



Deconstructing Modern Georgian Populism: Narratives from Political Parties to Social Movements

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There has been a significant surge of populist rhetoric since 2012 within political-civil space, which is expressed in electoral success of populist parties and stirred up activities of populist social movements. Within the current populist environment, it can be distinguished parties and non-party actors with the similarities and differences in their narratives. In the aim to detect and analyze them four subjects had been selected: programs, activities and speeches of political parties “Alliance of Patriots of Georgia”, “Georgian Labor Party”, and the social movements “Georgian March” and “Georgian National Unity” are under the focus. Analyses reveals several dichotomous narratives among which the anti-elite rhetoric against the government, liberal groups, various business-groups is most spread. Besides, the nativist attitudes are dominant to mobilize anti-immigration pathos, an orthodox accents side by side the anti-liberalism as the leading narrative as well. And lastly, in most of the actors’ narratives except from the Labors it is observed the attempts to distance from the west and support tightening relations with Russia, cover up this dichotomy with the support to the non-alignment movement and balance it with radical anti-Turkish narrative. The paper highlights also the differences among the various actors according to their ideological belonging, overall purposes and historical developments.

Introduction

There has been a significant surge of populist rhetoric since 2012 within political-civil space, which is expressed in electoral success of populist parties and stirred up activities of populist social movements. According to the widely accepted definition, populism is a “thin” ideology that looks at the society as two homogenous and antagonist groups: “ordinary people” vs “corrupt elites” and in this “battle” the primary purpose of politics should be the expression of the people’s will². The work analyses the Georgian populism through this framework.

Multiple parties are considered to be populist within Georgian political circles, however, while selecting the subjects for the research, one parliamentary and one extra-parliamentary opposition parties with different ideologies were selected. Within the party spectrum “Alliance of Patriots of

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² Mudde, C. (2004). The Populist Zeitgeist. Government and Opposition. pp. 541-563.

Georgia” have an increasing electoral support and currently occupies 6 seats in the Parliament³. Another populist “Georgian Labor Party”⁴ has been in politics since 1995 and did not get any mandates in the Parliament after the last parliamentary elections⁵, however, is active during the important political processes⁶. Besides parties, there are a number of movements among Georgian political circles with the purpose to mobilize masses and popularize their ideas within society. Since 2017 “Georgian March” and radical nationalist movement “Georgian National Unity” have appeared on the political scene. Since then, they have led multiple anti-liberal activities.

What are the primary narratives used by the populist groups in Georgia and to what extent are these narratives similar or different from each other? Observing the rhetoric of populist groups, dichotomic narratives, such as “us” and “them”, people versus the elites, liberalism and Christian values and Western rhetoric and Russia may be signaled out.

“Enemy Image” in the Narrative of Georgian Populist Actors

The primary feature of populism is the existence of corrupt elite, which is the “enemy” of ordinary people and against whom the society must rise up⁷. There are multiple images of enemy within Georgian populist groups, among which stand out political elites and liberal groups: while the right spectrum focuses on previous government and liberal ideas as threats to the state, the leftist narrative emphasizes on the current government as an elite to be countered.

“Alliance of Patriots” and “Labor Party”

The most important internal enemy for the “Alliance of Patriots” is the “United National Movement”, which is depicted as a power abusing people and betraying the country and are referred to as “executioners”, “Sergo Orjonikidzes”, “Blackmailers”⁸. According to the rhetoric of “Georgian National Unity” notorious year of 2003⁹ was followed by the emergence of neo-liberalism. In this case, non-governmental organizations are represented as opposing elites, which “abuse youth and taint the gene pool.”¹⁰ The message is shared by the “Alliance of Patriots” as well that call the liberal groups “invaders in social space” that come with the “mask of oppressed” and request protection from the state, while in fact trying to make us “reject our faith, Georgianhood.”¹¹

³ Liberal Academy Tbilisi, Caucasus Research Resource Center (May 29, 2019), Anti-Liberal Populism And The Threat of Russian Influence in the Regions of Georgia. Available at: <http://www.ei-lat.ge/images/doc/antiliberal-populisme-kartuli.pdf>. Accessed on January 24, 2020.

