is the LGBT issues, it can be argued that the GOC does not represent the challenge for spreading the EU's normative power. In the interviews, as well, the respondents

noted that they appreciate the values on which the EU is based. Despite the fact that Manners is not explicit what kind of criteria should be met in order to identify an actor as the receiver of the Normative Power Europe, from the results of this study can be concluded that, to a large extent (in not completely), the Church recognizes the importance of the realization of the EU norms and values in Georgia in order to become the full member of this institution as defined by the foreign policy agenda. In other words, the logic behind the EU membership is to meet certain requirements of sharing the values and norms of the Union, and by supporting the Europeanization of Georgia the GOC approves needs of norm-taking.

Regarding the contribution of this dissertation, at the general level, it enriches the academic literature about Georgia's Europeanisation by engaging the religious factor as the unit of analysis. Also, the results support the theoretical argument about the influential role of religion on the politics and reaffirm the importance of studying the religious discursive context in assessing the EU as a Normative Power. In addition, the dissertation shows how the European integration process is viewed from the religious angle. It also represents a good basis for the future research to study the reasons for such discourses in the GOC, in other words to move from the 'what' question to 'why'. Another important advantage of this study is that it can also contribute to the methodological approach of researching the GOC discourse among the GOC members. More specifically, as noted by one of the respondents, in order to conduct more in-depth study, Heads of the Eparchies should be interviewed, because the churchmen serving in a particular Eparchy, to a large extent, share the attitude of the Head.

In terms of the limitations, the most important deficiency of this thesis is the inability to engage those members of the GOC which are known for their pro-Russian and anti-EU sentiments. As already mentioned in the methodological part, they refused to the interviews for unspecified reasons and lack of time. In this respect, can be suggested to do a field research by attending the services and preaches of such churchmen in order to identify their discourses.

## Annex 1

### Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, what kind of discourse the GOC has towards the EU? In other words, to what extent the GOC supports foreign policy goal of Georgia, to become a full member of the EU? (What is your personal opinion? Do you agree with the current approach?)
2. In your opinion, are the reforms implemented by the state institutions since 2012 (for example: anti-discrimination law, the law on local self-government) executed in order to get closer to the EU in political, economic and social terms following the further integration and full membership of the EU, or they are implemented because of the government's willingness to improve the quality of governance?
3. Do you think that the adoption of the law about the elimination of all forms of discrimination is a positive step from the government?
  - a. What do you think, is this law acceptable for Georgian society?
  - b. Do you wish to support some amendments in this law?
4. The development of the 17th of May was evaluated in mass media and other sources as the restriction of freedom of expression (10th article of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms) from members of the GOC. In your opinion, in what circumstances freedom of expression can be restricted?
  - a. Is there any consensus in the GOC about this issue?
5. The Ministry of Education of Georgia is planning to introduce a new course at schools, "I and Society." The GOC presented remarks about this subject, in your opinion is teaching this subject at schools a threat of degeneration for pupils or should it be taught only after making certain amendments (for example, according to remarks presented by the GOC)?
6. In your own view, does the GOC support strong economic relations between the EU and Georgia while considering some elements of cultural proximity as a threat for Georgian society?

7. In general, which foreign policy direction is better for the development of Georgia, pro-European, pro-Russian or neutral?
8. What issues can you figure out which are unacceptable from the European values?

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