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Shifting Discourses: A Critical Geopolitical Analysis of Georgian Dream's
Narrative on Georgia's Global Positioning and European Integration

MA thesis

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis examines the discourse of the Georgian Dream (GD) party to understand how it shapes Georgia's identity, geopolitical positioning, and policy decisions. Using discourse analysis, it investigates GD's rhetoric on fundamental signifiers, EU aspirations, Christianity, political polarisation, relations with Russia, and responses to Ukraine's war. The study highlights the complexities and strategic nuances in GD's narrative construction, contributing to a deeper understanding of Georgia's political dynamics.

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Introduction

Contemporary Georgia stands at a crossroads of identity, geopolitics, and European integration. It navigates a complex terrain shaped by historical legacies, regional dynamics, and global aspirations. At the heart of this intricate landscape lies the discourse of the Georgian Dream (GD) party, the leading political force in the country. This thesis embarks on a comprehensive exploration of GD's discourse, and aims to unravel the intricate web of narratives, ideologies, and rhetorical strategies employed by Georgian Dream officials to shape public perception, justify governmental actions, and position Georgia within the international community.

This research endeavours to unravel the intricate interplay of geopolitical, identity-based, policy, security, and governance dynamics that characterise Georgia's position in the global arena. The study contributes significantly to the scholarly discourse within international relations.

The geopolitical importance of Georgia cannot be overstated. Situated strategically at the convergence of Europe and Asia, Georgia serves as a linchpin in regional power dynamics. It influences broader strategies and alliances concerning major players such as Russia, the European Union (EU), and NATO. Analysing GD's stance on European integration offers profound insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by countries aspiring to join Western institutions, and sheds light on the evolving landscape of global governance and cooperation.

Furthermore, Georgia's historical and contemporary relations with Russia form a critical backdrop for understanding regional security dynamics and conflict resolution efforts. The aftermath of the 2008 war and ongoing unresolved conflicts underscore the complexities of managing relations with powerful neighbours while pursuing Euro-Atlantic integration—a balancing act that holds implications not only for Georgia but also for broader regional stability.

At the core of this research lies an exploration of identity politics and its role in shaping GD's discourse and policy decisions. The construction of Georgian national identity, intertwined with historical narratives, cultural heritage, and geopolitical aspirations, offers a rich terrain for examining how identity dynamics intersect with foreign policy agendas. Moreover, GD's rhetorical commitments to European values juxtaposed with domestic policy actions, such as the

anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, highlight the complexities of policy-making and implementation in a democratic context.

The research problem addressed in this thesis revolves around understanding how the Georgian Dream party, through its discourse and rhetoric, frames Georgia's identity, geopolitical positioning, European aspirations, and policy decisions. This includes examining how GD officials depict external geographical spaces, justify their associations or dissociations with specific regions, and portray Georgia's role, position, and objectives within these spaces.

The research design encompasses a qualitative approach centred on discourse analysis and frame analysis. By employing Poststructuralist Discourse Theory by Laclau and Mouffe, and methodological tools developed by Lakoff and Fillmore, the study looks into the linguistic strategies, persuasive techniques, and symbolic meanings embedded in GD's discourse. The data collection involves textual analysis of speeches from GD officials, categorised across different timeframes to trace thematic shifts and consistencies.

The analysis chapter unpacks GD's discourse on fundamental signifiers such as independence, unity, and freedom, and also touches upon thematic areas including EU aspirations, Christianity, political polarisation, relations with Russia, and responses post-Russia's war in Ukraine. Additionally, a dedicated section explores the duality of GD's policies, focusing on anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and the Foreign Agents Law, to highlight contradictions between professed values and legislative actions.

The conclusions drawn from this research contribute to a deeper understanding of how political discourse shapes national identity, foreign policy decisions, and the broader socio-political landscape. The findings underscore the complexities, nuances, and strategic nuances inherent in GD's narrative construction, paving the way for further scholarly inquiry into Georgia's evolving political dynamics.

Structure:

Chapter 1 sets the theoretical foundation by diving into the multifaceted realm of identity politics. Drawing from scholars like Richard Mole and Rogers Brubaker, the chapter illuminates

how identity shapes social and political actions, providing a lens to understand GD's framing of Georgian identity and its implications.

Geopolitics takes centre stage in Chapter 1 as well, tracing its evolution from traditional realist structures to critical perspectives introduced by scholars like Gearóid Ó Tuathail. Through critical geopolitics, the chapter examines how GD constructs and navigates geopolitical spaces, using binary distinctions and persuasive strategies to influence political discourse.

The chapter transitions into the theoretical method of research and adopts a practical geopolitics framework to analyse GD's narratives. This approach scrutinises the role of policy-makers in shaping geopolitical realities and emphasises the impact of binary distinctions and persuasive tactics on public perception and policy decisions.

A comprehensive literature review forms an integral part of Chapter 1, and showcases existing scholarship on Georgian politics within the context of GD's leadership. Key themes such as Georgia's European integration aspirations, relations with Russia and NATO, and domestic politics' dynamics provide a nuanced backdrop for understanding GD's discourse.

Chapter 2 looks into the methodological framework. It outlines the research design, methodological tools, data collection, and analysis techniques. Poststructuralist discourse theory by Laclau and Mouffe serves as a guiding framework, supplemented by frame analysis tools developed by George Lakoff and Charles Fillmore.

A brief historical overview of Georgia's European and NATO integration journey unfolds in Chapter 3. There are highlighted pivotal moments, challenges, and strategic alignments that have shaped Georgia's foreign policy and aspirations for closer ties with Western institutions.

The core analysis takes centre stage in Chapter 4, where GD's discourse is dissected across various themes. Fundamental signifiers such as independence, unity, and freedom are explored, alongside themes like EU aspiration, the role of Christianity, political polarisation, and relations with Russia.

Chapter 5 looks into the duality of GD's policies, focusing on anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and the Foreign Agents Law. This chapter critically examines the contradictions between GD's professed European values and legislative actions, and analyses the party's commitment to democratic principles and human rights.

In conclusion, this thesis synthesises key findings, insights, and implications derived from the analysis. The thesis sheds light on the role of discourse in shaping national identity, geopolitical

narratives, and foreign policy trajectories. It underlines the importance of critically analysing political discourse in understanding contemporary challenges and opportunities facing Georgia on its path towards a democratic, European future.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework and Literature review

1.1 Identity Politics

The identity concept should be selectively conceptualised because its frequent usage has led to a certain ambiguity in its meaning. Richard Mole in his book *Discursive Constructions of Identity in European Politics* (2007) defines “identity” in broader terms. For him, identity simply explores ‘who we are or are perceived to be’, and it also defines how we see ourselves and others (Mole, 2007, p. 3). In order to better grasp why my thesis needs to use identity as its theoretical base, we need to look at how different disciplines define the identity concept according to the sociologist Rogers Brubaker (2004). He mentions the term identity politics which is an important concept for this thesis because in political studies, identity is used to emphasise that individual or collective actions can be influenced by particular self-understandings rather than universal self-interest (Mole, 2007, 3). In other words, it examines how social context and identity influence political and social actions. Therefore, rather than just focusing on universal self-interest, identity politics looks at how people's sense of who they are—based on factors like gender, ethnicity, or social status—affects their behaviour and decisions. In the Weberian sociology sense, which is influenced by Bourdieu and Foucault, identity politics explains how the modern state is capable of having dominance over both physical and symbolic forces of the nation, which gives the power to the state to name ‘what is what and who is who’ (Brubaker, 2004, 42). In other words, instead of assuming that people always act in their own universal self-interest, identity politics examines how individuals or groups may be motivated by their identity within specific social categories (such as gender, ethnicity, or race) or within broader social structures (like the economy or job market). It seeks to

understand and explain social and political actions by considering the social context and identity of the actors involved.

That is why we will talk about some of the key aspects of Georgian identity that researchers have singled out. This thesis is centred on the question of contemporary Georgia's identity construction in the hands of its government. Georgian identity reflects its historical, cultural, and political dimensions. There are several key paradigms that can give us the idea about Georgian Dream's political decisions. These paradigms present some of the characteristics that are always present in any Georgian government because they are part of Georgian identity, to which politicians need to pay attention to in order to stay relevant and construct suitable narratives for Georgian national identity.

According to Stephen Jones in his study, *The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy* (2003), Georgia's identity can be divided into four categories (paradigms). The first one is Christianity and orthodoxy which has deep roots and a long history in Georgia. Since 337 AD, the Georgian Church has played a vital role in preserving the national identity and culture of the country. Despite periods of Islamic occupation and Soviet atheism, Georgian elites have always constructed a narrative where Georgian Orthodoxy is perceived as a symbol of resistance against external threats. It is important to add that the Georgian Church's role extends beyond religious matters to encompass cultural preservation and nationalistic sentiments (Jones, 2003, p. 89).

Another dimension by Jones of Georgian identity is its European identity. Georgians view themselves as part of the Western civilization. The main argument is usually the Georgian Church's historical alignment with Western Christendom. In addition, since the nineteenth century, the "evil" image of the Turks, Persians and Mongols was intensified in the Georgian historiographical narrative. The invader Muslim empires and dynasties, became "others", and this defined better "what was truly Georgian" (p. 91).

The third paradigm that Jones provides is Georgia's Pan-Caucasianism. This is a less popular ideal for the Georgian context today. It was first initiated by the first president of independent Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. He envisioned a unified Caucasian identity and home. However, it lacked widespread support and eventually faded (p. 94).

The final paradigm and one of the most important ones, is Georgia's anti-Russianism. Georgia's relationship with Russia alternates between necessity and ambivalence. While Gamsakhurdia took an anti-Russian stance, subsequent governments like Shevardnadze's

adopted a pragmatic approach and recognized Russia's role in stability while asserting Georgian interests. Despite occasional anti-Russian sentiments, there's an acknowledgement of Russia's historical significance and its impact on Georgian identity and politics (Jones, 2003, 96).

Identity, as understood in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, is characterised by several key features. Firstly, the subject is inherently fragmented, never fully attaining a unified sense of self (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, 43). In the case of the discourse of the Georgian Dream, the notion of Georgian identity is often portrayed as multifaceted and it incorporates elements of tradition, nationalism, and modernity. Secondly, identity is acquired through discursive representation, meaning that individuals come to identify with specific subject positions within discourse structures. In the context of Georgian politics, the discourse surrounding national identity may position individuals as defenders of Georgian sovereignty against external threats, such as perceived encroachments by neighbouring countries.

These discursive structures construct identity through chains of equivalence, where signs are linked together to form coherent meanings. For example, in Georgian Dream's discourse, phrases like "preserving Georgian values" and "protecting Georgian interests" may serve as nodal points around which the identity of the nation is articulated. Importantly, identity is always relational, defined in contrast to what it is not, and is subject to change over time in response to shifts in social context. Within the discourse of Georgian Dream, identity may be constructed in opposition to perceived Western influence or as a reaction against previous political regimes.

Furthermore, individuals possess multiple identities depending on the discourses in which they participate, lacking a central, unified identity. This multiplicity is known as fragmentation or decentring. In the case of Georgian identity, individuals may identify simultaneously as Georgian citizens, members of ethnic or religious communities, and participants in global networks, reflecting the complex interplay of various discourses.

Additionally, identity is overdetermined, meaning that individuals have the potential to identify differently in different situations and underscore the contingent nature of identity in specific discursive contexts. For instance, a Georgian citizen may feel a sense of national pride during times of celebration or solidarity during moments of political unrest, highlighting the fluidity of identity within different discursive frameworks. This understanding of identity highlights the complex and dynamic nature of subjectivity within discourse theory, particularly as it pertains to the construction of Georgian identity within the political discourse of Georgian Dream.

1.2 The background of geopolitics

The word geopolitics (*geopolitik*) was first mentioned in 1899 by Rudolf Kjellen and since then, its critics have existed with it. As the major contributor to the critical geopolitics theory, Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1999) relates geopolitics to the kind of theories which deliberate the practical aspects of statecraft (p. 107). Kjellen himself described geopolitics as geographically characterised problems for states, which carries the essence of political realism. According to this theory, world politics is anarchic and states constantly strive for military supremacy because that is how the balance of power works. O Tuathail's argument is that geopolitics aims to brainstorm what states must do in order to maximise their strategic position in the world as is, therefore geopolitics narration is declarative, it simply makes assertions according to geographical aspects.

Geopolitics as a new field of research began with authors like Friedrich Ratzel, Alfred Mahan, Rudolf Kjellen and Halford Mackinder. After that, there was the interwar period with Karl Haushofer's German *Geopolitik* and Nicholas Spykman's 'rimland' theory, and today we see classical geopolitics in the writings of contemporary figures like Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

As one of the pioneering authors of geopolitics, Sir Halford John Mackinder, had an exclusive view of the world. He divided the world regions into the World-Island and the Heartland. According to critical geopolitics pioneer Gearóid Ó Tuathail, it needs to be said that Mackinder was a liberal imperialist thinker whose main goal was to modernise the idea of the British Empire during the period of its decline (p. 112). Mackinder even disliked the term geopolitics, even though he is considered one of the founding fathers of the discipline. For Mackinder, the discipline of geography as a whole, was geopolitics. He was a member of the British parliament and was interested in 'national efficiency', where his nation was dominated by white male British gentlemen and exploited Britain's imperial wealth. However, Mackinder's geopolitics didn't have too big of an influence on British politics, as Ó Tuathail argues. (1999). In fact, Mackinder's ideas became globally influential only after the media speculation about Karl Houshofer's German *Geopolitik*.