⁴ Papiashvili, N. (November 3, 2019). Populism in Georgian Colors. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2OlbcOj> Accessed on: 20 January, 2020.

⁵ Cesko.ge (October 23, 2016). Central Election Commission of Georgia’s final concluding report on the results of Georgia’s parliamentary elections of October 8, 2016. Available at: shorturl.at/hFJR5 Accessed on: January 20, 2020.

⁶ Radiotavisufleba.ge (November 14, 2019). Leaders of opposition parties are at the office of the Labor Party. Available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/30271493.html>. Accessed on: January 15, 2020.

⁷ Mudde, C., Kaltwasser, C.R. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁸ Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). Alliance of Patriots. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Giorgi Chelidze (January 3, 2020). 3rd year anniversary of the establishment of “Georgian National Unity”! Available at: <https://bit.ly/2tOaU54> Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

¹¹ Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). Alliance of Patriots. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

Unlike them, the “Labor Party” has always considered the government to be the elite opposing the people and strives for the lustration of corrupt “Georgian Dream” and de-oligarchysation with the slogan “no millionaire-billionaire in politics, no politician in business”¹².

In the background of elites opposing people, populist actors represent themselves as the power struggling with the people. In the program of the “Alliance of Patriots” we read “Our voter is a citizen... architect... teacher... doctor... taxi driver... Abkhazian and Ossetian”, and the list ends with the phrase: “we are among every layer and category.”¹³ This way the party concentrates on representing itself as an integral part of every layer of the society. “Labor Party” uses one of the primary rhetoric characterizing populism and actively talks about using the institutes of plebiscite and referendum¹⁴, which, according to them should ensure the direct participation of people in the governance of the state. It is interesting that representing itself as an integral part of people is not commonly shared strategy among civil movements.

“Georgian National Unity” and “Georgian March”

“Everyone, brothers and sisters, let us hold each other’s hands!” – this is pathos with which “Georgian National Unity” sees itself, always countered with “imprisonment, blackmailing, moral pressure”; however they protect the path of their ancestors, race, blood and tradition and do not give up in the efforts of saving Georgian nation¹⁵. In this context, “Georgian March” represents a power that focuses less on representing itself as an integral part of people and is mostly concentrated on countering liberal groups. Therefore, in the context of elites opposing people, Georgian populism highlights liberal groups and former and current governments as the elites against the people, while they themselves are mostly the leaders in this battle, fighting alongside the ordinary people.

“Us” and “Them”: Georgian Populist Narrative on Nativism and Immigration

Nativism is an integral component of populist rhetoric¹⁶, based on which the right populist narrative delimits “us” and “them”. As a result, anti-immigration sentiments are being stirred up.

For Georgian populists, rhetoric based on race, ethnos, purity of blood is one of the fundamental parts of the narrative. “Alliance of Patriots” defines “Georgianhood” by juxtaposing the “other”: “I am Georgian means that I am not French, I am not German, I am not Polish, I am not Russian.”¹⁷ In May 2018, “Georgian March”, with the slogan “Race, Nation, State”, announced the establishment of people’s guards. The purpose was to plan activities against liberal drug policy using the argument based on race: “body and health is the property of race and nation.”¹⁸ Nativist

¹² Labour.ge (2018). Main directions of the Presidential Candidate Shalva Natelashvili's Election Program. Available at: <https://www.labour.ge/en/about-us/program/article/13357--ain-directions-of-the-residential-candidate-halva-atelashvili-s-lection-rogram>. Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

¹³ Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). Alliance of Patriots. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on January 25, 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Giorgi Chelidze (January 3, 2020). *3rd year anniversary of the establishment of “Georgian National Unity”!* Available at: <https://bit.ly/2tOaU54> Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

¹⁶ Pappas, T.S. (2018). Exchange: How to Tell Nativists from Populists. *Journal of Democracy*. pp. 148-152.

¹⁷ Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). Alliance of Patriots. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on January 25, 2020.

