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**THE SOCIALIZING EFFECTS OF  
GEORGIAN PARTIES' MEMBERSHIP  
IN EUROPEAN POLITICAL PARTY  
FEDERATIONS**



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## Introduction

Building a functioning party political system is a complex process that is influenced by a range of factors. On the other hand, the nature of party politics also shapes the process of democratization. That means that, without the foundation of relevant political party system, it is unimaginable that Georgia will achieve a consolidated democracy. This paper focuses on party politics in Georgia and how interactions with European party federations (hereafter “Europarties”) influence Georgian political parties. The goal of the research is to analyse the links between Georgian and Europarties, with particular focus on whether and how partnerships with Europarties influence either the formation or the development of Georgian parties’ policy platforms and agendas on the issues of Europeanization and democratization in the country. Furthermore, the research also explores to what extent Georgian parties have a coherent political agenda to promote at the European level and to what extent they do so.

Georgian political parties are members of or affiliated to four different European party federations: European People’s Party (EPP), Party of European Socialists (PES), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), and Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists of Europe (ACRE). The Republican Party of Georgia and United National Movement (UNM) were the first Georgian parties that were affiliated with a Europarty: ALDE<sup>2</sup> since 2007 and EPP since 2008 respectively. Later other Georgian parties also followed the suit: in 2012 Free Democrats (FD) joined ALDE, and

Georgian Dream (GD) received an observer’s status in Party of European Socialists (PES); in 2014 the Conservative Party of Georgia (CPG) became affiliated with ACRE, and finally, in 2017 Movement for Liberty – European Georgia (MLEG) became an observer in EPP. Membership in Europarties are conditional on the results of fact-finding missions conducted by representatives of the relevant Europarty, which evaluates to what extent the applicant party’s ideological orientation is in line with the ideological stance of the Europarty. Mostly, however, this is a formality as it seems that interpersonal contacts play a crucial role in the application procedure. An application from a party that disagrees with the Europarty’s ideology is highly unlikely. Yet these ideological orientations should be understood in the context of each country on a case-by-case basis as the understanding of liberalism, socialism, conservatism, etc. varies from one country to another. The importance of interpersonal contacts, on the other hand, can be demonstrated by alleged vetoing of the membership of New Rights of Georgia in EPP by the UNM.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, MLEG managed to easily acquire affiliation with EPP, allegedly, due to the fact that MLEG leadership already had established personal contacts with EPP when they were members of UNM. That made it impossible for the UNM to block MLEG’s membership.

The study of relations between Europarties and political parties that are not based in the European Union (EU) is a relatively new

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<sup>2</sup> ALDE is the only Europarty that allows full membership of those political parties that are based outside the EU.

field. The influence of Europarties over the political parties in Central and East European states when EU conditionality held the most important “carrot” – membership in the union – has been studied extensively. Sometimes this influence was positive but at other times it has tended to lead not to consistent left-right competition but to the condition in which “all parties declare the same objective but dispute each other’s competence in achieving the desired policy”.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it is not immediately obvious why Europarties would want to cooperate with domestic parties based in non-EU countries. However, according to Shagina,<sup>5</sup> there are incentives for both sides to engage with each other. For Europarties, it is to spread their norms and values and promote relevant policies. Furthermore, by interacting with domestic parties outside the EU, Europarties inform themselves and their

MEPs as well as act as foreign policy agents. On the other hand, domestic political parties have a more complex incentive structure to engage with Europarties. Shagina identifies tangible; or political and intangible; or social and symbolic incentives that cover six different types: better access, knowledge and assistance from the EU; domestic legitimacy; international recognition; a subtle opportunity for lobbying EU integration; sharpening party’s ideological profile; and finally, political support for their activities in domestic arena. This paper, which is informed with this framework of incentive structures, includes a variety of research methods including in-depth interviews, an expert survey, public opinion polls, and the analysis of party documents such as manifestos and statutes as well as the analyses of the case of Georgia and interactions between Georgian parties and Europarties.

## Sharpening the ideological profile

Ideologies are one of the most important features of political parties. Depending on what kind of ideologies parties uphold, it is possible to describe the whole spectrum of positions related to any specific issue or problem. In the established democracies of Western Europe, it is believed that political ideologies emerged out of social cleavages organized along the mutually exclusive interests of different groups of the society.<sup>6</sup> However, in post-communist societies such as Georgia, seven decades of the Soviet

rule removed those societal cleavages and introduced different ones. Consequently, political parties did not have the chance to consolidate their ideologies along a certain societal cleavage. Instead, they were mobilized around personalities that would normally have charismatic characteristics.<sup>7</sup> Such political parties sometimes transformed into clientelistic parties, which mobilise the public with a promise of tangible or intangible direct benefits as a result of a victory in the elections.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, political par-

<sup>3</sup> Lavrelashvili, Teona. 2017. Georgian parties and the “Euro-Parties” cooperation, achievements and challenges. Rondeli Foundation. Available at: <https://www.gfsis.org/blog/view/770>

<sup>4</sup> See: Innes, Abby. 2002. Party competition in postcommunist Europe: The great electoral lottery. *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp.: 85-104.

<sup>5</sup> Shagina, Maria. 2014. The incentive structure of cooperation between the Europarties and the non-EU parties. Paper prepared for the 23rd World Congress of Political Science, IPSA. July 19-24, 2014, Montréal, Canada.

<sup>6</sup> See: Lipset, Seymour Martin, and Rokkan, Stein. 1990. Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments. In Peter Mair (ed.). *The West European Party System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 91-111.

<sup>7</sup> See: Kitschelt, Herbert. 1995. Formation of party cleavages in post-communist democracies: Theoretical propositions. Vol 1. No.4 pp.: 447-472.

<sup>8</sup> See: Kitschelt, Herbert. 1995. Formation of party cleavages in post-communist democracies: Theoretical propositions. Vol 1. No.4 pp.: 447-472.