The German military officer and professor of geography, Karl Haushofer founded the *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, which was a journal that aimed to help Germany regain its power after the First World War, therefore geopolitics for Haushofer was the way to rationalise German expansionism. According to conservative German writings of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Geopolitics seeks to uncover laws governing state behaviour. These laws, as codified by German academic Friedrich Ratzel and elaborated by General Haushofer, aim to guide those responsible for 'advancing and protecting the national interest' (Dodds et al., 2013, 170). That is why, for American-based geographers, geopolitics had this stereotype of nazi ideology and they soon realised that it was important to create a 'scientific political geography' (Dodds et al., 2013. 4).

Before we delve into critical geopolitics, as this research utilises critical geopolitics as its theoretical framework, it is logical to discuss classical geopolitics from a critical geopolitics perspective first. In examining classical geopolitics, it becomes evident that the traditional understanding of geopolitical challenges has undergone significant transformations in the contemporary era. One notable transformation is the globalisation of national security issues - terrorism, international organised crime, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, have surpassed territorial confines and assumed a global character. In the Western security world, there's a growing realisation that working together with other countries is key to solving big security problems. But some countries prefer to act alone, and Western countries often don't want to admit their own role in making things worse. Plus, new risks from advanced technology make the situation even more complex. So, it's crucial to think carefully about how we address these challenges today.

The second argument of critical geopolitics points out a "victory crisis" faced by Western institutions, like the free market and national security agencies. These institutions struggle to deal with modern challenges, like global terrorism and environmental risks, because they're stuck in old ways of thinking. Also, they often create the same problems they try to solve. For example, some threats, like weapons of mass destruction, come from countries the West helped arm in the past. This "victory crisis" shows that our old ways of dealing with problems don't work anymore in today's complex world. We need big changes in how we manage global risks and conflicts (O Tuathail, 1999, 120).

1.3 Critical Geopolitics

On the other hand, Ó Tuathail suggests critical geopolitics that does not take the realist structure for granted. If geopolitics is a problem-solving theory, critical geopolitics is a “problematizing theoretical enterprise”, he says. It is critical geopolitics’ job to identify how the manufacturing and sharing of knowledge is based on power relationships in orthodox geopolitics and to critique the existing partial understanding of world politics by certain political cultures, especially powerful Western states. It can be also said that whoever is powerful, produces theoretical geopolitics, in other words, establishes and asserts its own “truths” about international politics by promoted and certified “experts”. (Ó Tuathail, 1999, 108).

Now, why would critical geopolitics bother to expose classical geopolitics? – Ó Tuathail claims that by criticising these malignancies, the theory aims to strengthen democracy, on the basis of awareness of the marginalised groups, whose voices get lost between the powerful entities that produce geopolitical knowledge. Critical geopolitics’ main focus in politics is ‘security’ - it questions the ‘power concentrated in state and military bureaucracies’ and is ‘committed to an open democratic debate about the meaning and politics of ‘security’” (Ó Tuathail, 1999, 108). Critical geopolitics demolishes the ‘good and evil’ understanding of the world which was the main characteristic of the Cold War period. According to Ó Tuathail, traditional geopolitics during the Cold War was dangerous because it simplified world politics to the point where the European continent faced fatal militarisation, all justified by geopolitical arguments. This view was opposed by environmentalists and peace movements, which Ó Tuathail looks at as the advocates of practical critical geopolitics who aimed to change the status quo. Since then, the idea of finding ‘timeless truths’ has become less relevant; with the help of the World Wide Web, global communication has become much faster and the process of globalisation accelerated at a rapid speed.

Critical geopolitics has gained more popularity because of its wider understanding of geopolitics and the ability to scrutinise the simultaneity and uncertainty of the modern world. Despite this, Ó Tuathail admits that just like traditional geopolitics, critical geopolitics also aims to influence politics because this is in his definition of what geopolitics is about - an ‘explicitly political account of the contemporary geopolitical condition that seeks to influence politics’ (Ó Tuathail, 1999,109). The major difference between these two is the scale of the problematic of

geopolitics, and for critical geopolitics, this scale is very broad, unlike its predecessor. In broad, I mean that critical geopolitics does not just look at geopolitics from a geographical perspective. It is not only geography that influences politics. If it were, we would have to think about geopolitics in only a territorial way, meaning that states have physical borders and their foreign policy is based on securing their territory, and they do that by ‘certain geographical understandings about the world’ (Ó Tuathail, 1999, 109). However, critical geopolitics believes that the territorial views in geography are derived from historical and social knowledge about the world. In Ó Tuathail’s words, geography is “a cultural and political writing of meanings about the world” (Ó Tuathail, 1999, 109). And therefore geopolitics is also characterised by political and geographical meanings.

Gearóid Ó Tuathail divides critical geopolitics into formal, practical, popular and structural geopolitics. Each of them has its own object of investigation and the problematic. Formal geopolitics investigates what shapes geopolitical thought and how this knowledge is produced by intellectuals. These intellectuals have usually been right-wing ‘countermoderns’ who look at geopolitics as a more strategic planning for the world where two permanent opposites (‘land power’ versus ‘sea power’) are in constant confrontation with each other on a map that is ‘depluralized’. Countermodernity attempts to manage the chaos that exists in today’s modernised world. It uses methods like violence and myth to impose order in a rapidly changing world. This approach is seen in resurgent nationalism and religious fundamentalism, which seek to establish certainty in an uncertain global environment. In other words, traditional geopolitics conveys the idea of reducing complexity by consolidating multiple elements into fewer categories or concepts, like Mackinder’s Heartland and Rimland, or East versus West nexus (Ó Tuathail, 1999, 113).

In contrast, policy-makers try to make sense of the world using practical geopolitics. They create foreign policy according to their general cultural and spatial geographical perceptions of the world without too much deep diving into geopolitical theories. Close to this stands popular geopolitics. It is how the media is producing social constructions and people’s understanding of what is inside and outside their states’ borders, and their national identity. Using practical and popular geopolitics, policy-makers also explain to their electorate their actions and historical events. This kind of geopolitics is what they teach in schools in order to form society’s cultural consciousness and national identity. In Ó Tuathail’s words, it can also be described as ‘common

sense' geopolitics, which is not the best choice for foreign policy practices because it can be too conventional (Ó Tuathail, 1999, p.114). Finally, structural geopolitics observes the bigger picture of trends that show how states produce their foreign policy. This is mostly where the modernity of critical geopolitics comes in because these trends usually are connected to globalisation, proliferation and other global technological advancements (p.110). So, to cut it short, the discipline of critical geopolitics investigates the texts produced by geopolitical actors. Its main duty is to revise the traditional Geopolitical authors and their 'timeless insights' (p.111).

1.4 The Theoretical Method of Research - Practical Geopolitics

Now that we have reviewed the four types of approaches in critical geopolitics, it is imperative to select the most suitable one for this specific thesis. While it's feasible to base research on multiple of them, focusing solely on the narratives of Georgian Dream, which would be considered as practical geopolitics, offers the potential for a deeper understanding. Specifically, analysing speeches delivered by GD's representatives, particularly the presidents and prime ministers since 2012, presents an opportunity to dive into their discourse comprehensively. Consequently, this research is based on the theoretical framework of practical geopolitics.

As already mentioned, practical geopolitics looks closely at what role policy-makers have in constructing the world around them, and their narratives usually carry the characteristics of 'common-sense' truth. These narratives have binary distinctions, as Ó Tuathail and Agnew explain (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, 194). This means that the categorisation used by Georgian politicians is often presented as mutually exclusive and sharply defined, with little room for overlap or nuance. In practical geopolitical reasoning, binary distinctions are used to simplify complex ideas or relationships by framing them in terms of dichotomies such as civilised versus backward, Western versus non-Western, etc. For example, the GD leaders often portray their party and its supporters as the righteous defenders of Georgian interests, while framing opposition parties or external actors as adversaries seeking to undermine the nation's stability or sovereignty. Additionally, the government may emphasise its role in maintaining stability and order in the country, contrasting its actions with dissent or protests, which are portrayed as threats to the nation's security and prosperity.

What's more, in the narratives of Georgian Dream, binary distinctions related to East/West and Russia/Europe are often invoked to frame Georgia's geopolitical orientation and foreign policy choices. The government may portray alignment with the West and Europe as synonymous with progress, democracy, and economic development, contrasting this with an association with Russia, which may be depicted as restrictive, authoritarian, or regressive. Conversely, Georgian Dream might highlight the importance of maintaining positive relations with Russia for economic cooperation or regional stability, contrasting this with tensions or conflicts with Western partners, which may be portrayed as external interference or pressure. These binary distinctions reflect competing geopolitical narratives and influence policy decisions regarding Georgia's international alliances and partnerships.

Hence, in alignment with the practical geopolitical perspective, this thesis directs its focus towards the contemporary narratives of Georgian political elites rather than delving deeply into the discipline of Georgian geopolitics. While there may not exist a formally recognized academic discipline of Georgian geopolitics with distinct authors dedicated to this realm, Georgia has a rich historical legacy of intellectuals and statesmen whose ideas could be seen as laying the groundwork for the discipline. Therefore, it becomes imperative to acknowledge and explore these historical perspectives in order to grasp the contextual backdrop against which modern Georgian political leaders articulate their narratives today. This aspect will be further explored in the upcoming analysis chapter of the thesis.

According to Ó Tuathail (2002), when the discourse analysis research is based on a practical geopolitics framework, it usually presents a 'meso-level argumentative approach' (p. 606). This approach utilises the rhetorical tradition to analyse public policy making. It emphasises that rhetoric involves more than just stylistic devices but includes the art of invention and creative dialogical processes. The approach is grounded in the idea that thinking is inherently social, and individuals develop thoughts through public conversation and shared interpretative resources. It also recognizes that individuals actively form positions within social contexts of argumentation and debate, while being influenced by dominant narratives and storylines.

As Agnew and Corbridge (1995, 48, as cited in Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 2002, 20) put it, 'the practical geopolitical reasoning of political elites is the link between the dominant representations of space and the geopolitical order of dominant spatial practices'. In other words, political elites' practical geopolitical reasoning helps shape and maintain the dominant spatial

practices within a given geopolitical order. By examining the rhetoric used in the Georgian Dream speeches, this thesis can identify how persuasive strategies, argumentation techniques, and rhetorical devices are employed to shape public perception and justify governmental actions in the country. Additionally, the analysis explores how these rhetorical practices contribute to the construction of national identity, influence public opinion, and contribute to the overall political discourse in Georgia.

In the domain of practical geopolitics, discourses typically centre around the perspectives of "politicians and practitioners of foreign policy" (Foxall, 2019, 175). However, this study aims to explore beyond simple foreign policy actions when examining the narratives of the Georgian Dream. While foreign policy undoubtedly holds significance and will be a focal point of discussion, this thesis adopts a broader approach by analysing both the foreign and domestic narratives of the Georgian Dream. This expanded scope is intended to illuminate their perceptions of Georgia's identity and its standing within the sphere of international relations.

1.5 Reviewing Georgian context

Located in the Caucasus region, Georgia has been a focal point of political discussions due to its direction in geopolitics, internal policies, and global interactions. Throughout the last decade, central to these discussions is the Georgian Dream party, which has been instrumental in shaping the country's political scene since taking office in 2012. With aspirations of European integration, Georgia's path under GD leadership has prompted scholarly exploration into its policies, beliefs, and diplomatic approaches.

As we explore the existing literature on GD and Georgian politics, we uncover several recurring themes (codes) that reflect the core concerns and challenges of the nation. These themes not only encapsulate the essence of Georgian politics but also illuminate the historical, cultural, and societal influences shaping its current political landscape. These thematic contours serve as guiding principles for the subsequent analysis of GD's discursive practices and textual productions. By situating GD's speeches and texts within the broader scholarly discourse, this study aims to clarify the underlying motivations and implications of GD's political rhetoric.

Research on the Georgian Dream's political goals towards Europe is often doubtful. They want to know if Georgia's desire to join the EU is based more on 'practical reasons' or identity-driven 'symbolic' consequences (Loda, 2019, p. 76). They look at how the Georgian government treats LGBTQ+ issues for example and see a notable contrast between professing adherence to European values and actions that contradict these principles. This contrast was particularly evident during an incident on May 17, 2013, when a large group, including Georgian Orthodox priests, sought to violently disrupt an anti-homophobia rally in the city centre (Beacháin & Coene, 2014, p. 936). This is important because it shows how Georgia's values and beliefs affect its relationships with other countries and institutions from the West. The term 'West' is often considered to be the US and the EU interchangeably in the Georgian political narrative. This means that the term 'West' carries more meaning than just the direction of the compass - In the Georgian political narrative, the 'West' is something that is not Soviet (German, 2015, p. 606). It is an identity that was taken away from Georgians in the recent past and now it is time for the country to come closer to its 'estranged past', emphasising Georgia's European identity. Therefore, this thesis will also follow the 'Georgian' definition of the 'West' and when mentioned, it will mean both the US and the EU in a wider, symbolic sense as most of Georgians think of it.