¹⁸ Meparishvili, M. (April 14, 2018). *Who Are Those, Threatening to Create People’s Guard*. Available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/277032/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

rhetoric is characteristic to the activities of “Georgian March” as well. For instance, during the anti-immigration demonstrations in June 2017, one of the issues raised was the protest against “mixing Georgian blood with that of foreigners.”¹⁹

“Labor Party” is less active in this regard and focuses on the primacy of history and Georgian state, with less emphasis on ethnic and race-based criteria. This difference is likely caused by the ideological differences with other populist actors.

Against the background of nativist rhetoric, Georgian populism carries unanimous anti-immigration rhetoric. “Georgian March” started to present itself with anti-immigration demonstration and protesting “uncontrolled migration of Muslims” in June, 2017.²⁰ In parallel with this, the “Alliance of Patriots” opposes the sale of land to foreigners in Georgia and in its program states that “Georgian land and natural resources of Georgia should belong to the Georgian state and Georgian people.”²¹ Border control and stricter policies on residence permit and granting citizenship is prominent in the agenda of the “National Unity.”²² “Labor Party” comes in full accord with radical anti-immigrant and particularly anti-Asian narrative, according to which it is important to stop bringing in foreign labor migrants, strengthen immigration policies and terminate visa-free regime with Iran and Arabic states²³.

Anti-immigration, as a leading factor in Georgian populist sphere is identified in multiple researches. According to the CRRC data, ultra-right pages are especially active in social networks in these regards. The fact that Islam, as a historical enemy, dominates populist narrative was illustrated by the joint study of CRRC and Liberal Academy Tbilisi²⁴. According to the aforementioned studies, ultra-right social pages were particularly active in responding the news on the show of Iranian hip-hop artist – Amir Tataloo²⁵, introducing visa regime with Asian states²⁶, “punishing businesses illegally employing foreigners.”²⁷ Although the aforementioned studies only cover ultra-right populist groups and therefore, the results of the study does not concern “Labor Party”, in the context of anti-Eastern narrative, the party is in obvious accord with the rest of the populist spectrum.

¹⁹ Media Development Fund (July 14, 2017). *Monitoring of the Activities of Ultra-Nationalist Groups on the Facebook Ahead of Georgian March*. Available at: http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/71/file/ultra_nacionalisturi_egstrmizmi_fb.pdf Accessed on: January 20, 2020.

²⁰ Svanidze. T. (July 16, 2018). Georgia’s growing cultural divide: a sign of far-right populism? Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgia-growing-cultural-divide/> Accessed on: January 20, 2020.

²¹ Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). Alliance of Patriots. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

²² Giorgi Chelidze (January 3, 2020). *3rd year anniversary of the establishment of “Georgian National Unity”!* Available at: <https://bit.ly/2tOaU54> Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

²³ Labour.ge (2018). Main directions of the Presidential Candidate Shalva Natelashvili’s Election Program. Available at: <https://www.labour.ge/en/about-us/program/article/13357--ain-directions-of-the-residential-andidate-halva-atelashvili-s-lection-rogram>. Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

²⁴ Liberal Academy Tbilisi, Caucasus Research Resource Center (May 29, 2019), Anti-Liberal Populism And The Threat Of Russian Influence In The Regions Of Georgia. Available at: <http://www.eilat.ge/images/doc/antiliberal-populisme-kartuli.pdf>. Accessed on January 24, 2020.

²⁵ CRRC.ge (2019). Countering Anti-Western Discourse in Social Media, monthly report (28 February – 31 March, 2019). Available at: <http://awdb.ge/files/PPAG-March-Report-KA.pdf> Accessed on: January 15, 2020.

²⁶ CRRC.ge (2019). Countering Anti-Western Discourse in Social Media, monthly report (28 February – 31 March, 2019). Available at: <http://awdb.ge/files/PPAG-March-Report-KA.pdf> Accessed on: January 15, 2020.

²⁷ Salte (March 18, 2019). Georgia’s Liberal Immigration Policy. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1984189428542965> Accessed On: January 15, 2020.