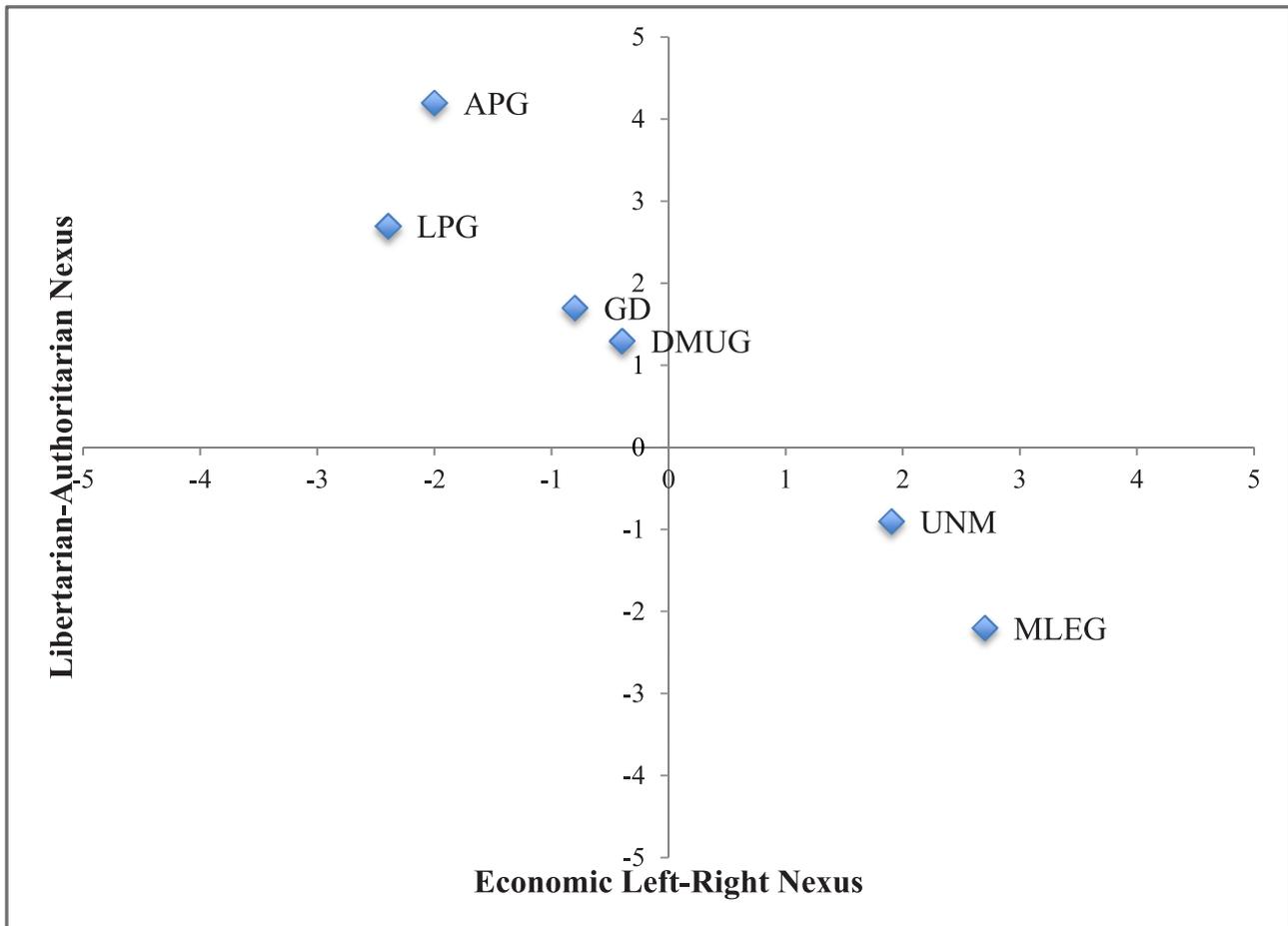
ties in post-Soviet hybrid or authoritarian regimes never managed to consolidate their ideological stances and emerge as consistently programmatic parties.<sup>9</sup>

The formation of programmatic parties, or at least contributing to sharpening the ideological positions of Georgian parties, is one possible outcome of interactions between Georgian parties and Europarties. Europarties claim that observer, associate or member parties should be in line with the ideological stance of the relevant Europarty. However, as political parties in Georgia do not have a coherent ideology and often what they claim as their ideological direction is not related to what they promise before elections, interac-

tions with Europarties can be a useful tool to at least vaguely pinpoint issue positions in the domestic arena.

In order to determine the ideological stances of mainstream Georgian parties, an expert survey was conducted. The findings of the expert survey confirm the declared ideology of the three largest political parties that are also member of relevant Europarties. Experts evaluated that Georgian Dream (GD) is a left-leaning party while United National Movement (UNM) and Movement for Liberty-European Georgia (MLEG) are right-leaning parties (see Chart 1). This confirms that these three largest parties are indeed in the federation of the European parties that uphold the same ideology.

Chart 1: Distribution of party stances in Georgia on a two-dimensional plane



<sup>9</sup> See: Kakhishvili, Levan. 2017. Is democracy possible without stable political parties? Party politics in Georgia and prospects for democratic consolidation. Tbilisi: Georgian Institute of Politics. Available at: <http://gip.ge/6401/>

An interesting observation on this chart is that all right-leaning parties are evaluated as more libertarian and all left-leaning parties are evaluated as more authoritarian by the surveyed experts. It is unclear, however, if there is any intrinsic feature related to being on either side of the spectrum that would explain the correlation between being left-leaning and being more authoritarian. This can be a topic for further studies.

Another important aspect of ideological

stances is issue salience. If an issue position indicates if a political party leans left or right, on the one hand, and if skews toward libertarianism or authoritarianism, on the other, issue salience is an indicator of what aspects of the current state of affairs are problematized by the political party in question. This is about what kind of problems parties want to solve and what kind of policies they offer to their voters. The survey explored two main issues to evaluate the issue salience: economy and traditional values (see Chart 2).