Scholars wonder if GD truly wants to integrate with Europe or if there are other priorities. In order to explain this, they also look at how GD sees Russia. Georgian Dream's 'conciliatory approach' (German et al., 2022, 8) to Russia seems to have raised questions about Georgia's national security in academia, and it is an important aspect of the existing literature.

Scholars also study Georgia's relationship with NATO. They think about how Georgia's history and security concerns affect its plans to join NATO (German et al., 2022, 167). Some scholars notice that Georgian political parties do not have strong ideologies. Instead, voters focus more on individual leaders (Amaglobeli, 2018, 8). This means that how leaders talk and present themselves is very important in Georgian politics.

Researchers also look at how Georgia deals with conflicts in other countries, especially the war in Ukraine (e.g., Kakhishvili, 2022). They study how Georgia tries to keep good relations with Russia while also supporting Ukraine. This contradictory action on behalf of Georgia's government is an important part of its policy-learning because it shows how Georgia balances its own interests with its relationships with other countries. The war in Ukraine is an important part

of the discussion in this thesis. It may not seem as important as the country's relations with big powers like Russia and the West, however, it is strongly intertwined with it. In addition, there has been discontent from the Georgian public, the Western officials and Ukrainian officials themselves towards the Georgian Dream about not supporting Ukraine enough (Kakhishvili, 2022, 6). One could argue that the government of a small country, which has experienced war with Russia in 2008 would have been expressing full solidarity with Ukraine. However, the GD has been steering clear of provoking Russia and has been avoiding criticism from the above-mentioned entities. Scholars have tried to understand if GD's actions are simply to avoid conflict with Russia for the sake of Georgia's national interests, as GD officials usually say so (Civil Georgia, 2022). However, some also believe that the GD's approach to Russia is its attempt to diverge from the previous UNM government (Kakhishvili, 2022, 6), which is considered as the second worst antagonist after Russia in GD's discourse because they believe UNM could have avoided the War with Russia in 2008 by having a more collaborative attitude towards the 'Russian bear' (Algarni, 2022, 9).

Finally, scholars talk about how small countries like Georgia make decisions about their foreign policy (Kakachia et al., 2018). They think about the challenges these countries face and how they try to stay safe and make their voices heard in the world. This is important because it helps us understand Georgia's role in the international community and how it navigates its relationships with other countries. This thesis brings together all these ideas to understand Georgia's politics and how they affect its relationships with other countries.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Method:

The aim of this thesis is to understand how the Georgian government constructs Georgia's position in the world through its discourse. It is designed as a qualitative research, which is defined by Azpíroz (2014) as a methodology that aims to describe a phenomenon in a flexible and intuitive way (p. 76). It is dependent on the researcher to have a contextual knowledge of the subject and also have the skill to interpret the data. The important part of qualitative research is that it is usually inductive, unlike quantitative research.

This thesis seeks to explore in-depth how the Georgian Dream sees Georgia's role in the world, through unfolding narratives and deconstructing texts. Therefore, the methodological tools and frameworks will be drawn from these authors: Poststructuralist Discourse Theory by Laclau and Mouffe, and methodological tools developed by George Lakoff and Charles Fillmore will be used.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe developed their discourse theory in order to shed light on social phenomena using constructionist discourse analysis. Laclau and Mouffe's approach was developed by breaking down existing theoretical structures to reveal their internal workings and ideological foundations. These theories were mainly Marxism, (which is there as a basis of thinking about social) and Structuralism, (which focuses on meaning). This allowed them to develop a more poststructuralist theoretical framework that could account for the complexities of social phenomena and provide new insights into creating meaning (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). However, discourse theory lacks practical tools for textual analysis and therefore this thesis will be using methodological supplementary tools by other approaches to discourse analysis, specifically the one of Larkoff's and Fillmore's.

Discourse theory derives from the idea that the meanings of words in societies and their identities are never the same, that it depends on the context and who is using them. That is where discourse theory fulfils its purpose of offering insights on how language shapes social reality and provides a basis for analysing power dynamics, ideological implications, and struggles over meaning within discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 24). In other words, it provides a

framework for understanding how meaning is constructed, contested, and transformed within social phenomena through discursive practices.

Laclau and Mouffe define discourse as ‘the structured totality resulting from articulatory practices’ (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, 26). In simpler terms, discourse is an organised collection of meanings and practices that arise from interactions among entities within a specific area of social life. According to Jørgensen & Phillips there are several concepts that define discourse in Laclau and Mouffe’s work. Firstly, discourse is understood as a combination of signs which they call *moments*. These signs make up one body of discourse, and their meanings are dependent on each other.

Another concept is that within these signs there are some more important ones that are called nodal points. These nodal points in politics are terms like ‘democracy’, ‘the people’. Here, ‘democracy’ is a nodal point that encompasses various smaller signs or concepts that derive their meaning from their relationship to it. These smaller signs may include terms like "voting rights," "political participation," "rule of law," "civil liberties," "elections," and "citizen engagement." Each of these smaller signs contributes to the overall meaning and understanding of democracy within the discourse, and they are organised around the central concept of democracy itself.

Another idea for discourse definition is that each sign or concept is like a piece in a puzzle, and its meaning is determined by how it fits with the other signs in the discourse. This process fixes or sets the meaning of each sign within the discussion. To make the discussion coherent, we exclude certain meanings or interpretations that don't fit with the overall framework. This narrowing down of possibilities is what creates a unified understanding. The excluded meanings or alternative interpretations form what Laclau and Mouffe call the "field of discursivity." It can be seen as a reservoir of additional meanings that exist outside of the specific discussion but are excluded to maintain the coherence of the discourse. In Georgian politics, The excluded meanings, such as dissenting opinions, criticisms from opposition parties, or alternative policy proposals, form the field of discursivity. While they're not part of the discourse promoted by the Georgian Dream party, they represent alternative perspectives and potential areas of debate within Georgian politics. To maintain its political narrative, the Georgian Dream party might exclude discussions or interpretations that challenge its authority or diverge from its agenda.

The criticism for Laclau and Mouffe is in the nature of the "field of discursivity" within discourse theory. Jørgensen & Phillips point out that while discourse is defined by what it

includes and excludes, there's ambiguity about how the excluded meanings are structured. Specifically, it questions whether the field of discursivity is simply a chaotic collection of all possible meanings, or if it's organised by the competing discourses present in a given context (p. 26).

In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, various key concepts form a hierarchical structure that helps analyse the construction and transformation of meaning within discourses. There is a certain hierarchy and categorisation which is not visually available in either Jørgensen & Phillips work or the original literature of discourse theory (1985). Therefore, this thesis provides a visualisation of these key concepts (table 1) in order to better understand the overall structure of the discourse theory.

Table 1.

Key signifiers in the Social Organisation of Meaning and Their Hierarchy
According to Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory

	Keywords	Definition	Function	Example
1	Discourse	A temporary closure: it fixes meaning in a particular way, but it does not dictate that meaning is to be fixed exactly in that way forever.	Establishes a totality where elements are turn into moments (polysemic meaning to fixed meaning)	political discourse
2	Signs	Elements within a discourse that convey meaning.	Serve as the building blocks of discourse, with each sign having potential meanings	Words, phrases, symbols, etc.
3	Moments	Signs whose meanings are fully fixed within a	Contribute to the unified system of	Georgian sovereignty" may

	Keywords	Definition	Function	Example
		discourse.	meaning within the discourse.	be a moment within the discourse, representing a fully fixed concept that contributes to the party's unified message.
4	Elements	Signs whose meanings are not yet fully fixed and may have multiple potential meanings.	Are in the process of being transformed into moments through closure.	While the Georgian Dream party generally supports closer ties with the European Union (EU) and Euro-Atlantic institutions, the concept of 'European integration' can be considered an element within its discourse.
5	Nodal Points	Privileged signs around which a discourse is organised. — The crystallisation of sign happens within a	Serve as central concepts that organise other signs and meanings within the discourse.	"national identity." This includes ideas related to Georgian culture, history, language,

	Keywords	Definition	Function	Example
		specific discourse		and traditions.
6	Floating Signifiers	<p>When nodal points are empty in themselves, they are the same as elements, and that is called floating signifier.</p> <p>—</p> <p>They're the signs which are the most struggled between different discourses to fix the meaning.</p>	Represent signs that different discourses seek to invest with meaning in their own particular way.	"foreign influence" could be considered a floating signifier, as its meaning may vary depending on the context and competing discourses.
7	Master Signifiers	<p>Powerful and deeply resonant symbols within discourse that serve to unify and mobilise collective identity. They often carry strong emotional or ideological connotations.</p>	Organise identity.	
8	Myths	<p>Overarching narratives or stories within discourse that help to legitimise and naturalise certain social structures or power relations.</p>	Organise a social space	"The West", "Society"

	Keywords	Definition	Function	Example
9	Empty Signifiers	Symbols within discourse that lack fixed or specific meaning on their own but derive significance from their context and associations.		

At the core of this framework is the notion of discourse, which represents the fixation of meaning within a specific domain. As mentioned, within a discourse, signs play a crucial role as the building blocks of meaning. These signs can be categorised into two main groups: moments and elements (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, 26). Moments are signs whose meanings are fully fixed within the discourse, contributing to its unified system of meaning. On the other hand, elements are signs whose meanings are not fully fixed and may have multiple potential interpretations. These are in the process of being transformed into moments through closure.

Nodal points are privileged signs around which a discourse is organised (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, 26). These central concepts, like "the people" in political discourse, serve to structure other signs and meanings within the discourse. Floating signifiers, however, represent signs that are particularly open to different interpretations and subject to struggles between competing discourses. For instance, in medical discourse, the concept of "the body" may be contested and defined differently by alternative treatment discourses.

Applying this framework to the discourse of the Georgian Dream party in Georgian politics, we can observe how certain concepts serve as nodal points while others remain floating signifiers. A word can be a nodal point and a floating signifier depending how we use it (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, 29). For example, "Georgian sovereignty" may be a moment within the discourse, representing a fully fixed concept that contributes to the party's unified message. Meanwhile, "foreign influence" could be considered a floating signifier, as its meaning may vary depending on the context and competing discourses.

When these key signifiers are without context, they hold no meaning on their own. In order to understand the organisation of discourses, these key signifiers need to be put together with other signs through chains of equivalence and that is how they gain meaning. By understanding discourses like this, then we can understand identities (master signifiers) and social spaces (myths). An example drawn by Jørgensen and Philips (2002) is also relevant for the Georgian context. They provide the concept of "the West" (p.50), which is usually associated with ideas like civilization, white people, the Christian church, and liberal democratic institutions. This association defines what "the West" is in relation to what it is not, creating an opposition between "Us" and "the Other." However, this construction of identity is not fixed and can be contested. Different discourses struggle to define what "the West" means, showing that it is a flexible concept. This idea extends to other aspects of discourse as well, highlighting the importance of understanding conflicting understandings of reality and their social consequences. According to the same analysis, the concept of "chains of equivalence" refers to how meanings are connected or linked together within a discourse or social context (p.43). It suggests that certain ideas, symbols, or terms become linked or associated with each other in people's minds, creating a chain of interconnected meanings. These chains establish relationships between different elements, often based on shared characteristics or associations. It is also important to note that chains of equivalence can be both linguistic and non-linguistic, meaning they can involve words, symbols, gestures, or other forms of communication.

Since we talked about identity as seen by Laclau and Mouffe in chapter 1, it is now important to put their theoretical foundations to practical work. For this to work, we need to understand the most fundamental principle of identity formation in discourse theory, and that is 'identity is something entirely social' (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 43). This means that identity is not something that we have inside us when we are born and that something needs to be expressed - on the contrary, identity is a unity of signifiers and a central nodal point and it is always changeable, depending on given situations, and therefore, the same goes for discourse.

When it comes to understanding group identities and their formation, it is important to note that since in any society, individuals have diverse identities based on factors such as their nationality, ethnicity, religion, occupation, gender, etc, group formation involves simplifying this diversity by categorising individuals into broader collective identities. For example, instead of considering each person's unique combination of identities, they might be classified into groups

based on nationality, political affiliation, social class, etc. In the context of group formation, discursive processes involve the use of language and communication to construct and reinforce collective identities.

We can now relate all the terms to one another. Discourse aims to remove ambiguities by turning the elements into moments by reducing their multiple meanings to a fully fixed meaning. Laclau and Mouffe call this process a closure and by it they mean that discourse is the attempt to temporarily stop at a certain fixation of the meaning. This temporality proves that discourses can always change. Since discourse is also dependent on what it excludes (field of discursivity), its change can also be caused by the change in field of discursivity (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 28)

This is why discourse theory is useful for the thesis because the Georgian identity is ambiguous, and so is GD's discourse. So when the GD tries to remove ambiguities of meanings in Georgian identity, they use floating signifiers.

There are several justifications for using discourse theory in this thesis. Firstly, even if the overall discourse of GD remains relatively consistent throughout the selected timeframes (these will be moments), there may still be subtle shifts or nuances in the way certain terms or themes are framed or emphasised (these will be elements). What's more, while the discourse may not change drastically, external events such as the EU integration process or the war in Ukraine (both floating signifiers) may still influence the way certain topics are framed or discussed within GD's discourse. Also, even if the party's messaging remains stable, the way it is communicated and tailored to different audiences or contexts can still be subject to analysis. In addition to focusing on differences, the thesis will consider analysing the continuities in GD's discourse across the three timeframes. It will look for the core themes (codes) that remain consistent, regardless of external factors or changes in political circumstances.