Hence, right populist actors have clear nativist rhetoric, which, on its turn is characterized by explicit anti-immigration sentiments. It is also a fact that less emphasis on nativism of leftist “Labor Party” does not exclude strict approaches towards immigration, however with social-economic motives, not that of the race²⁸.

Religion in Georgian Populism and Anti-Liberal Narrative

For populist forces, it is not alien to manipulate with religious matters and to mobilize the society using the fear factor.²⁹ In its study, Media Development Fund concludes that for radical groups Orthodox Christianity is the power of supreme importance, while Patriarch is the highest ranking authority³⁰: populist actors even use his statements, such as “the nation united in Christ cannot be defeated³¹”, as slogans.

Constantly highlighting Orthodoxy, as a fundamental value is visible in the rhetoric of the “Alliance of Patriots”. The subchapter “Value Patriarch” in the party’s program once again proves the point.³² According to the “Labor Party’s” program for parliamentary elections, Christian culture shall become the basis for rising up and educating future generation,³³ while according the 2012 program, party considers it to be its historical duty to “execute (without any preconditions whatsoever) the constitutional agreement between the state and the Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church.”³⁴

“Georgian March” frequently uses religious symbols; for instance, the leaders of the movement led the June 2017 anti-immigration demonstration with the icon of David the Builder.³⁵ Moreover, insult of religious feelings drove them to attack the then-journalist of Rustavi 2 Giorgi Gabunia in March 2018.³⁶ The rhetoric of “National Unity” focuses less on religious sentiments: the movement is inspired by Nazi ideology, where the primary narrative is focused on race and its protection, instead of national culture and history established within the religious context.

²⁸ 1TV.ge (January 11, 2020). Shalva Natelashvili requests the termination of visa-free regime with Iran. Available at: <https://1tv.ge/video/shalva-natelashvili-irantan-uvizo-redjimis-gauqmebas-itkhovs/> Accessed on: January 28, 2020.

²⁹ Palaver, W. (2019). Populism and Religion: On the Politics of Fear. *Journal of Theology – Dialog*. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/dial.12450>. Accessed on: January 27, 2020.

³⁰ Media Development Fund (July 14, 2017). Monitoring of the Activities of Ultra-Nationalist Groups on the Facebook Ahead of Georgian March. Available at: http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/71/file/ultra_nacionalisturi_eqstrmizmi_fb.pdf Accessed on: January 20, 2020.

³¹ The phrase used by the page of social-political union “Georgian Idea” to spread the information on the demonstration of May 17, 2017.

³² Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). Alliance of Patriots. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

³³ Ivote.ge (2016). Election Program Parliamentary Elections 2016 (Labor Party of Georgia). Available at: <http://www.ivote.ge/archevnebi/saparlamento-archevnebi/saparlamento-archevnebi-2016/programebi/22779-saarchevno-programa-saparlamento-archevnebi-2016-saqarthvelos-leiboristuli-partia.html?lang=ka-GE>. Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

³⁴ Labour.ge (2012). Metekhi Obligation. Available at: <https://www.labour.ge/ka/chvens-shesakheb/programa/article/13220-metekhis-valdebuleba-2012-tseli>. Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

³⁵ Khachapuridze, E. (July 14, 2017). “Georgian March” – Xenophobic movement in Tbilisi. Available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/207453/> Accessed on: January 20, 2020.

³⁶ Liberali.ge (March 22, 2018). What was happening in the car, when the members of “Georgian March” attacked Giorgi Gabunia. Available at: <http://liberali.ge/news/view/35168/video--ra-khdeboda-manganashirotsa-qartuli-marshis-tsevrebi-giorgi-gabunias-daeskhnentavs> Accessed on: January 27, 2020.