Chart 2: Salience of traditional values and economy for Georgian political parties

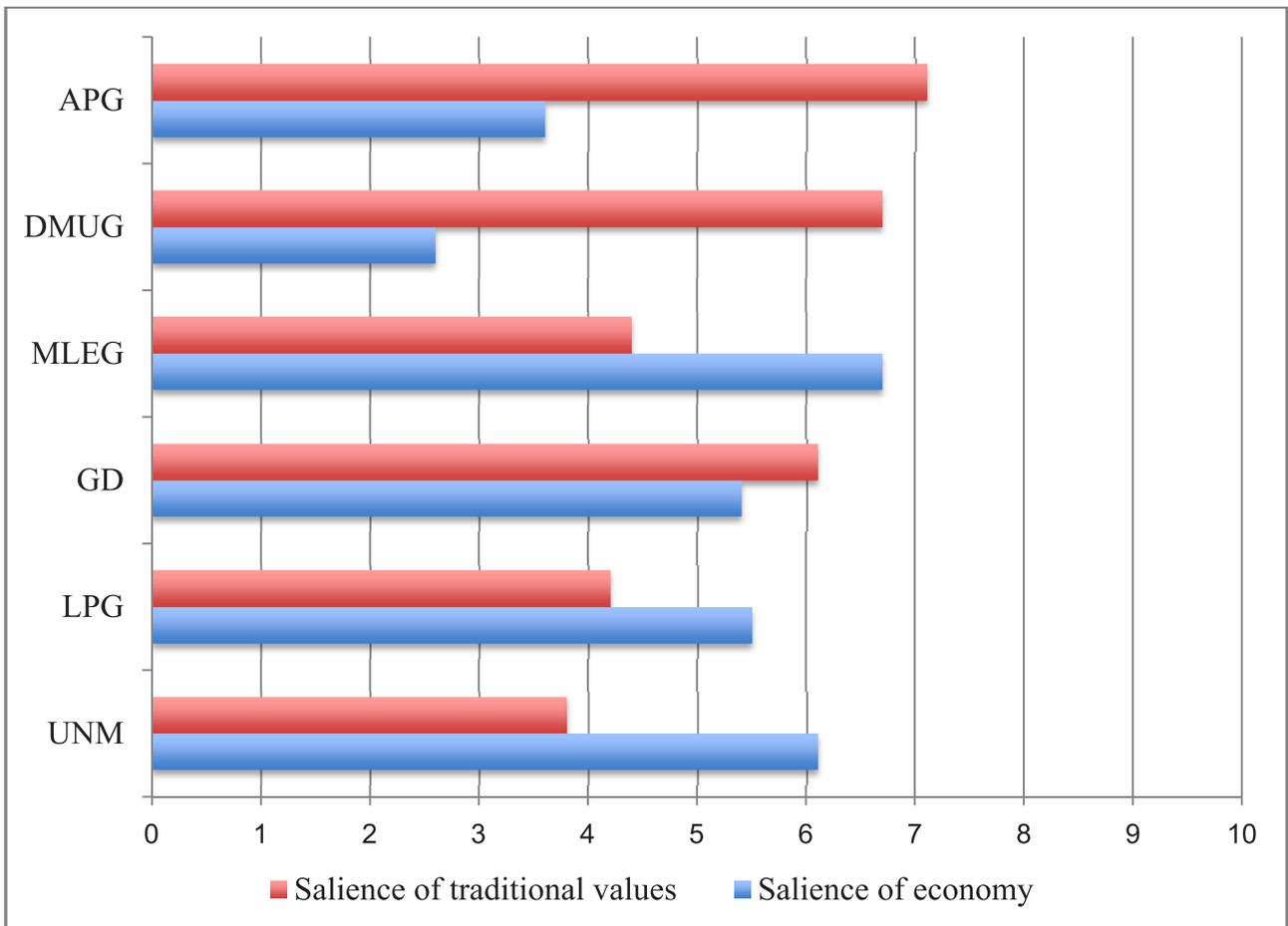


Chart 2 demonstrates that there are three parties that, according to surveyed experts, show higher salience for traditional values than economy. All three parties are left-leaning parties and include the current ruling party Georgian Dream. The second group, i.e. the parties that priorities economic issues

more than traditional values, include UNM, MLEG, and LPG. The latter here is an exception and violates the trend otherwise consistent with the rest of the political parties. One important observation here would be the slight over-prioritization of traditional values compared to economic issues by GD.

This does not accurately reflect the structure of issue-salience among the main left-leaning political parties in countries such as Germany or the UK. SPD of Germany and Labour Party of the UK prioritize economy roughly 3 points higher than traditional values.<sup>10</sup>

It has to be noted that Europarties do not tend to dictate what kind of positions their members should adopt or policies they should develop. Europarties also do not participate in designing pre-election manifestos. Therefore, the domestic arena is almost exclusively the individual parties' playing field and the federation does not get involved. On the other hand, inconsistencies between overall ideological stances are more important than differences between the structures of issue salience. Consequently, it is up to a given domestic party if it wants to adopt the structure of issue salience from its more advanced counterparts within their family federation or not. On the other hand, the process of socialization is such that the transfer of norms and values will happen even if the actors do not so intend for it to happen. Therefore, depending on the adopted theoretical assumptions, there can be domestic parties can more actively seek out more tangible benefits from the Europarties.

On the other hand it might be argued that Europarties played a more important role in sharpening the ideological stance of the GD. When GD was established as a political movement in 2012, it was founded on 12 major principles, most of which were purely political in nature and only two of which

were related to economic issues.<sup>11</sup> The first economy-related principle was overcoming unemployment and poverty through developing small and medium businesses, agriculture, protection of property and labour rights, and integrating Georgia into the world economic system. The second tenet related to the economy was to create a system of social solidarity guaranteeing dignified living conditions for those unfit for work. These two principles can be considered to be the inception of left-leaning political party but it is also possible that two other factors – opposition to UNM and their membership in EPP – that actually determined GD's ideological stance. Clearly GD had to offer policies that would be different from those offered by UNM.

At the start GD was a coalition of various political parties with almost mutually exclusive ideological stances. However, the formation of GD's ideological stance cannot be considered without referring to the so-called "war of letters" between members of GD and a group of MEPs.<sup>12</sup> A year after the establishment of GD as a political party, 23 MEPs – including 19 from EPP – sent a letter to then-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili accusing him of moving Georgia away from Europe. Although David Usupashvili, then Speaker of the Parliament who had connections with ALDE, responded to the allegations, this incident arguably motivated GD to find a family federation that would be capable of countering such attacks. This kind of a partner turned out to be PES, and informal talks with the party started following the so-called "war of letters". Consequently,

<sup>10</sup> Chapel Hill Expert Survey. 2014. Data available at: <https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-stats/> The expert survey conducted over the course of this research was modeled on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. Therefore, results can be comparable without major shortcomings.