2.2 Methodological Tools:

In this thesis, the more practical methodological approach is to find 'framing' practices in GD's discourse. In discourse analysis, frames allow researchers to explore the presence of symbolic elements or cultural meanings that may not be immediately apparent or explicitly stated. By delving into the context in which words or actions occur, qualitative methods can uncover

underlying themes, implicit meanings, or cultural resonances that may be overlooked by quantitative approaches.

In the course of conducting discourse analysis, several challenges emerge in order to ensure the integrity and reliability of the study's findings. One such challenge involves the intricate process of categorising textual material, which often proves to be complex and time-intensive. Given that qualitative data is varied and influenced by personal perspectives, creating clear categories can be difficult. It requires a careful method that stays open to new ideas and trends. That is why this research uses frame analysis and different types of signifiers in order to better categorise and visualise which are the most frequently used dominant narratives in Georgian politics.

Framing theory was coined by an American linguist George Lakoff. According to his theory, frames are what gives meaning to the objective reality by constructing ideas and concepts with metaphors (Amaglobeli, 2018). Lakoff himself based his book on several authors, one of which is the pioneer author of frame semantics, Charles Fillmore. In his article 'Frame Semantics and the Nature of Language' (1976), Fillmore explains that certain words, speech patterns, or grammatical choices are associated with particular frames in memory (Fillmore, 1976, 25). This means that when exposed to linguistic forms in appropriate contexts, these associations activate the corresponding frames in the mind. In his article, frames are conceptualised as 'building blocks' for constructing a speaker or hearer's ongoing model of the world. The idea behind "frame" suggests that when people communicate, they can change how others see the world by sharing messages that affect their understanding (Fillmore, 1976, p. 26).

In his debate with Steven Pinker for *The New Republic Journal* (2007), Lakoff emphasises that facts are interpreted through frames, and if the frames are inconsistent with the facts, the facts may be ignored. Therefore, he advocates for "reframing" – correcting frames that distort truths and finding frames that accurately characterise reality (Lakoff, 2007, p. 67). He clarifies that reframing is not about spin or propaganda but about communicating using frames that align with one's moral beliefs. Lakoff emphasises that people can fluidly switch between different cognitive frames, as emphasised in cognitive linguistics. He advocates for a "higher rationality" that acknowledges these cognitive processes explicitly, especially in political discourse (p. 68).

In this debate, George Lakoff contrasts the old view of the mind with the new view based on insights from cognitive science. The old view, rooted in 17th-century notions of disembodied universal reason, posits that thought is conscious, disembodied, and operates according to formal

logic. However, the new view challenges these assumptions. Lakoff argues that these insights are crucial for politics because politics involves ideas, actions, perceptions, and communication—all of which require an understanding of the mind. Framing, which involves shaping perception and understanding through language and communication strategies, is particularly important in politics. By understanding how the mind works and how language influences perception, politicians can effectively communicate their ideas and policies to the public. The new view of the mind by Lakoff acknowledges that our understanding of the world is shaped by brain mechanisms like frames and metaphors (Lakoff, 2007).

In other words, framing can lead to different interpretations of the events described. This choice of language can subtly influence the reader to perceive certain actors or actions in a negative or positive light (Fillmore, 1976, p. 53). Framing is a set of actions that determine the essence of the narrative and part of that set are the keywords that the creators of these narratives use. Since this thesis seeks to uncover how the Georgian government presents Georgia's role in the world through different frames in language, it is useful to bring in the concept signifiers. There are three important types of signifiers in this thesis: master, floating and empty signifiers.

Generally, master signifier stands for the fundamental ideological justification for a political behaviour. In essence, master signifiers are pivotal in shaping discourse and political action, they embody core values or ideals. They hold significant influence over meanings and beliefs, generating or nullifying them over time. Politicians often employ master signifiers within formal discourse to manipulate and gain political advantages, contributing to the dominance of certain discourses over others (Amaglobeli, 2018).

On the other hand, a floating signifier is a sign that holds multiple potential meanings and is subject to interpretation and contestation within different discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 28). In simpler terms, a floating signifier is like a word or symbol that doesn't have a fixed meaning on its own. Instead, its meaning depends on how it's used and understood within a specific conversation or context. So, a floating signifier remains fluid and open to interpretation. Floating signifiers reveal struggles or conflicts over meaning between different groups or ideologies because they represent concepts or ideas that lack a fixed interpretation. Different groups may interpret these signifiers in ways that align with their own beliefs or agendas, leading to disagreements or conflicts over what these concepts truly mean. These conflicts can reflect deeper societal tensions or power struggles as different groups vie to shape the meaning of these

signifiers according to their own interests or perspectives. For example, Jørgensen and Phillips describe "the country" as a floating signifier because different political actors may use it to represent different ideas or agendas, thereby imbuing it with varying meanings. However, when a particular interpretation of a floating signifier gains widespread acceptance and comes to be seen as objectively true, Laclau thinks that it can be considered a myth (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.39). So, while floating signifiers are the flexible concepts that can take on different meanings, myths are the specific interpretations or representations of those concepts that become widely accepted within a society.

Finally, empty signifiers are linguistic elements that lack a fixed or specific meaning attached to them. They exist within a system of signification but do not directly correspond to any particular concept, object, or idea. Essentially, they are symbols or terms that carry significance but are devoid of a concrete referent or signified. The concept of empty signifiers poses a theoretical challenge because, according to traditional linguistic theory, a signifier must always be attached to a signified to function within a language system. However, empty signifiers challenge this notion by existing as part of the system despite lacking a clear signified. Empty signifiers are not simply arbitrary or ambiguous in meaning, nor are they floating signifiers that acquire shifting meanings depending on context. Instead, they represent a structural impossibility within signification itself, highlighting a gap or lack of meaning inherent in language systems (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, 36).

Some terms can be used strategically in politics to rally support or convey a sense of importance, even though they do not have a fixed meaning. Essentially, they are words that sound powerful but do not have a clear, agreed-upon definition. For example, "national pride" is an empty signifier. It is a term that sounds powerful and meaningful, but its actual meaning can change depending on who is using it and what context it is used in. For some people, "national pride" might mean supporting the government's policies. For others, it might mean protesting against perceived injustices. So, while "national pride" sounds significant, it does not have a fixed definition. It is a word that can be filled with different meanings depending on the speaker and the situation.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The qualitative researcher's inherent subjectivity poses yet another significant challenge. As an active participant in data collection and analysis, the author of this thesis is susceptible to the influence of their own perspectives, biases, and preconceptions (Fairclough, 2003, p.14). This phenomenon, termed the “excessive influence of the analyst” by Azpíroz (2014, p.77), underscores the importance of researcher reflexivity and self-awareness throughout the research process. In order to mitigate the risk of unintentionally shaping or privileging certain interpretations over others, one of the more important texts that this thesis focuses on are celebratory speeches made by the state officials. Looking only at the speeches that the state officials have published on their official social media pages or websites, this thesis tries to eliminate the chance of interpreting the narratives of the Georgian Dream through the discourse of the opposition media in Georgia.

Despite significant academic attention to Georgia's foreign policy path during Georgian Dream in power, the party's active integration of spatial considerations into both foreign and domestic policies has not received comprehensive analysis. Unlike numerous studies about president Saakashvili's period (e.g. Zurabashvili, 2023; Kakabadze, 2020), there has been a noticeable lack of thorough analysis regarding how the external world and Georgia's role in it have been depicted under the leadership of the Georgian Dream party. Notably, Georgian Dream leaders consistently outline Georgia's position within international contexts, often using geopolitical arguments to justify policy decisions. Specifically, the article delves into how Georgia's role and status in relation to the global community, Europe, the United States (US), and Russia are depicted in annual addresses delivered to Georgian public at the two most important celebratory days in the country - May 26 (Independence Day) and April 9 (Day of National Unity). This article aims to bridge this gap by systematically exploring representations of identity in key political speeches delivered by Georgian Dream officials.

The thesis addresses the following research questions: How does the current Georgian government, represented by officials from Georgian Dream, frame and depict various external geographical spaces in their rhetoric? What justifications—be they cultural, historical, economic, or security-related—are employed to either associate or dissociate the country with specific

regions? Additionally, what role, position, and objectives does Georgia hold within these spaces, as portrayed by the government?

The thesis will analyse speeches made by the Georgian Dream top officials, notably the prime ministers and the presidents of Georgia throughout the years of the party's tenure since 2012 until the beginning of 2024. As mentioned, these speeches include two national holidays of Georgia, one is Independence Day (26 May) and the other is the Day of National Unity, or also called April 9 tragedy. On this day in 1989, the Soviet army violently suppressed thousands of peaceful demonstrators in Tbilisi, who were advocating for Georgia's independence. The use of tanks and poison gas during the crackdown in front of the parliament on Rustaveli Avenue led to 21 deaths. Two years later, on April 9, 1991, an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet passed an act restoring Georgia's independence, reclaiming the sovereignty that had been lost in 1921 due to Sovietization. Even though Georgia officially separated from the USSR on April 9, 1991, its Independence Day is celebrated on May 26. This date commemorates the initial declaration of independence in 1918, when the Georgian National Council in Tbilisi enacted the Act of State Independence. This act established a democratic Georgian state modelled after European nations. The Democratic Republic of Georgia was founded on May 26, 1918, in the wake of the Russian Empire's collapse and the 1917 revolution. The restoration of state independence was fueled by two significant factors: the national movement that began in the early 19th century and the effects of the First World War.

The narratives surrounding April 9th as presented by Georgian Dream officials are interpreted differently for domestic and international audiences, shaping how Georgia is positioned in the eyes of these diverse groups. For the domestic audience in Georgia, the narratives of heroism, sacrifice, patriotism, and struggle for freedom resonate deeply. These narratives tap into the historical and emotional consciousness of the Georgian people, reinforcing a sense of national pride, unity, and resilience. The emphasis on April 9th as a day of remembrance and reflection on the nation's journey towards independence and sovereignty serves to strengthen the bond between the government and its citizens. It positions Georgia as a country that values democracy, human rights, and the preservation of its identity in the face of historical challenges.

On the international stage, these narratives are often framed to highlight Georgia's commitment to democratic values, human rights, and its ongoing struggle for sovereignty. The narratives of

heroism and sacrifice are used to garner sympathy and support from the international community, portraying Georgia as a nation that has overcome adversity and is striving towards greater democratic ideals. The emphasis on April 9th as a symbol of freedom and independence positions Georgia as a progressive and resilient country in the global arena that deserves recognition and solidarity from other nations.

Independence Day, celebrated on May 26th, holds profound significance in Georgia's history as it marks the country's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Georgian Dream utilises this occasion to convey a narrative steeped in themes similar to the 9 April tragedy: national unity, sacrifice, freedom, and aspirations towards democratic values. Through speeches delivered on Independence Day, GD officials reflect on historical milestones, honour the sacrifices of past generations, express gratitude towards international partnerships, and articulate a vision for a united, prosperous, and democratic Georgia. These discourses not only commemorate the country's journey towards statehood but also project a forward-looking perspective, and emphasises the importance of collective effort, resilience, and a shared vision for the nation's future.

Georgian foreign policy, especially concerning Russia, is significantly influenced by its relations with the US, EU, and NATO. Initially, after gaining independence, Georgia lacked experience in foreign policy, particularly in democratic processes. Kakachia and Mineashvili argue that Georgia's foreign policy lacked a clear strategy or ideology apart from its overarching goal of aligning with Europe. Over time, the Georgian political elite developed key foreign policy ideas emphasising Georgia's European identity and distancing from Russian influence. For example, the Act of Restoration of State Independence of Georgia in 1991 highlighted Georgia's unwilling membership in the Soviet Union and advocated for integration with Western institutions as the pathway to modernization (Karlíková, 2021, 13).

The texts were analysed with a qualitative research approach. Firstly, several topics were identified and coded manually in the statements of the officials. These topics include: National identity; Soviet Union and the recent past; Positioning the west as an organic part and Russia as an undesirable "other"; NATO integration and military missions; The 2008 war and the West's response; Lost territories and minority; Political polarisation; The orthodox church and family values.

The data is organised thematically, followed by textual analysis using Discourse Theory method in a three-step process. First, I identify recurring themes, actors and spaces; after that I look into what different meanings these themes carry. At the same time, I explore the linguistic techniques that the Georgian Dream officials use for justifying their positions. The findings will be transcribed into a combination of facts and assumptions with the help of corresponding quotes.

2.4 Division of the Timeline

The analysis of political discourse necessitates a nuanced understanding of the contextual factors and temporal dynamics shaping the articulation of political messages. In this thesis, I propose to divide the timeline of Georgian Dream Party's political communication into three distinct periods: 2012-2016, 2017-2021, and 2022-2023. Each period represents a significant juncture in Georgia's political landscape, characterised by distinct political developments and external influences, which may have had discernible impacts on the discursive strategies employed by the Georgian Dream Party.