Against this background, anti-liberal rhetoric is even more prominent among populist actors. The program of the “Alliance of Patriots” states that ethnic differences should not cause of discord and division in the country on the one hand, since “Georgian values excludes xenophobia.”³⁷ However, daily statements and activities of the party indicate the opposite. As an example, the campaign against the vice-captain of the Georgian National Football Team – Guram Kashia was so violent that the party member Konstantine Morgoshia was called in the police for questioning.³⁸

The case of Kashia clearly illustrated the anti-liberal narrative of populist actors in relation to other subjects: on October 31, 2017 the members of the “Georgian March” requested the expulsion of the football player from the national team for wearing the armband in support of LGBT community.³⁹ In May 2018, “Georgian March” was one of the organizers of counter demonstration against the demonstrators protesting the raids on night club and requesting liberal drug policy.⁴⁰ To sum up, the movement organized five demonstrations: anti-immigrant (2017), against Guram Kashia and Giorgi Gabunia (2017, 2018), against pride march (2019) and to cancel the screening of the movie “And Then We Danced” (2019). As it is evident, big part of the activities of the movement is related to anti-liberal narrative.

Similar pathos can be seen in the ideas of “National Unity”: they openly oppose “leftist liberals” and the ideas affiliated with these groups, such as “normalizing multicultural, feminist and LGBT way of life.”⁴¹ Within a month after its establishment, the movement started to collect signatures to outlaw the functioning of George Soros’ foundation “Open Society –Georgia”.⁴² It should also be noted that “Georgian March”⁴³ and “Alliance of Patriots”⁴⁴ openly desire the same.

In 2018, Investigative Journalists’ Team published a list of 50 the most anti-liberal Facebook pages, among which were “Georgian March” and “Georgian National Unity.”⁴⁵ According to CRRC, one of the most violent activities followed the nomination of Lado Apkhazava for Global Teacher Prize: the posts of that period mainly focused on him being “part of the liberal plan” or blaming him for “homosexual propaganda.”⁴⁶

³⁷ Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). *Alliance of Patriots*. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

³⁸ 1tv.ge (August 29, 2018). *Member of the “Alliance of Patriots” Konstantine Morgoshia Was Questioned on the the Case of Football Player Guram Kashia*. Available at: <https://1tv.ge/news/fekhburtel-guram-kashias-saqmeze-patriotta-aliansis-wevri-konstantine-morgoshia-gamokitkhes/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

³⁹ Khachapuridze, E. (October 31, 2017). *Police Arrested the Members of “Georgian March” by the Georgian Football Federation*. Available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/230249/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁴⁰ Imedinews.ge (May 14, 2017). *Georgian March is Threatening with Protests in Case of Humane Drug Policy*. Available at: <https://imedinews.ge/ge/saqartvelo/61420/qartuli-marshi-humanuri-narkopolitikis-shemtkhvevashi-aqtsiebit-imugreba> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁴¹ Giorgi Chelidze (January 3, 2020). *3rd year anniversary of the establishment of “Georgian National Unity”!* Available at: <https://bit.ly/2tOaU54> Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

⁴² Manifest.ge (February 10, 2017). *National-Socialist Movement “Georgian National Unity”*. Available at: <https://manifest.ge/main/item/1283> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁴³ Kokoshvili, D. (September 12, 2017). *“Georgian March” against the ruling party and George Soros*. Available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/220070/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁴⁴ Chichua, N. (January 20, 2020). *Inashvili requests the start of an investigation against Laura Thornton*. Available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/421003/> Accessed on: January 20, 2020.

⁴⁵ Ifact.ge (July 4, 2018). *50 Facebook pages created for the information war*. Available at: <https://www.ifact.ge/50-fb-page/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁴⁶ CRRC.ge (2019). *Countering Anti-Western Discourse in Social Media, monthly report (28 February – 31 March, 2019)*. Available at: <http://awdb.ge/files/PPAG-March-Report-KA.pdf> Accessed on: January 15, 2020.

To sum up, another dichotomy, characterizing the Georgian populist spectrum is the explicit Orthodox faith and spread of their ideas in the name of religion, which is in stark contrast with the anti-liberal sentiments characterizing the aforementioned populist actors. Here too one can find the difference between right-wing and left-wing actors: despite the fact that “Labor Party” openly carries religious pathos, it is less characterized with anti-liberalism.