<sup>11</sup> სივილ ჯორჯია. 2012. კოალიცია „ქართული ოცნების“ დამფუძნებელი დეკლარაცია. ხელმისაწვდომია: <https://old.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=25137&search=>

<sup>12</sup> Shagina, Maria. 2014. The incentive structure of cooperation between the Europarties and the non-EU parties. Paper prepared for the 23rd World Congress of Political Science, IPSA. July 19-24, 2014, Montréal, Canada.

GD's ideological stance had to be sharpened and articulated as center-left as required by the PES. This could be the reason why GD updated its statute and identified itself as a center-left political party. On the other hand, this incident leads to another important as-

pect: the domestic legitimation or domestic support for actions as well as international recognition. These issues, although identified as separate incentives by Shagina, are closely intertwined with each other and cannot be considered separately.

## Access to knowledge and transfer of party political know-how

Ideology, and the sharing and learning about values derived from ideologies, is only one part of relations between Europarties and Georgian political parties. A rather more important dimension – or at least the one that is practiced much more intensively – concerns exerting influence in the domestic arena. For Georgian parties, especially for UNM and MLEG, research has shown it is important to utilize their membership in a European party alliance in order to influence the ruling party: membership in the European People's Party is often used by Georgian opposition parties as a tool to mobilise political support in Europe. Furthermore, scholarly literature suggests that Europarties are also interested in using their influence to support their members in the domestic arena as they aim to act as actors in EU's external relations and thus increase their own influence. Therefore, this process seems to be mutually beneficial.

On the other hand, however, there are both challenges and opportunities. The latter is related to making the best use of membership in European party alliances. These alliances offer an extensive source of knowledge and experience, which can be used by any members, observers or associate mem-

bers that are not as developed institutionally as their European counterparts. Therefore, it is possible to conduct study visits, trainings, consultations, etc. for Georgian parties as long as there is willingness and the relevant financial resources. As for challenges, it is often argued in scholarly literature on Central and East European countries that party political systems in these countries were damaged by the process of EU integration. As domestic actors followed instructions given to them in the framework of EU conditionality policy, social cleavages in party politics were erased and only one dimension emerged along which parties aligned: being for or against EU integration. Judging from this historical experience, it is important for Georgian political parties to first elaborate coherent ideologies and programmes while also maintaining their uniqueness, both on the domestic level and the European level.

One of the respondents assigned strategic importance to Europarties' accumulated knowledge and experience in party politics. According to the respondent, relations between Europarties and domestic political parties should be built on the transfer of what he called "party political know-how". This "know-how" covers what Shagina<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Shagina, Maria. 2014. The incentive structure of cooperation between the Europarties and the non-EU parties. Paper prepared for the 23rd World Congress of Political Science, IPSA. July 19-24, 2014, Montréal, Canada.

calls not only sharpening parties' ideological stances but also access to information – and the transfer of knowledge about – how to organize a political union so that it is transparent, democratic, and institutionally stable. The internal democracy and institutional strength of Georgian political parties have been criticised in the past and parties themselves recognise the need for development in these areas.<sup>14</sup> A former Georgian prime minister from GD has pointed out that Georgian Dream has not managed to emerge institutionally as a political party.<sup>15</sup> This indicates that “party political know-how” must be of great significance. However, Georgian parties do not seem to utilize the opportunity.

One potential explanation for the lack of interest in transferring knowledge related to internal party governance could be finances. If a certain political party is interested in how party politics is done and how parties are institutionally organized in various EU countries, the partner Europarty will not provide financial support for trainings, study visits or related activities. It is the responsibility of domestic parties to mobilise financial resources for such activities. However, this remains a challenge due to Georgian political