1. 2012-2016 (GD comes to power):

This period marks the ascension of the Georgian Dream Party to power following the parliamentary elections of 2012. It represents a crucial phase in Georgian politics, characterised by a transition from the long-standing dominance of the United National Movement (UNM) to the emergence of a new ruling party. The years following the electoral victory witnessed significant shifts in political rhetoric, policy priorities, and governance strategies as the Georgian Dream Party sought to consolidate its position and implement its agenda.

2. 2017-2021 (EU aspiration integrated in Georgia's constitution + EU visa liberation):

The years spanning from 2017 to 2021 witnessed notable developments in Georgia's relations with the European Union (EU), including the integration of EU aspirations into Georgia's constitution and the implementation of visa liberalisation with the EU. These developments reflect the Georgian Dream Party's commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration and its efforts to advance Georgia's candidacy for EU membership. Against the backdrop of evolving EU-Georgia relations, this period is characterised by intensified discursive efforts aimed at promoting Georgia's European identity and garnering domestic and international support for EU accession.

3. 2022-2023 (War in Ukraine):

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022 and its subsequent implications for regional security and geopolitics significantly influenced the discursive landscape in Georgia. Against the backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions and security concerns, the Georgian Dream Party's discourse may have undergone notable shifts as it sought to navigate the complexities of the regional dynamics and articulate its response to the unfolding crisis. This period represents a critical juncture in Georgia's foreign policy orientation and may have had profound implications for the framing of national security, sovereignty, and international relations in the party's discourse.

By dividing the timeline into these three distinct periods, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the Georgian Dream Party's political communication in response to changing political, social, and geopolitical contexts. Through a close examination of discursive strategies employed during each period, this study seeks to elucidate the party's shifting priorities, ideological orientations, and rhetorical tactics, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of political discourse in Georgia.

Chapter 3: A Brief History of Georgia's European and NATO Integration

3.1 A Brief summary of Georgia's independence

This subchapter will give background information about Georgia's Western aspirations throughout its modern history. However, some aspects of earlier history are also important to mention in order to understand the narratives of today's political elites as they often mention historical figures and often picture them as heroes and intellectuals who made it possible to connect Georgia's history and identity to the West today. These aspirations are deeply rooted in Georgia's historical and cultural identity, particularly its early adoption of Christianity, its medieval history, and its orientation towards European models of governance.

Georgian intellectuals and political elites have viewed independence and democracy as intertwined goals, with independence seen as a means to join the ranks of civilised Western states. This aspiration to join the West is not merely pragmatic but also carries deep cultural and historical significance, stemming from Georgia's perception of itself as a Christian outpost in the East and its adherence to Western political and ideological models (Nodia, 1995, p. 107).

Georgia's longing for independence stems from its historical background. Georgia was once a flourishing kingdom in the 11th and 12th centuries, and it ruled almost entirely the territory between the Black and the Caspian seas. After that, there was a series of conflicts with its Islamic neighbours and in 1801, Georgia decided to share its independence and allow annexation by Czarist Russia. After that, there was a short period when the Russian empire broke up, and Georgia regained independence in 1918 only until it was again subjugated by Bolshevik Russia in 1921. Today, these historical injustices, similar to those experienced by the Baltic states, provide a legal basis for Georgia's claim of forced incorporation into the Soviet Union (Nodia, 1995, p. 107).

Georgia has been through a lot of political instabilities since the end of communism. There have been fights over who should be in charge and where the borders should be. When Georgia started its action towards independence in 1988, the Abkhazian and Ossetian separatist groups wanted to break away from the Georgian state since they were already an autonomous region (South Ossetia) and an autonomous republic (Abkhazia) claimed by the Soviet Union. They were backed by Russia. Abkhazians are the Northwest Caucasian ethnic group, and the Ossetians living in north-central Georgia, are a remnant of the eastern Iranian nomads. They both made up roughly 30 percent of Georgia's population at the time of their first separatist activities. Their separation led to the Georgia-Ossetian War in 1991-1992 and the Georgia-Abkhazian War in 1992-1993. As a result, more than 200,000 people (mostly Georgians) had to leave their homes and move to Georgian territory (Nodia, 1995, p. 104).

This fighting made things even more chaotic. The president's supporters controlled a big part of the country and fought against the government in 1993. It looked like there might be a huge war, but in order to prevent that scenario, Georgian leader and former Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, exchanged significant aspects of Georgia's recently acquired independence for the Russian assistance necessary to swiftly put down the insurgents with minimal casualties (Nodia, 1995, p. 105).

In 1995, Nodia wrote that Georgia had gained the image of 'a politically immature society incapable of self-government and doomed to reabsorption into a recrudescing Russian empire' (p. 105). Although he draws the theory of Olshevskii about all post-soviet countries' transition process. It was supposed to be nonlinear, it was supposed to hit the rock bottom in order to 'bounce back up out of the abyss of social destruction' (p.106).

The changes in Georgia, like in other former Soviet Union republics, were mostly triggered by Gorbachev's reforms. With the loosening grip of the communist regime due to perestroika, Georgians were forced to adapt. This led to the emergence of two key ideals: democracy and national independence. Initially, there was widespread support for these principles, especially after the tragic events of April 9, 1989, when Soviet troops killed peaceful pro-independence demonstrators in Tbilisi. From then on, opposing independence or democracy became unacceptable. Georgians viewed independence as a rightful status, not primarily for immediate gains but as a matter of principle. As Nodia points out, while some acknowledged the potential economic gains and the end of Russian exploitation, these were not the driving forces behind the

desire for independence. Instead, it was perceived as the rightful status for Georgia to have. (Nodia, 1995, 106).

3.2 Georgia on its Western Journey

Nodia understands Georgia's commitment to democracy as closely tied to its desire for independence. The aspiration to embrace democracy is not merely about supporting democratic institutions; rather, it signifies Georgia's aspiration to be recognized as a civilised Western state. Georgia's geographical position as Christianity's eastern stronghold has consistently made it feel connected to the broader European sphere. Since the nineteenth century, Georgia has leaned towards more secular thinking of being a Western state. This movement was influenced by figures like Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), who advocated for a European-style democratic nation-state. In the post-communist era, Georgia's independence movement has embraced Chavchavadze's liberal nationalism. They viewed democracy as a means to achieve independence from oppressive regimes, particularly those imposed by Soviet Russia. In Nodia's terms, 'In principle, being democratic meant being pro-Western. In practice, democracy meant a chance to work for the cause of independence' (1995, p.107).

Various Georgian scholars explore Georgia's European identity aspirations. For Minesashvili and Kakachia (2015, 173), Georgia is considered as a historical buffer zone between empires and its identity characteristics were driven by this factor as well. They also emphasise the significance of Christianity and the Church in shaping Georgia's European identity. They suggest that Georgia's orientation towards Europe stems from its historical commitment to Christianity and its desire for self-preservation. According to Kakachia, Georgia's pursuit of European identity is rooted in both practical considerations, like survival, and moral principles, such as protecting Christianity from Persian and Ottoman empires. They highlight historical figures like Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani, who promoted Georgia's pro-European stance through his diplomatic mission to France.

Following its separation from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia aimed to adopt Western-style democracy. However, with little experience in democracy, new diplomats, not enough money, and fighting inside the country, Georgia had a hard time figuring out how to deal with the West at first. President Zviad Gamsakhurdia had trouble making friends with other countries because

they didn't want to accept Georgia as independent. Even though Georgia hoped for help from the West because of laws and the right to choose their own path, Gamsakhurdia's focus on other projects meant Georgia's wish to be part of Europe got overlooked (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, 174).

Rondeli suggests that Georgia's desire to be European is deeply ingrained in its national consciousness, associating Christianity with Europe. Despite challenges and geopolitical constraints, Rondeli argues that Georgia's political elite and society have always aspired to align with European civilization and culture, viewing it as essential for progress and development (Javakhishvili, 2022, p. 25).

Shevardnadze's period is an important starting point of the Georgia-NATO relations. Following the stabilisation of internal affairs, Georgia renewed its focus on Western integration in the late 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence, cooperation between Georgia and the European Union began in 1992. This resurgence was particularly pronounced among the younger reformist faction within the ruling party, the Citizen's Union of Georgia. Concurrently, Georgia's distancing from Russia failed to facilitate conflict resolution, prompting a heightened emphasis on relations with European structures. Since 1995, Georgia has benefited from the European Union's Generalised System of Trade Preferences (GSP, which was first renewed in 2005 and later in 2014 (GSP+) - and which was also extended to Georgia. On April 22, 1996, the European Union and Georgia signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in Luxembourg, which entered into full force in 1999, establishing Georgia-EU cooperation institutions aimed at facilitating the implementation of the PCA and strengthening bilateral relations and political dialogue (Info Center on NATO and EU, 2024). Symbolic milestones included Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe in 1999 and its partnership agreements with NATO and the European Union. Parliamentary chairman Zurab Zhvania succinctly captured this sentiment, declaring, "I am Georgian, therefore I am European." Georgia's official documents underscored its commitment to European integration, affirming its aspiration for full participation in the European community (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, p. 174).

It can be said that his rule was characterised by balancing the country's foreign policy towards the West and Russia at the same time, however, at the end of his mandate, Georgia's relations with Russia was heading downhill. In terms of progress made with the West, in 1994, Georgia

joined the Partnership for Peace program. This meant that the security relations would increase between Georgia and NATO. This date can be marked as the starting point of Georgia-NATO relations (Rondeli, 2001, 198). However, Shevardnadze soon had Georgia join another military alliance, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) led by Russia and as a result, four military bases were built in Georgia. In addition, a formal Georgian-Russian Friendship Treaty was signed the year after (Karlíková, 2021,35). In the beginning of the millennia, the so-called Pankisi Gorge crisis influenced the decline of Georgia's attitude towards Russia and the West took this opportunity to help Georgia in overcoming the crisis. The Pankisi Gorge crisis started in 1999 when Chechen refugees had to leave their homes due to the Russian military campaign and move to a Georgian territory near the border called the Pankisi Gorge. Soon after, Russia's military aircrafts flew over Georgia's territory, violating its airspace. In addition, the Pankisi Gorge became a hub for Chechen rebels who brought drug-trafficking and police corruption to the area. This is where the US interfered by promoting anti-terrorist training in 2002 (Karlíková, 2021, p. 36).

The 2003 Rose Revolution saw Mikheil Saakashvili rise to power with a vision of a European-oriented Georgia. In 2003, by the decision of the EU Council, the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus was appointed whose duties included participation in peace negotiations to resolve conflicts in the region, as well as support for regional cooperation. More specifically, the special representative participated in the Geneva international negotiations, which began after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

In 2004, the Government of Georgia established the position of State Minister for Integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. The same year, following a decision by the Council of the European Union, Georgia joined the European Neighborhood Policy. Subsequently, on November 14, 2006, the Georgia-EU European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan was adopted. In response to the Russia-Georgia war of August 2008, an extraordinary session of the European Council took place on September 1, 2008. Following this, on September 15, 2008, the Council of the European Union decided to establish the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), which has been operational in Georgia since October 1, 2008. Additionally, on September 25, 2008, the Council of the European Union created the post of Special Representative of the European Union for the crisis in Georgia, a position held by Pierre Morel until 2011. In 2009,

Georgia joined the "Eastern Partnership" initiative, the foundation (Info Center on NATO and EU, 2024).

Saakashvili's tenure was marked by growing national sentiment and deteriorating relations with Russia, culminating in the 2008 war. This conflict, sparked by tensions in South Ossetia, saw Georgian forces initially gain ground but ultimately being pushed back by Russian and separatist forces, leading to significant destruction and displacement. The war ended with a French-brokered ceasefire, yet Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states marked a severe blow to Georgia, which lost the last of its controlled territories in these regions. The aftermath of the war solidified Georgia's commitment to Western integration and also showed Russia's strategy of supporting separatist entities to maintain influence. The 2008 war was a pivotal moment, which showed the fragile nature of Georgian independence and sovereignty, the persistent threat posed by Russian intervention, and the complex dynamics of the region's geopolitical landscape.

During the presidency of Saakashvili, the relations with the West were changed. Saakashvili drastically intensified the pro-western discourse that Shevardnadze started. Despite Russia's open stance against any post-soviet country being in close partnership with NATO, Saakashvili did not back down on building stronger connections with the organisation. The Georgian president wasn't able to acquire NATO's first tangible first step towards its membership, Membership Action Plan (MAP), because the NATO leaders were not happy about Saakashvili's downgrading reputation from 2007 violent demonstrations, the increased corruption, authoritarian tendencies and several other reasons. However, Georgia still managed to take a new step in NATO integration - in 2008, a NATO-Georgia Commission was founded in order to create a framework for political dialogue (Karlíková, 2021, 43).

On June 27, 2014, the Georgia-EU Association Agreement was signed, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). On July 1, 2016, the Georgia-EU Association Agreement fully entered into force (Info Center on NATO and EU, 2024).