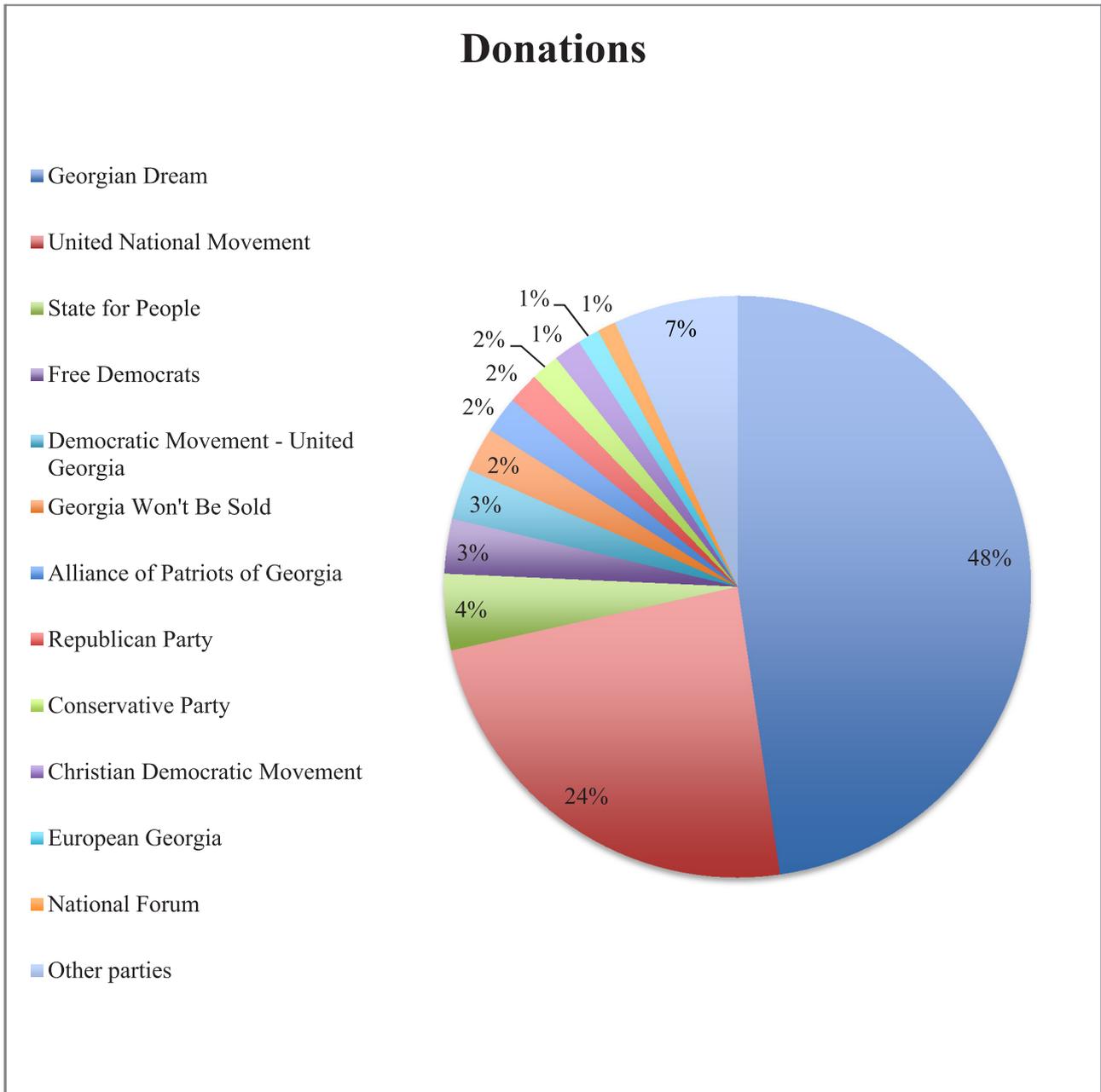
parties' poor financial resources. According to data provided by Transparency International Georgia<sup>16</sup>, since 2012, all Georgian political parties have jointly received a total of 105,910,256 GEL in donations (see Chart 3 below). Based on the number of recipient political parties this amounts to an average of 1,357,824 GEL over the period of more than six years, which means that each party receives less than 210,000 GEL annually in donations, on average. Clearly, this is not a lot of money. Yet another problem is that most of these donations are channelled to the ruling party. GD has received 50,506,940 GEL, or 48 per cent of all donations. UNM comes in second place with 25,196,355 GEL or 24 per cent of donations. Overall, two political parties have received 72 per cent of all money donated by individuals or legal entities in the period of 2012-2018. This data suggests that smaller political parties, for instance the Free Democrats or Republican party – both members of ALDE with combined political donations worth just 5.1 million GEL over the past six years – would be unlikely to be able to afford financing study visits in the EU. On the other hand, the largest political parties, GD and UNM, seem to be interested in issues other than institutional development and internal democracy.

<sup>14</sup> Kakhishvili, Levan. 2018. Competing for Votes of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia: The 2017 local elections. Center for Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism: Tbilisi. Available at: [http://csem.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Competing-for-Votes-of-Ethnic-Minorities\\_Eng.pdf](http://csem.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Competing-for-Votes-of-Ethnic-Minorities_Eng.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> რადიო თავისუფლება. 2018. გიორგი კვირიკაშვილი: პარტია “ქართული ოცნება” ინსტიტუციად ჯერ ვერ ჩამოყალიბდა. ხელმისაწვდომია: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/29202252.html>

<sup>16</sup> Transparency International Georgia. 2018. Donations to Georgian political parties. Available at: <https://www.transparency.ge/politicaldonations/en/parties?page=all>

Chart 3: Donations to political parties in Georgia, 2012-2018



Source: Transparency International Georgia. 2018. Donations to Georgian political parties. Available at: <https://www.transparency.ge/politicaldonations/en/parties?page=all>

## Domestic legitimacy and international recognition

It is not uncommon for political actors to instrumentalize their membership in international unions or organizations. Therefore, domestic political parties, which play their political game at two levels – domestic and international – and often bring domestic competition to the international level and international support to domestic competition. This strategy is designed to achieve higher level of international recognition to increase a given party's capability to mobilize international support on the European level, on the one hand, and to use international support as a source of legitimacy not only in foreign policy against other actors and countries but also in their domestic competition against other parties. The above-mentioned "war of letters" is an ideal example of how membership in Europarties can be instrumentalized for domestic political struggles. The basic assumption behind using this approach is the idea that support for Georgia's EU integration is significantly high among the public, so the EU and its institutions – including the European Parliament and by extension Europarties – can be a source of domestic legitimacy. Former communist publics, especially Georgians, are used to observations and evaluations from their European counterparts. For example, after each election, OSCE ODIHR report is always anxiously anticipated in Georgian civil society. Conditionality in the framework of Eastern Partnership, without mentioning the conditionality for CEE countries for membership, has also contributed to the mind-set that

Tbilisi needs instruction from the West. This attitude can be useful when utilized with caution, but it can become dangerous when abused. If the mechanism loses trust or is demonized, then the strategy of recognition and legitimacy will fail. There are emerging populist forces in Georgia that are attempting to do this. However, this is a topic for a separate body of research. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to emphasize that the Georgian political elite expects the Georgian public to trust the evaluations that Georgia receives from Europe.

However, there is a problem with this assumption. It may well be that civil society trusts European officials and appreciates political parties sharing European values, but the story is somewhat different when it comes to average citizens. Although there is no data that would allow the analysis of trends in terms of to what extent the Georgian public trusts statements from European officials regarding Georgia, it is possible to see whether a connection exists between the popularity of a political party and the public perception of whether a political party shares European values. This could be a proximate variable that could indicate how Georgians view the links between Georgian parties and the EU or Europe at large.

Data on the public's perception of how closely political parties share European values, as well as the popular attitudes toward them, provides some interesting conclusions.

Chart 4<sup>17</sup> below shows the extent a particular political party shares European values, according to public perception, and what kind of attitudes people have toward each of them. Such data can provide important insights on whether a party's perceived European values correlates to positive ratings. Political party ratings represent a complex issue in a country like Georgia and numbers can be misleading if one wants to predict election outcomes<sup>18</sup>, however this paper is not focused on which party is more likely to win the next election. The primary concern of this analysis is the extent to which it is possible to establish any reasonable correlation between a party sharing European values and public perceptions of this party. It has to be emphasized, however, that these figures do not necessarily describe the extent to which political parties actually share European values. The popular perception is more important in this case, and that is the

focus of this paper.

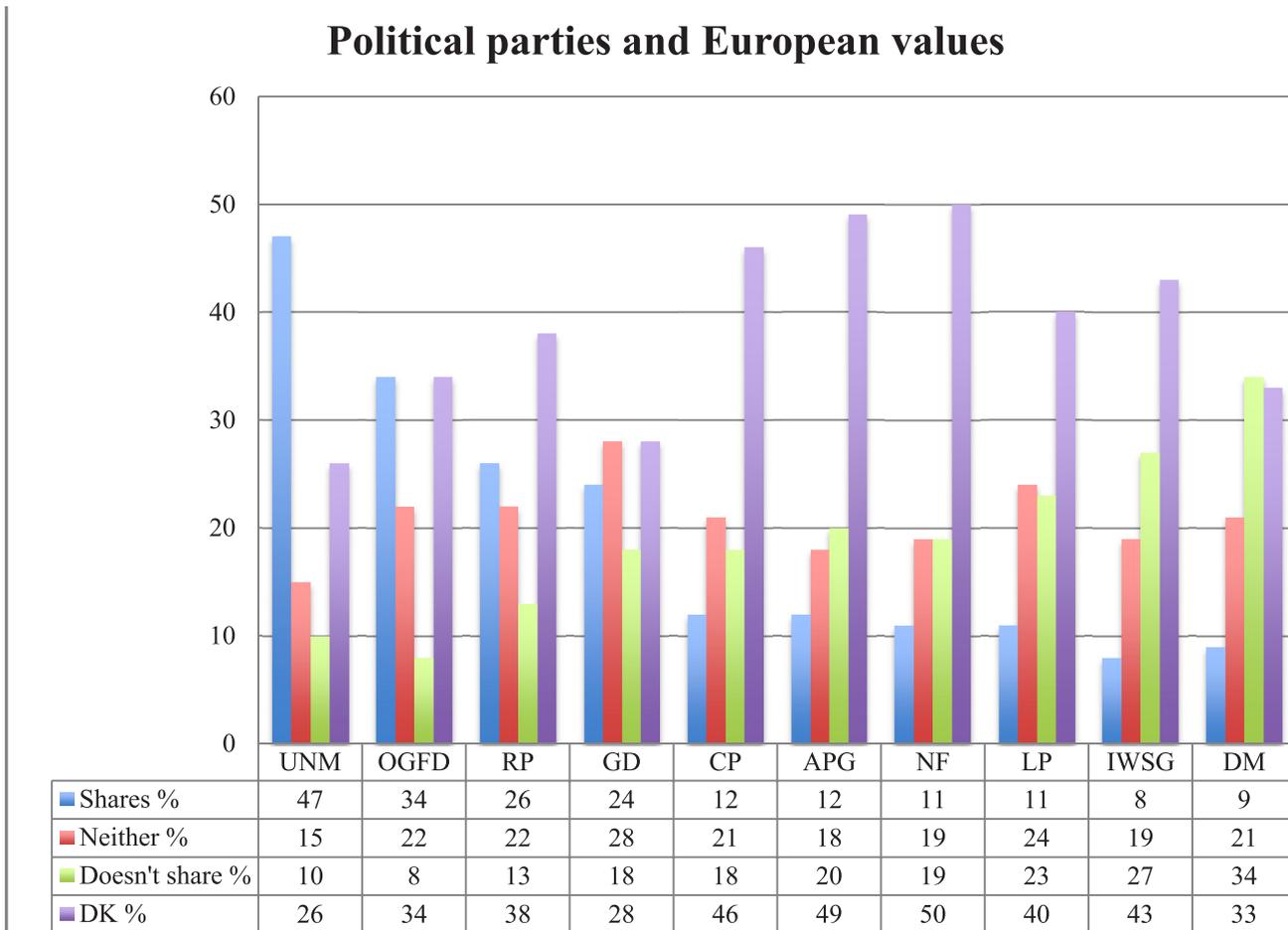
The data from Chart 4 makes it clear that there is high degree of confusion among the public, i.e. a large proportion of population cannot decide whether parties do or do not share European values. The share of answer category "Don't know" ranges from 26 percent to as high as 50 percent. Furthermore, the answer category "Neither" also has a high proportion, ranging from 15 to 28 percent. This may mean two things. First, the public is unsure about what European values mean, which is why people cannot decide whether a particular party shares them or not. Second, political parties themselves represent such conflicting values that it becomes extremely difficult for the people to decide to what extent they share European values. It is possible, however, that a combination of both of these factors shapes public perceptions.

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<sup>17</sup> The parties represented in the data include the following: UNM - United National Movement; OGFD - Our Georgia Free Democrats; RP - Republican Party; GD - Georgian Dream; CP - Conservative Party; APG - Alliance of Patriots of Georgia; NF - National Forum; LP - Labour Party; IWSG - Industry Will Save Georgia; DM - Democratic Movement.

<sup>18</sup> Gutbrod, Hans, and Dunbar, William, 2016. Corridor of expectations: Georgian Dream ahead, for #GVote16. Available at: <https://medium.com/@hansgutbrod/georgian-dream-ahead-according-to-aggregate-estimate-406f2831ebd2#.evoo748lz>