On March 28, 2017, visa-free travel to the EU/Schengen area was officially granted to Georgian citizens. On September 16, 2020, during a plenary session, the European Parliament voted on a report regarding Georgia's implementation of the Association Agreement, which received the support of 552 deputies. On June 23, 2022, the European Council made a landmark decision to open the European perspective for Georgia, signalling the country's potential

candidacy for EU membership. This decision elevated Georgia-EU relations to a new and significantly higher level (Info Center on NATO and EU, 2024). On December 14, 2023, the European Council officially granted Georgia candidate status for EU membership. Following Georgia's application for EU membership in March 2022, the European Commission issued an opinion detailing 12 priorities for the country to address during its accession process. These priorities encompass areas such as democracy, the rule of law, judicial reform, and fundamental rights (Civil Georgia, 2023).

It is important to provide a retrospective summary of Georgia's contributions to the US-led military operations internationally also. Georgia had participated in a US-led peacekeeping mission in Kosovo in 1999. In 2004 Georgia joined for the first time in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF, 2001-2014), later known as Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan (RSM, 2015-2021). By the year of 2012, 'Georgia was the fifth largest contributor to ISAF' (German, 2015, p. 611). Within the framework of its 2014 National Military Strategy (NMS), Georgia indicated its participation in the international security environment as one of its key objectives. This became a tangible international military achievement for Georgia. According to official sources, from 2004 to the present day, over 20,000 Georgian troops have taken part in 107 international missions under ISAF and RSM. Throughout this period, 32 soldiers have lost their lives (Radio Tavisupleba, 2021a).

The United States has been supportive of Georgia's position about the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. In 2006, the United States formally endorsed the removal of Russian military forces from Georgia. And before that, in 2005, the US president Georgia W. Bush visited Georgia and openly expressed backing for Georgia's collaboration with NATO and its aspiration to join the institutions of Europe (Karlíková, 2021, p. 44).

In terms of Georgia's relations with the EU, Saakashvili's period was important in several ways. Firstly, the first Georgia-EU Action Plan within the European Neighbourhood Policy was signed in 2006. In the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the EU played an important mediative role by issuing a peace agreement between the warring sides. In addition, we can include establishing the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) on the Abkhaz and South Ossetian border and an Eastern Partnership program as the effort from the EU's side during the Saakashvili period (Karlíková, 2021, p. 44).

The Georgian Dream is often considered by the local opposition and some experts on the region to be a pro-Russian party, which is logical to think since its founder Bidzina Ivanishvili had several businesses in Russia before coming to politics (Atasuntsev, 2023). Despite this, their period includes some important steps in the EU and NATO integration process of the country - for example, signing the Association Agreement and achieving visa-free travel. Consequently, there have been no substantial changes in the essence, objectives, or trajectory of Georgian relations with the EU, NATO, and the United States between these two periods. However, the impact of Georgian-Western relations on the country's policy towards Russia has remained notably significant in both eras (Karlíková, 2021, p. 71).

Chapter 4: Georgian Dream's Discourse

4.1 The Three Fundamental Signifiers: Independence, Unity, Freedom

We can see that April 9th and 26th May are framed as symbols of the Georgian people's ongoing struggle for freedom and independence. These two codes, together with 'unity' are definitely the most fundamental building blocks of the Georgian Dream's narrative about Georgian identity. We can call them nodal points or master signifiers as well, since the repetitiveness of them is also easily detectable; and they also unify the collective identity and serve as key signs around which the GD's discourse is built. They showcase what is priority for Georgian people and Georgia as a state. Usually, in their speeches, first the historical context of events leading to independence is revisited, which then underlines the nation's resilience and determination to assert its sovereignty and freedom, and in order to achieve this, unity (united action of Georgian people) is needed. The following part of the thesis will dive into each of these master signifiers and their correlation.

Independence is a necessary condition for further progress, but the goal is even higher - the goal is freedom... A state can be independent but not necessarily free, however a free state can never not be an independent one. (Margvelashvili, 2014)

We passed this battle (of independence) with dignity. From independence we are now moving towards freedom. (Margvelashvili, 2016)

We can say that, for Margvelashvili, freedom is the main nodal point, a master sign, and independence is the way to achieve it. For Gharibashvili, independence of Georgia “means Georgian statehood... This means building state institutions, taking care of our citizens, and strengthening the state as a united family” (Gharibashvili, 2015).

Ivanishvili looks at unity as the main force to gain freedom and independence:

The liberation of our homeland from the oppression of the Soviet empire, along with the attainment of independence and freedom for Georgia, represented the grand national aspiration that unified and galvanised the entire nation into a cohesive force. (Ivanishvili, 2019)

So does president Zourabichvili - “May 26 is a symbol of unity and achieving victories through unity. The result of this unity is our independence” (2020).

In his second term as a prime minister, Gharibashvili’s view on this matter remained the same - “The idea of freedom has always been the main pillar that united all patriots, and which made the independence of our country possible (2021). This is a correlation between these three signifiers. The idea of freedom is greater, which makes independence possible. And the guarantee of both of these is the unity of the Georgian people - many years of struggle of the Georgian Defense Forces together with civilians who got united to protest on 9 April of 1989 and then later took part in a referendum, which resulted in 99.5% of Georgia voting for the declaration of independence in 1991 (Nohlen et al., 2001, 394).

Freedom is the highest value for which a life sacrificed is worth it. Of course, it's difficult, but it is worth it. Today we celebrate the integrity of our nation around this issue and mourn the sacrifices our fellow citizens made then. (Margvelashvili, 2014)

The mentioned quote, given by the former president of Georgia, Giorgi Margvelashvili (2013–2018) celebrates the unity of the Georgian nation in upholding values such as freedom, dignity, and integrity. This narrative of national unity emphasises the collective strength and solidarity of Georgians in facing challenges and shaping their future.

The first theme, National Identity, underlines the importance of May 26 and 9 April as symbols of Georgia's sovereignty, resilience, and historical journey towards statehood. Georgian Dream's speeches often highlight pivotal moments in Georgian history, and evoke sentiments of national unity, pride, and determination.

Many young people tried with their bare hands to resist the Soviet Union - a powerful machine of governance. It was an example of self-sacrifice, and the blood that was shed on this day changed not only the vector of the country's development, but also the consciousness of the Georgian people and strengthened the belief that it is possible to stand up to a force far superior to you with endurance and bravery. (Kvirikashvili, 2016)

This speech of Giorgi Kvirikashvili, a prime minister of Georgia (2015-2016), made on April 9th, portrays it as a day of heroism, where young people sacrificed their lives for the country's independence and freedom. This narrative of heroism and sacrifice instils a sense of pride and resilience in the Georgian identity, it highlights the courage of individuals in the face of adversity.

Batiashvili in her study about Georgian history school textbooks (2019, p. 1088) argues that heroism, resistance and unity are all important parts of Georgia's general historical narrative, and it serves as an interpretative mechanism for highlighting how Georgians maintained their culture despite the foreign invasion - this approach idealises the nation and its achievements. In addition, Batiashvili mentions that they are also often followed by narratives about 'friction, treason, and collaboration'. This motif, on the other hand, focuses on how Georgia is unable to resist political

fragmentation - it acknowledges its shortcomings and failures, particularly in terms of political unity and cohesion. Finally, these two motifs contribute to what the author calls "bivocality" in the Georgian national narrative. This duality of voices, according to Batiashvili, shapes the discursive patterns and storytelling habits related to Georgian nationhood. This motif is interpreted in Georgian Dream's discourse mostly as political polarisation. Before we move on to a deeper analysis of this motif, we should focus first on the national sentiment narrative, which gives the general picture of what it means to be Georgian.

The emphasis on love for the motherland and patriotism also runs through the speeches of the GD officials, and it showcases a deep connection between the Georgian people and their homeland. This narrative reinforces a strong sense of national pride and identity, and helps foster unity among citizens. Just like in this speech here, made by Georgia's prime minister Irakli Gharibashvili (2013-2015, and then again in 2021-2024):

This day is a symbol for independence, a symbol for fighting for the love of one's motherland. These people gave us an example of how to live and sacrifice ourselves for the motherland. This is the victory of our nation. (Gharibashvili, 2015)

After analysing the texts, it can be concluded that they are all structured to convey Georgia's aspirations toward the West and at the same time they evoke a sense of national pride. As Tracey German explains (2015), the narrative about Georgian people's sacrifice and struggle is used to depict the country's determination to join the West (p. 612). And this all happens against the background of Russia's negative position towards the idea of Georgia joining the western camp through NATO and the EU. For example, the soldiers who have taken part in 107 international missions under ISAF and RSM have been portrayed as symbols of sacrifice in the Georgian political narrative, starting from Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency and continued by the Georgian Dream party as well. Today, this topic still carries the same significance throughout all three periods of Georgian Dream's rule. Here are examples from each one of them:

Georgia participates in international peacekeeping missions and we fight for world peace alongside the troops of our partner and friendly countries. Therefore, I would like to congratulate our military personnel participating in international missions on May

26, who now have the most honourable mission - they protect the future of our children and Georgia on a foreign land. (Gharibashvili, 2014)

Congratulations to you, soldiers of the armed forces! You have never lowered the sword and flag of our forefathers and today you proudly serve the motherland, both within the country and in international missions. I will pay tribute to your comrades who sacrificed their lives for our motherland...we are sure that this is the precondition of our victory that will lead us to our strategic goal of membership in NATO and the European Union. (Margvelashvili, 2018)

This army has shown numerous examples of dedication and professionalism for the motherland beyond the borders of the country. (Zourabichvili, 2023)

4.2 Theme 1: EU Aspiration

These three signifiers (Independence, Freedom and Unity) are then used in different themes. Firstly, they emphasise the importance of western aspirations. The independence imagined by the GD is the basis to create a democratic, European Georgia. Even though the topic of Western integration had been emphasised before 2016, it gained more prominence following the visa liberalisation. Prior to that, while the exact phrase "Western aspiration" wasn't explicitly used (as analysed in the text for this thesis), the values synonymous with liberal Western democracies, such as freedom and democracy, were frequently underscored. These principles were often promoted by President Margvelashvili: "In 1918, our ancestors... set a democratic republic as the default format of the country's organisation" (2014). And Gharibashvili's mention of EU aspiration before 2016 is not easy to detect, it can even be said that his texts carry an unclear connotation about his approach to EU aspiration. In one of his celebratory speeches, he thanked "the friends of our country - the United States of America, European countries, all those who support the unity and independence of our country (2015). However, before saying that, he also mentioned during talking about Georgia's goals, to focus more on the national angle of independence:

Independence Day is at the same time our statehood day - all of us should be aware of the common benefits that the rule of law brings. Many generations have sacrificed to this idea. Today we have the honour to live in an independent Georgian state. Freedom needs taking care. Subversive thinking [against state interests] brings great harm to our country. And unfortunately we have many examples of this. (2015)

This brings out the first signs of the domestic political confrontation in the analysed celebratory texts of this thesis, which then became more and more frequent. However, before moving to this topic of political polarisation, we need to focus more on what has been said about Georgia's European objectives. On May 26, 2016, on the 25th anniversary of the independence day of Georgia, Margvelashvili declared that year as "The year of the European state". He suggested transferring Georgia's already existing European values to the "statehood", which then he further explained meant that Georgia was ready to "take further firm steps on [our] European and Euro-Atlantic path" (2016). This was already several months after the visa-liberalisation and a year before the addition in the constitution about the EU-aspiration of Georgian people.

A major angle from which the GD officials approach Georgia's European identity, is the narrative of returning to the European Family. This narrative is the most frequently used by President Zourabichvili:

The 30 years that we passed after that (independence) were difficult years: conflicts, war, sibling rivalry, occupation of territories, slow but systematic progress, development and returning to our own national and European path. (Zourabichvili, 2021)

Zourabichvili's vision pivots around Georgia's reintegration into the European family. She stresses, "If Georgia's only prospect is to return to the European family, and to build a European state, and this is true - we should not miss the greatest opportunity that has been given to us" (2021). This statement underscores the strategic importance of aligning Georgia's trajectory with European values and institutions, and framing it as an opportunity for growth and development.

"When, if not today, we have to understand that we have no other way. A united nation has a great future - towards Europe and returning to ourselves" (2021). This call for unity highlights the pivotal role of a cohesive national identity in pursuing a European path and also reclaiming Georgian values and essence. "Thus, we must understand that protecting these values is neither following someone else's dictates [echoing Euroscepticism], nor is it a threat of alienation and loss of identity, but on the contrary, taking decisive steps on the path of Europe is equivalent to returning to ourselves" (2021). This sentiment underscores the narrative that embracing European ideals is not a departure from Georgia's essence but rather a reaffirmation of its core values and aspirations. So does this narrative by the ex-premier minister Bakhtadze:

“Our ancestors had another attempt to return Georgia to its historical family, to return to Europe... Unfortunately, the Soviet occupation did not allow them to fully fulfil their mission, but our generation has a completely unique chance and, at the same time, a responsibility to bring the path started by our ancestors to the end and lead it successfully. (Bakhtadze, 2018).

Later on, Gharibashvili also started mentioning the returning myth and that the Georgian nationhood is in fact close to a European one:

After gaining independence, we aimed to implement this inner freedom, which defines our entire history and culture, in the state and institutional arrangements of the country. This, of course, means building a modern, European state... That is why the desire to return to our natural environment, to the common European family, has also never slowed down among our people. (Gharibashvili, 2022)

The narrative of "returning to the European family" in Georgian political discourse is not unique to the Georgian Dream officials but has been a common theme among post-Soviet countries seeking integration with the European Union. According to Tsuladze et al. (2016), this narrative has served as a primary international strategy for policymakers aiming to align Georgia with Western values and institutions. Some scholars argue that this narrative may be a construct

invented by Georgian politicians, yet it has effectively facilitated Georgia's Europeanization process.

One of the factors lending credibility to this narrative is Christianity, which has historically connected Georgia to Europe. However, Christianity also presents an ambiguity in political discourse. While Europe is predominantly Christian, Russia, as another Christian nation, represents the "other" or the antihero in Georgia's narrative. This stems from Russia's historical actions, such as annexing Georgia's independence in 1918 and then again in 1921 and the subsequent Soviet rule until 1991.

Under the pressure of the Russian Empire, despite the total Russification and the annulment of the autocephaly of our church by the "unanimous" brother, despite the destruction of the frescoes, we were able to preserve our language and faith... the more they fought against us, the stronger the spirit of independence and the attitude of the society. We have come to this day with this honour, these principles and this consciousness. (Zourabichvili, 2023)

This historical context creates a dichotomy where Christianity symbolises both a connection to Europe and a divergence from Russia. In this context, Christianity carries different connotations depending on the geopolitical perspective. It serves as a cultural link to Europe, emphasising Georgia's historical ties to the West. Simultaneously, it symbolises a rejection of Russia's influence, portraying Russia as the force that separated Georgia from its European roots. This complexity highlights the nuanced relationship between religion, politics, and identity in Georgia's pursuit of European integration.

Other cultural characteristics that backup the argument of Georgia's European identity is tolerance towards other nationalities, democracy, and human rights. Therefore Euro-integration is driven by values. However, portraying Georgia as a European country rather than a post-Soviet one, is at the same time a pragmatic objective for strengthening national security against Russian aggression. Tsuladze et al. note that this is an important idea that was invented by the political elites and it needs to be constantly repeated in order to maintain its relevance (P. 103).

4.3 Theme 2: Christianity and Georgian Orthodox Church

Christianity and the Georgian Orthodox Church play an important role in Georgia's path to joining the EU, especially when it comes to LGBT rights. The Church, while officially supporting EU integration, strongly opposes LGBT rights and the anti-discrimination law, believing these go against traditional Georgian and Christian values.

Because the Church has a lot of influence in Georgia, political leaders and intellectuals handle this issue carefully. Even though many are critical of the Church's stance, they often hold back their criticism because they know how powerful the Church's opinion is with the public. This creates a tension in Georgia's EU integration: while the country promotes European values like tolerance and minority rights, there is also significant resistance due to religious and cultural beliefs. In this case there is a subtle but detectable difference between the GD officials themselves. While Zourabichvili is open about women rights and minorities, Gharibashvili often highlights traditional family values:

Christianity dictated Europe and Georgia alike to recognize the human as the centre of the universe and therefore to respect and protect all his rights...And when I say the human, I mean the woman. This is also on the agenda on our way to Europe.
(Zourabichvili, 2022)

Lies and misinformation are enemies of freedom. As our wise patriarch proclaims: "Man can lose his freedom in the name of false freedom" - in the modern era, where the spread of false information and propaganda of pseudo-values is the greatest challenge for all humanity, and when evil forces try to destroy traditional values, family values; They are trying to replace facts with perceptions, to turn lies into reality - the truth remains our only tool for freedom. (Gharibashvili, 2023)

4.4 Theme 3: Political Polarisation and the President as the Main Critic of the Government

Salome Zourabichvili's recent speeches and actions indicate a shift in her approach towards Georgian politics, particularly regarding European integration and her relationship with the ruling Georgian Dream party. Initially perceived as a neutral and ceremonial figure aligned with Georgian Dream, Zourabichvili has evolved into a more assertive leader, actively engaging in national affairs and displaying a growing confidence in confronting certain government policies.

Zourabichvili's background as an independent presidential candidate, initially appreciated by Georgian Dream, has contributed to her unique position in Georgian politics. Despite past ties to Saakashvili's presidency and her French roots, she has emerged as a key player in shaping Georgia's European future. Her focus on mediating between political factions and her critical stance on EU integration progress highlight her evolving narrative and concerns about Georgian Dream's commitment to European goals. Her efforts since around 2021 to bridge divides and push for stronger European ties demonstrate a departure from traditional presidential roles, signalling a more proactive and dynamic leadership style.

In her speech on April 9, 2021, Salome Zourabichvili addressed the issue of polarisation in Georgian politics and society with a focus on unity and responsible governance. She expressed, "It is very sad to see empty chairs today at this event at the President's Palace as we celebrate Unity and Independence Day," highlighting the absence of certain political parties as a reflection of the lack of cooperation and unity among political actors. Zourabichvili emphasised the potential role of the President as a mediator in political processes, stating, "The time must surely come when the President of Georgia and Georgia itself will be the mediator of its political processes." She also called for a moratorium on hate speech and abuse in political discourse, urging for "the language of hate and abuse" to cease for a more respectful and constructive dialogue among political parties and society at large.

Reflecting on past failures, Zourabichvili highlighted the lessons learned, saying, "Unpreparedness, disorganisation, inconsistency, lack of plans, lack of professionalism, and behind all this, indifference, putting forward party goals and ambitions." She stressed the need for a clear national vision, concrete plans, and unity among political actors to address

polarisation effectively. Zourabichvili connected true independence with duties when she stated "the more independence, the more responsibility."

Salome Zurabishvili's speech on May 26, 2023, addressed the growing concern over the influx of Russian emigrants into Georgia following the war in Ukraine. This influx, numbering around 110,000 by the end of 2022, posed a national security threat and exacerbated existing tensions between Georgians and Russians (Kucera, 2024). Georgians viewed all Russians with suspicion, seeing them as complicit in the Ukraine conflict. The issue became politically charged, with opposition parties criticising the government's response and the ruling party defending its policies, leading to heightened social and political tensions within the country.

During her speech at the Independence Day event, President Salome Zourabichvili once again criticised the actions of the ruling team, including the restoration of direct flights to Russia and the ruling team's anti-European and anti-American rhetoric. She highlighted the incomprehensible and insulting aspects of the government's actions regarding Russian emigrants, stating, "It is incomprehensible and insulting to our people when the government does not think about the honour and dignity of its citizens." Zourabichvili also expressed concern about accusations of xenophobia, saying, "It is also incomprehensible and insulting when the ruling power of your own country accuses you of xenophobia." These criticisms were followed by disgruntled cries from Georgian Dream MPs in the stands, indicating the contentious nature of her remarks towards the government's policies and actions.

The ruling party in Georgia initiated in October, 2023 an unprecedented impeachment process against President Salome Zourabichvili, citing her unauthorised foreign visits seeking support for the country's European integration as a violation of the Constitution. Despite the impeachment attempt falling short of the required two-thirds majority in Parliament, it was perceived as a setback to Georgia's European integration efforts. The Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the impeachment claim, highlighting a political dispute over the President's foreign engagements. This move raised concerns about the country's foreign policy goals, particularly its EU integration prospects, as Georgia awaits the European Commission's decision on granting EU candidate status (Transparency International - Georgia, 2023).

This [gaining independence] was a victory over the 70-year-old Soviet ideology and totalitarian system, which tried by all means (and today we are still reaping some of its

results) to fragment, disintegrate Georgia and oppose Georgian citizens to each other. (Zourabichvili, 2021)

The question arises whether the current polarisation in Georgia is driven by external forces, such as Russia, or by internal party interests. While Zourabichvili did not explicitly identify Russia in this context, the historical reference to Soviet attempts to fragment Georgia suggests an enduring influence. Additionally, the President has been vocal about the ruling party's actions that contribute to division, criticising their handling of national security and the influx of Russian emigrants, which she views as a threat to the country's stability and unity. Therefore, the polarisation can be seen as a complex interplay of internal party interests and the lingering effects of external pressures, particularly from Russia.

4.5 Theme 4: The Soviet Past and Relations with the modern Russia

In commemorating April 9, Georgian leaders often highlight the enduring struggle and resilience of their nation against Russian and Soviet oppression. In 2016, Margvelashvili reflected on April 9 as a dual symbol: a victory over the "Russian totalitarian Soviet machine" and a celebration of Georgia's independence. This day marked a pivotal shift in the nation's consciousness, spurred by the bravery of young Georgians who, as Kvirikashvili noted (2016), "tried to stand up against the powerful machine of Soviet rule with their bare hands." Their sacrifice not only altered the country's developmental path but also instilled a deep-seated belief in the possibility of overcoming superior forces with "strength and bravery."

In his 2014 celebratory speech, Margvelashvili highlighted the fragility of this hard-won independence, emphasising that despite the progress made since "what we did together 23 years ago," Georgia's sovereignty remained challenged by ongoing occupation and division. The "barbed wire" symbolically represented the continued Russian influence and control over Georgian territories, a stark reminder of the nation's incomplete journey toward full autonomy. This historical context underscored the persistent tension in Georgia's relationship with modern Russia, reflecting a legacy of resistance and the ongoing quest for true independence.

The Act of Independence adopted on April 9 signifies a collective victory: the cadets of 1921, the officers executed in 1923, Patriarch Ambrose of Georgia, the rebels of 1922-23-24, and of course, the heroes of April 9 and Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Together, they triumphed over a much overpowering enemy. I'm consciously not saying a "strong" enemy. And our state with a centuries-old history was restored... The victory of April 9 is significant because it marked Georgia's resurrection as the legal successor to the state established in 1918. This means, and it is important to emphasise, that 70 years of slavery and alienation have been erased from our legal history. (Zourabichvili, 2021)

Here Zourabichvili draws a significant distinction between the physical and moral strength of nations, emphasising that true strength is not merely about military power or resources. By deliberately choosing not to label Russia as a "strong" state, she highlights the notion that being strong encompasses more than physical dominance. Zourabichvili underscores that the Soviet Union, though formidable and oppressive, ultimately lacked the moral strength that small nations like Georgia possess. This perspective positions Georgia not as a passive victim but as an active, principled actor on the global stage, capable of withstanding and overcoming physical domination through its unwavering commitment to its values.

Let us leave a united, European, and strong state for future generations. This was the belief of and the goal of his life for General Kvinitadze, the driving force behind his fight against Russia. Today, we all share this vision. (Zourabichvili, 2021)

General Giorgi Kvinitadze was a prominent Georgian military leader born on August 21, 1874. He played a crucial role in the formation of the Georgian Armed Forces and the establishment of the Georgian Military School, where he served as its first head. He was actively involved in combat operations during the years 1918-1921 and was appointed as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces during the Russian-Georgian war of 1921. After the Soviet occupation of Georgia, Kvinitadze emigrated to France (Radio Tavisupleba, 2021).

On May 26, 2021, symbolically on Georgia's Independence Day, General Giorgi Kvinitadze's remains were transferred from France and reburied in the Mtatsminda Pantheon in Tbilisi, honouring his significant contributions to Georgia's military history. By highlighting Kvinitadze's

role in Georgia's fight against Soviet occupation and his dedication to the nation's independence, Zourabichvili draws a direct parallel to the contemporary struggle against Russian influence. This rhetorical strategy not only reinforces national identity and resilience but also aligns Georgia's current geopolitical stance with its historical legacy of resistance.

On this day, Zourabichvili poetically remarked, "May 26 wins over February 25.". On 25 February 1921, the Red Army entered the capital Tbilisi and installed a communist government, and the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic was established. This speech symbolised Georgia's triumph over adversities such as war, territorial occupation, and persistent provocations, particularly from Russia.

In her address, Zourabichvili also touched upon the ongoing efforts to overcome the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. She emphasised the need for a tailored approach and comprehensive strategy. While acknowledging a shared national consensus on this overarching goal, she candidly acknowledged lingering differences in attitudes towards Russia, underlining the country's continued polarisation.

Despite these challenges, Zourabichvili highlighted a fundamental unity transcending political divides, stating, "We all unite around this goal, regardless of party affiliations or other distinctions." However, she underscored the practical difficulties in achieving this objective, and stressed the importance of effective tools and measures. These include implementing the 2008 ceasefire agreement, expanding the EU monitoring mission, stopping border demarcation efforts, safeguarding citizens' rights, facilitating the return of abducted individuals, and fostering genuine grassroots connections between people.

4.6 Theme 5: GD's Discourse after the Russia's War in Ukraine

In her 9 April speech in 2021, Zourabichvili mentioned "the struggle of our Ukrainian friends", and expressed her solidarity. At that time, Russia had already mobilised its military forces near the border (Piaskowska, 2021). After Russia's launching the full-scale invasion towards Ukraine in February of 2022, the "West" as we know it has changed for good. In Georgia, this was particularly important because of its own experience with Russia and its European integration path together with Ukraine and Moldova. Given this context, Georgia was expected to take a strong stance on the matter, however the Georgian Dream government has taken steps towards the matter that has confused the West and Ukraine about Georgia's dedication to its European

identity, and it even resulted in massive protests against the GD's response to the war. Gharibashvili announced during these protests that Georgia would not participate in the financial and economic sanctions, and explained that such measures would be detrimental to the country's national interests and would harm its citizens. The parliament issued a resolution supporting Ukraine but did not mention Russian aggression (Kakhishvili, 2022, 2).

President Salome Zourabichvili also opposed the government's stance.