Chart 4: Political parties and European values

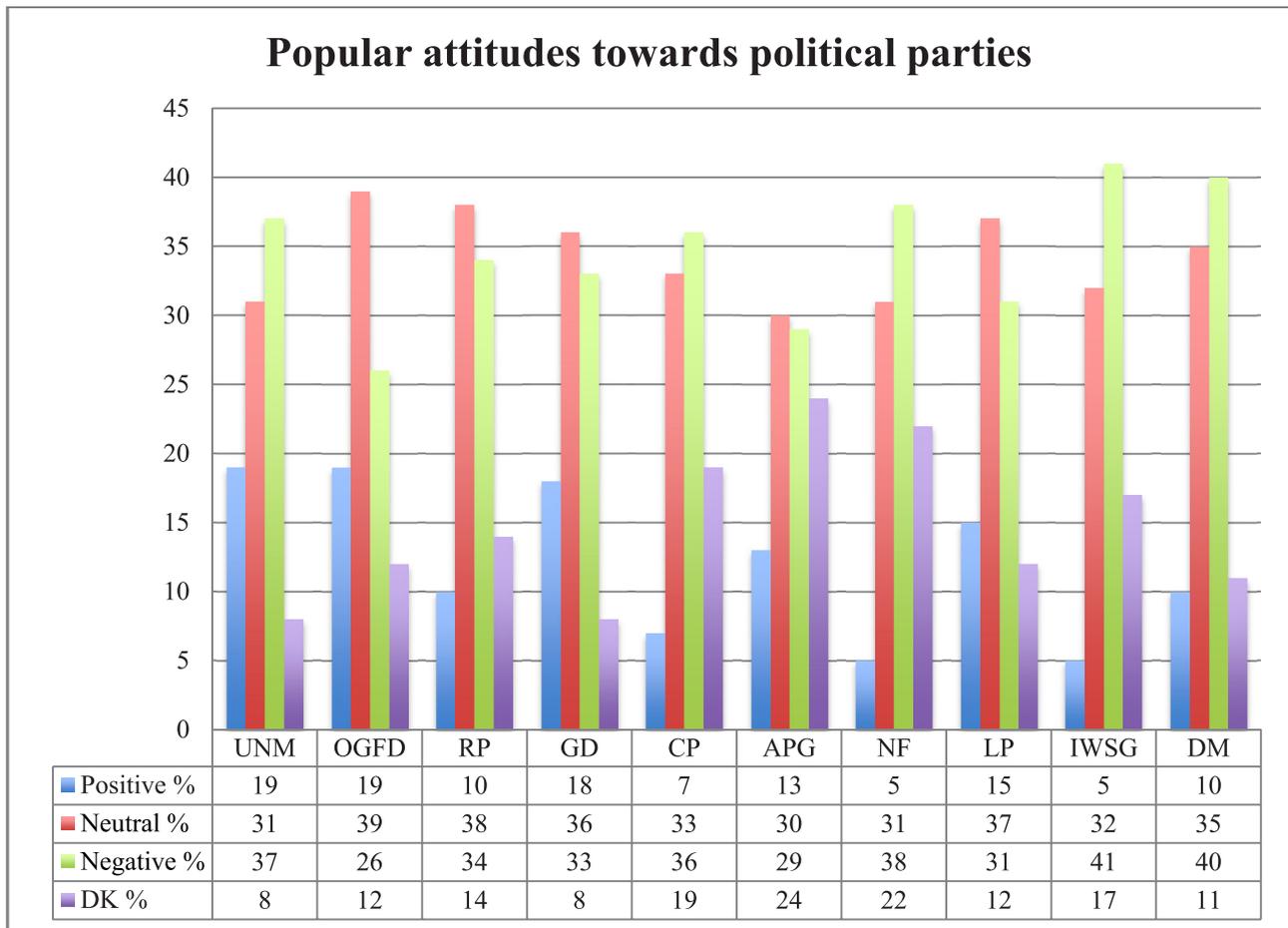


Source: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. 2015. "Knowledge and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia, 2015". Retrieved through ODA - <http://caucasusbarometer.org>

Notwithstanding the limitations of the data, however, the ten political parties can be broken down into three groups in terms of the extent they share European values. The first group of parties includes United National Movement (UNM) and Our Georgia Free Democrats (OGFD) since more a third of the society believes they share European values. The second category also includes two political parties: Republican Party (RP) and

Georgian Dream (GD), which are believed to share European values by about 25 per cent of the public. The final group would include the rest of the parties. However, the third group includes two political parties – Industry Will Save Georgia (IWSG) and Democratic Movement (DM) – that do not represent European values according to 27 and 34 per cent of the public, respectively. These two figures are the highest on the list.

Chart 5: Popular attitudes towards political parties



Source: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. 2015. "Knowledge and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia, 2015". Retrieved through ODA - <http://caucasusbarometer.org>

Although Chart 5 does not necessarily predict election results, it shows which parties the public views positively. There are a few outliers: GD, APG, LP and DM. The GD was categorized in the second group above but it has the same share of positive attitudes as the UNM, which is perceived to share European values by twice as many people. The APG, LP and DM all have a higher share of positive attitudes – 13, 15 and 10 per cent respectively – than the RP, at 10 per cent. In light of the fact that RP is perceived to share European values by two to three times more people than any of these three parties, it appears that sharing European values is not the primary factor that shapes popular atti-

tudes towards political parties.

The results of this analysis suggest that perceived links of a given party with Europe does not necessarily translate in the popularity of the party. Therefore, it might be an exaggeration to assume that affiliation with a Europarty brings a high degree of legitimacy in the domestic arena. However, it is undeniable that, by mobilizing support on the European level, domestic parties can drive the discourse on a certain issue or problematize a topic that was not previously considered to be a problem. Consequently, legitimization strategy is a pragmatic tool that should be used with a high degree of cau-

tion in order not to abuse its capacity. Otherwise, there is a possibility that the results of this tool will become counterproductive.

On the other hand, the importance of international recognition cannot be overlooked either. After the 2012 parliamentary elections, the newly elected GD needed to establish itself on an international arena, especially against the background of then-president Mikheil Saakashvili's active approach and wide outreach. UNM had an advantage internationally as it was already a member of the EPP. As a result, it did not take long for GD to realize the importance of membership in a European party federation for mobilizing international support. Consequently, GD joined PES, which is represented by the second largest group in the European Parliament after EPP.

Georgian parties use their membership in European party federations mostly for promoting their own political agenda by gaining international recognition and domestic legitimacy – that does not necessarily mean the agenda of Georgia's Europeanization. Therefore, the primary function of membership for Georgian parties seems to be mobilization of political support for themselves and not for the country on the European level. For example, the only resolution about Georgia that can be found on the official website of EPP is an emergency resolution adopted in October 2015 regard-

ing "The Backsliding of Democracy in Georgia".<sup>19</sup> The resolution was triggered by the events surrounding the ownership of Rustavi 2 TV channel, which is closely associated with UNM. The resolution "[i]nsists that failing to reverse these trends [political instrumentalization, restriction and improper influence of judicial decisions] will seriously harm Georgia and its progress in moving towards the European family of nations."<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, there have been successful cases of utilizing Europarty support. On two different occasions, ALDE adopted supporting resolutions for Georgia, first in October 2008 and second in June 2016. The first resolution was a response to the 2008 August War, and stated that "Russia's invasion and occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and its unilateral recognition of their independence must be condemned without qualification". The statement also called on all parties to find a space for a dialogue to achieve peace in the Caucasus and beyond.<sup>21</sup> The second resolution from ALDE was related to the issue of visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine. The resolution called on "all appropriate EU institutions to adopt a timely decision on the liberalisation of the visa regime with Ukraine and Georgia."<sup>22</sup> These two resolutions are examples of how Europarties can be used to lobby for and advance Georgia's national interests on the European level.