How can a nation with our history believe that Russia's policy can depend on someone's good or bad behaviour, or any good or bad statement, on anything but their own interest? When Russia started the war, what depended on Ukraine? Anyone who thinks that Russia will return territories to us in exchange for our concessions has not learned anything from our history. Or how can we believe that the occupier can care about the well-being of our fellow citizens? Do we forget who oppresses and kidnaps our citizens in Abkhazia, Tskhinvali? (Zourabichvili, 2023)

Before this critical speech on the Independence day in 2023, Zourabichvili expressed solidarity with Ukraine right from the start of the invasion, in a video address from France on February 28, 2022. She criticised both the government and opposition for their responses to the crisis. The president revealed that the government had restricted her international activities amid the invasion. The Georgian Dream party responded by announcing plans to sue President Zourabichvili in the Constitutional Court. They claimed she violated the constitution by travelling to Paris and Brussels to discuss the Ukraine crisis without government consent. The party asserted that the government holds sole responsibility for the country's security and foreign policies (Sheils, 2022).

Georgia and Ukraine have had close ties since the Soviet Union's dissolution, signing 107 bilateral agreements and conducting 85 high-level visits between 1991 and 2017. However, the Georgian Dream party has distanced itself from open support for Ukraine to reduce anti-Russian narrative and normalise relations with the oppressor. The GD even removed Ukraine from its list of strategic partners in 2015 due to strained relations about the migration of the former president Mikheil Saakashvili, when Ukraine refused to extradite him to Georgia.

President Salome Zourabichvili underscored Georgia's solidarity with Ukraine, likening Ukraine's sacrifices to Georgia's own struggles. She stated that the tragedies Ukraine faced, like the events in Bucha and Kramatorsk, would lead to eventual empowerment and spiritual independence, much like Georgia's experience: "The tragedies of Bucha and Kramatorski, like our tragic night of April 9, will become a harbinger of spiritual independence and empowerment."

Zourabichvili stressed the unity of Georgian society in their commitment to independence, European integration, and solidarity with Ukraine. She mentioned that the country was unified in its choice for freedom and the rule of law: "Society already agrees on the most important thing - we are united in the choice of independence and freedom, in the choice of the European integration path, in the choice of the rule of law, in solidarity with Ukraine."

She warned that any division between Georgia and Ukraine would benefit Russia, emphasising the need for solidarity: "Any rift between us and Ukraine will be broken by only one person - that is Russia."

Additionally, she acknowledged that Georgia's progress towards European integration was significantly aided by Ukraine's sacrifices, recognizing that Ukraine's fight was also for the freedom and future of other European nations: "We understand very well that [Georgia's] accelerated process towards Europe is the merit of the Ukrainian people, achieved with their blood and suffering... Ukraine protects not only its own sovereignty, independence, freedom, but also our freedom and that of other European countries."

In his 9 April speech in 2019, Ivanishvili warned of ongoing threats from those who "want chaos" and exploited democratic tools and economic problems to incite division. He accused these groups of being driven by emotions, aiming to return Georgia to the "darkness of the 90s." He asserted that "their main support is still emotions winning over rationalism." Ivanishvili's speech underlined his belief that rationalism was crucial for maintaining stability and progress in Georgia, protecting the nation from the pitfalls of emotional and irrational decision-making.

Some studies indicate that Georgian Dream and United National Movement had largely similar positions on foreign and security policy, though with some nuanced differences (Kakhishvili, 2022; Kakachia et al., 2018). However, GD's approach to Russian-Georgian relations and the August War diverged from that of UNM.

Kakhishvili in his study about GD's response to the war in Ukraine (2022) explains this approach from two worldviews that GD has (P. 3). Firstly, GD thought that neutralising the threat of Russian military aggression and normalising relations with it was possible and they downplayed Georgia's aspirations to join the EU and NATO. Second, GD suggested that the 2008 war was the result of the UNM's policy which was reactionist and confrontational, which caused the war that could have been avoided. Kakhishvili says that this shift was evident in various textual documents, including party manifestos from the 2012, 2016, and 2020 elections, as well as strategic documents adopted by the Georgian government after the August War (P. 3).

Georgian Dream's approach is driven by a desire to maintain stability and avoid provocation, however it has faced substantial domestic opposition, and caused broader anxieties about Georgia's future and its international alignment. In short, these events about GD's response to Ukraine's war have deepened the divide within Georgia about its broader geopolitical direction.

Chapter 5: The Duality of Georgian Dream's Policies: Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation and the Foreign Agents Law

Despite the rhetoric of embracing European values and aspirations for EU membership, Georgia's political landscape is also marked by pragmatic considerations and historical complexities. The signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014 was a significant milestone, yet it was also influenced by external factors, including the geopolitical context shaped by events such as the occupation of Ukraine.

The narrative of Georgia's European identity has been central to its political discourse, with leaders emphasising the country's historical ties and future aspirations. However, the journey towards European integration has been fraught with challenges, including domestic political shifts, external pressures, and the need to align national policies with EU standards and practices.

This chapter examines the dual nature of Georgian Dream's policies, focusing on two significant areas: anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and the foreign agents law. While Georgian Dream's rhetoric often emphasises alignment with European values and aspirations for EU membership,

their actions in these realms reveal a stark contrast, raising questions about the party's commitment to democratic principles and human rights. Georgian Dream's discourse analysis reveals a narrative that portrays Georgia as a progressive and democratic nation aspiring to integrate with European norms and standards. However, recent legislative actions paint a different picture, particularly concerning LGBTQ+ rights and civil society freedoms.

Georgian Dream's introduction of a draft bill targeting LGBTQ+ rights represents a departure from European values of inclusivity, equality, and non-discrimination. The proposed legislation aims to prohibit gender changes, same-sex adoption, and public celebrations of same-sex relationships, contradicting the EU's stance on promoting diversity and human rights (Gavin, 2024).

The influence of conservative ideologies, notably from the Georgian Orthodox Church, is evident in Georgian Dream's anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. This alignment with conservative views raises concerns about prioritising religious values over fundamental rights and freedoms, undermining Georgia's progress towards EU membership.

In parallel, Georgian Dream's passage of the foreign agents law has triggered widespread protests and criticism, both domestically and internationally. The law requires organisations receiving significant funding from abroad to register as "agents of foreign influence," echoing similar laws in Russia and raising concerns about stifling civil society and free expression. The foreign agents law's impact on nonprofits and human rights groups mirrors Russia's use of similar legislation to quash dissent and opposition. This raises questions about Georgian Dream's commitment to democratic values, transparency, and freedom of expression, all crucial aspects of EU integration (CNN, 2024).

The duality of Georgian Dream's policies regarding LGBTQ+ rights and the foreign agents law underscores a complex relationship between rhetoric and action. While the party's speeches align with European values, their legislative actions contradict these values, signalling potential obstacles to Georgia's EU integration. The anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and foreign agents law both reflect a divergence from democratic principles and human rights standards, casting doubts on Georgian Dream's genuine commitment to European norms. These policies risk undermining Georgia's progress towards EU membership and could lead to democratic backsliding and restrictions on civil liberties.

The discrepancies between Georgian Dream's rhetoric and actions in the realms of LGBTQ+ rights and civil society freedoms have significant implications for Georgia's European integration aspirations. The EU has repeatedly emphasised the importance of upholding democratic values, human rights, and freedoms as prerequisites for EU membership. Georgian Dream's policies, particularly the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and foreign agents law, may hinder Georgia's path towards EU membership by undermining key values and principles upheld by the European Union. The need for alignment between rhetoric and action is crucial for fostering trust and credibility in Georgia's European integration journey.

One of the underlying themes in Georgian Dream's policies is the spectre of Russian hard and soft power. The party's approach appears to be reactive, driven by apprehensions regarding Russian influence rather than a proactive strategy towards European integration. This reactive stance, rooted in fear, has implications for Georgia's foreign policy decisions and its trajectory towards Euro-Atlantic structures like NATO and the European Union. Georgian Dream's policies have oscillated between softening rhetoric towards Russia, as seen in the "policy of normalisation" proclaimed upon assuming power, and moments of heightened vigilance, such as discussions on Russian "creeping occupation" and the need for militarization in occupied regions. This fluctuation reflects the challenges of navigating a geopolitical landscape where Russian influence looms large (Tokhishvili, 2022).

A notable aspect of Georgian Dream's rhetoric is the creation of an "icon of the enemy," often portraying opposition parties like the United National Movement (UNM) and liberal NGOs as adversaries. This narrative of "othering" serves to mobilise support by presenting a stark contrast between the purported values of the dream and the perceived threats posed by these entities.

The trajectory of the Georgian Dream has raised concerns about democratic backsliding and illiberal tendencies. Instances such as the government's inaction during the beating of journalists at the Dignity March highlight the challenges faced in upholding human rights and democratic principles (Samkharadze, 2023).

Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili's speech at the Global Forum of American Conservatives in Hungary marked a pivotal moment, shaping the contours of Georgian Dream's populism. The speech, criticised by progressive European leaders, underscored the party's shift towards illiberal topics and a more confrontational stance on international relations (Samkharadze, 2023, 6).

Conclusion

The thesis explained the strategic use of narrative framing by Georgian Dream officials, particularly in relation to geopolitical spaces and external actors. The concept of binary distinctions, as expounded by Ó Tuathail and Agnew, revealed how Georgian politicians employ dichotomies to simplify complex ideas and relationships. The thesis unpacked how Georgian Dream leaders portray themselves as defenders of Georgian interests against perceived adversaries, and emphasised stability and order as foundational elements of their narrative.

The thesis stressed the multifaceted nature of Georgian identity construction within political discourse. Drawing from Mole's insights on identity politics, it explored how individuals and groups were motivated by specific self-understandings within social contexts. Georgian Dream's discourse strategically framed Georgian identity as a blend of tradition, nationalism, and modernity, emphasising elements like anti-Russian sentiment, European identity, Christianity, and pan-Caucasianism.

Through discourse theory and frame analysis, the thesis unveiled the discursive strategies employed by Georgian Dream to construct and reinforce collective identities. The use of master, floating, and empty signifiers in GD's discourse reflected the complexity of identity formation and the strategic deployment of language to shape public perception. The thesis also looked into the role of excluded meanings or alternative interpretations, forming the field of discursivity, which represented potential areas of debate and alternative perspectives within Georgian politics.

One of the central findings of this thesis was the strategic narrative framing employed by Georgian Dream officials to shape perceptions of external geographical spaces. The analysis revealed a nuanced approach where narratives of historical ties, cultural identity, and geopolitical positioning intersected. Georgian Dream strategically constructs narratives that emphasise Georgia's European identity and aspirations for EU membership while also acknowledges the historical and geopolitical context, especially concerning Russia.

The strategic narrative framing serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it enhances Georgia's national security narrative by highlighting threats from Russian influence and aggression, and positions Georgia as a victim of historical oppression. It also emphasises resilience and

determination. Secondly, it fosters a sense of solidarity and unity among Georgians by appealing to shared historical experiences and aspirations for a democratic, European future. Thirdly, it seeks to garner support from Western allies and institutions by aligning Georgia's narrative with European values, human rights, and democratic principles.

However, the analysis also uncovered tensions and contradictions within these strategic narratives. While Georgian Dream officials emphasised Georgia's European identity and alignment with Western values, policies such as the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and the foreign agents law raised concerns about democratic backsliding and the prioritisation of conservative ideologies over fundamental rights and freedoms. These contradictions highlighted the complex interplay between strategic narrative framing, domestic politics, and international relations.

Georgian Dream strategically associates Georgia with Europe, portraying European integration as a strategic imperative and a pathway to security, prosperity, and democratic consolidation. This strategic alignment with Europe is justified through narratives of historical ties, shared values, and the desire to distance Georgia from Russian influence and aggression. At the same time, Georgia's positioning within European spaces is framed as a natural progression based on historical, cultural, and political affinities.

However, the thesis also uncovered nuances in Georgia's positioning within broader geopolitical spaces. While Georgian Dream officials emphasised European integration and Western alignment, they navigated delicate relationships with neighbouring countries, including Russia, and other regional actors. The strategic narrative framing carefully balances cooperation, conflict resolution, and national interests, and reflects Georgia's complex geopolitical reality and the pragmatic approach adopted by its government. This shows the complexity of policy-making of a small-state like Georgia which is on the border of the Western and the Eastern world map.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed the role and objectives Georgia held within these spaces as portrayed by the government. Georgian Dream officials project Georgia as a strategic partner, a reliable ally, and a responsible actor committed to regional stability, economic development, and international cooperation. This portrayal aligns with Georgia's foreign policy objectives of diversifying partnerships, enhancing security cooperation, and promoting regional integration.

One significant aspect is the concept of bivocality within Georgian national narratives, as discussed by Batiashvili. This duality of voices, oscillating between narratives of heroism, resistance, unity, and narratives of friction, treason, and collaboration, shapes the discursive

landscape of Georgian nationhood. In Georgian Dream's discourse, this manifests as political polarisation, reflecting the challenges and complexities of navigating multiple identity paradigms and historical narratives.

In essence, this thesis provided a nuanced understanding of how Georgian Dream strategically constructed narratives, justified geopolitical positioning, and navigated complex dynamics in external geographical spaces. It shed light on the interplay between identity politics, national security imperatives, and international relations.

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