<sup>19</sup> European People's Party. 2015. The backsliding of democracy in Georgia. Emergency resolution adopted at the EPP Congress, Madrid (Spain), 21st – 22nd October 2015.

<sup>20</sup> European People's Party. 2015. The backsliding of democracy in Georgia. Emergency resolution adopted at the EPP Congress, Madrid (Spain), 21st – 22nd October 2015.

<sup>21</sup> European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party. 2008. Response to the conflict in Georgia. Congress in Stockholm, Sweden.

<sup>22</sup> Alliance of Liberals and Democrats of Europe Party. 2016. Visa liberalisation with Ukraine and Georgia. Congress in Vilnius, Lithuania.

## Facilitating domestic competition and cooperation

Another important effect of interactions between Georgian parties and Europarties derives from the fact that Europarties are interested in strengthening their ideological orientation in the domestic arena of competition. For this reason they often push for cooperation between or even unification of those parties that are affiliated with them in case there is more than one such party. To what extent Georgian parties follow the recommendations is another issue; two particular cases are worth exploring. The first case is ALDE and its involvement with RP and FD prior to the 2016 parliamentary elections. The second case, and arguably a more successful one, is the recent agreement facilitated by EPP between UNM and MLEG for the upcoming presidential elections in October 2018.

When FD left the Georgian Dream ruling coalition, it was unclear whether RP would follow. Irakli Alasania, then-leader of FD had been serving as defence minister in the GD government and a few months after his resignation, the post was assumed by Tinatin Khidasheli from RP. When it became apparent that GD would run in the upcoming parliamentary elections as a party, not in a block, RP had to leave the GD coalition. Reportedly ALDE tried at the time to convince FD and RP to unite and run together in the 2016 elections<sup>23</sup>, which did not happen. Consequently, neither of the two parties managed to get the minimum of 5 per

cent of votes necessary to secure seats in the parliament. Even though it is hard to evaluate how the electoral block of FD and RP would have done in the elections, it is important to emphasize that the sum of the two parties' votes was just enough for the Georgian parliament not to be left without any liberal party.

In October 2018, Georgia had its last presidential election; future presidents will not be popularly elected, based on constitutional amendments designed to complete the country's transition to a parliamentary system. Therefore, it is an important milestone and a chance for opposition parties to control one branch of power, however symbolic. As UNM and MLEG are strongest opposition parties and both members of EPP, the latter facilitated a cooperation deal between the two. Signing the agreement at the headquarters of EPP, UNM and MLEG agree that if one of their candidates makes it to the second round, the candidate will have the support of both parties. Furthermore, the two parties agreed not to attack each other during the pre-election campaign and to mobilize voters to participate in the elections.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, when Grigol Vashadze, UNM's candidate, went through to the run-off elections, MLEG declared that they pledged support to him in the second round.<sup>25</sup> As a result of the agreement, EPP has demonstrated that, through their in-

<sup>23</sup> Shagina, Maria. 2014. The incentive structure of cooperation between the Europarties and the non-EU parties. Paper prepared for the 23rd World Congress of Political Science, IPSA. July 19-24, 2014, Montréal, Canada.

<sup>24</sup> Civil Georgia. 2018. UNM, European Georgia agree to cooperate during presidential polls. Available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/245978>

<sup>25</sup> Civil Georgia. 2018. Bakradze Admits Defeat, Pledges Support to Vashadze. Available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/262006>

volvement, it is possible to achieve stronger cooperation between like-minded political parties.

As a result, it can be argued that Europarties have the potential to strengthen the ideolog-

ical orientation they uphold in the domestic politics of a relevant party, even if the country is not a member state of the EU. This is, of course, a long-term process and its outcomes are still unknown.

## Conclusions

Over the course of this research, several effects of the interaction between Georgian parties and Europarties have been identified: sharpening a party's ideological profile; accessing knowledge and transferring party political know-how; acquiring domestic legitimacy and international recognition; and facilitating domestic competition and cooperation. It must be noted that the goal most desired by Georgian political parties appears to be related to domestic legitimacy and international recognition, although there have been some cases that demonstrate how international support can be channelled towards safeguarding Georgia's national interests instead of the interests of a particular political party.

Furthermore, there seems to be great potential in terms of the transfer of knowledge from Europarties to domestic parties in Georgia. The former could ideally help Georgian parties establish more coherent ideological positions. It is necessary to mobilize financial resources, which remains a challenge for Georgian parties, in order for this to be achieved via these interactions, however. Even so, this process may be supported in the future by potential donors, such as German political foundations, e.g. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, which works closely with EPP; Friedrich Nauman Stiftung, which is cooperates with liberal parties; or Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, which has a leftist ideological stance. This is still a largely unutilized op-

portunity for Georgian parties and it should be explored if the parties aim to develop institutionally and become transparent organizations with a high level of intra-party democracy.

Finally, Europarties, given their willingness to be engaged, can act as agents that can strengthen a specific ideological orientation in Georgia. For this to happen, it is not necessary for Europarties to work with a single political party. Rather, it is necessary for them to create conditions in which parties with similar ideological stance can cooperate and agree on mutually beneficial deals. This potential effect depends more on Europarties' readiness, capacity and political will, rather than input or requests from domestic parties in Georgia.

Overall, cooperation between European party federations and Georgian political parties is a process that needs to be deeper and more intense than it currently is. The success of this process does not exclusively depend on the pragmatic cost-benefit analysis of each actor; rather, judging from the perspective of social constructivist assumptions, it can result in real outcomes even when actors do not intend to achieve them. The simple act of interacting with Europarties can help Georgian party politics develop in the right direction by virtue of socialization and the transfer of norms.

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