Triangle of Russian, Western and Turkish Narratives

Part of the populist narrative is to find a balance between Russia and the West through the policy of non-alignment. Increased anti-western rhetoric was particularly evident in 2017-2018.⁴⁷

While outlining the foreign policy priorities in the program, the “Alliance of Patriots” expresses the support towards the pro-western choice of the majority of the population at first sight, but at the same time contradicts their role and opinions with those of other political actors, i.e. elites:

We support Georgia’s membership in the EU. Moreover, we feel positive towards Georgia’s NATO membership... However, according to the statements of NATO member states, there is a set of reasons why NATO cannot accept us as a member state.⁴⁸

Based on this reasoning the “Alliance of Patriots” boils down its view to the narrative of non-alignment, which was also voiced during the party meeting in 2019 and is strongly supported by the party members. In the background of the outspoken position on the policy of non-alignment the party is actively considering close relations with Russia, which is the reason behind their periodical meetings with Russian members of the parliament in Tbilisi or in Moscow. The last similar meeting was held in July 2019 in Russia. Party member Ada Marshania stated that the main motive for her visit was the fact that party’s approach “is shared by a big part of Georgian society.”⁴⁹ For the party it is unacceptable to be pronounced as “pro-Russian”, however they also note Russia’s interest “with our ports, as the energy-transit region.”⁵⁰

Views on foreign policy of “Georgian March” are also synchronized: despite the fact that they do not consider themselves as a pro-Russian actor, improving relations with Russia and declaring neutrality by distancing from the West is an acceptable narrative.⁵¹ The movement admits that 20% of Georgian territories are occupied by Russia, however disassociates the state and the society from each other and this way manages to avoid labeling “Russian nation” as an enemy of the Georgian people.⁵²

Turkey has a particularly negative place in Georgian populism. The “Alliance of Patriots” considers the NATO member neighbor state through the lenses of conspiracy and states that in addition to the historically Georgian territories held by Turkey, the country also wants to take

⁴⁷ Minesashvili, S. (2019). Social Underpinnings of Right-Wing Populism in Georgia. Available at: <https://bit.ly/36zUM4r> Accessed on: January 17, 2020.

⁴⁸ Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). Alliance of Patriots. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁴⁹ Imedinews.ge (July 15, 2019). The members of the “Alliance of Patriots” went to Moscow. Available at: <https://imedinews.ge/ge/saqartvelo/111731/patriotta-aliansis-tsevrebi-moskovshi-chavidnen> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁵⁰ Patriots.ge (June 2, 2017). Alliance of Patriots. Available at: <http://patriots.ge/Newspaper/> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁵¹ Abashidze, Z., Pipia, D. (April 20, 2018). “Georgian March” Against Immigrants and in Support of “Neutrality”. Available at: <https://bit.ly/36EE1oQ> Accessed on: January 27, 2020.

⁵² Ibid.

over Adjara and Abkhazia.⁵³ Moreover, party members occasionally spread disinformation forming negative public perception on Turkey, such as “Turks take potatoes and tomatoes from here and bring in its own bad [products],”⁵⁴ or inaccurate facts that in seven mosques in Batumi, there are saloon, trade and eatery places, where “night life” also flourishes.⁵⁵ Myth Detector identified both facts to be false information. The arguments against Turkey resemble the major factors of anti-Russian sentiments in the society: on the one hand, the occupation of territories and on the other hand, diversification of trade as a result of Russian sanctions, which is rarely talked about by the members of the “Alliance of Patriots”. It may be concluded that the “Alliance of Patriots” try to balance the attitudes of the society with anti-Turkish propaganda in addition to abovementioned nativist and religious aspects. Therefore, the party rhetoric towards the neighboring state is explicitly aggressive in its nature.

“Labor Party” has a different approach: for them the priority is to speed up “our accession in the EU” and continue cooperation with NATO using the existing formats.⁵⁶ At the same time, party members talk about the alliance of Russia-Turkey-Iran with the tone of conspiracy, which, according to them, is directed against Georgia.⁵⁷ Despite the fact that the “Labor Party” also talks about the importance of working on opening the Russian market, the tone towards the Russian occupation is far more strict in leftist populist narrative.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Modern Georgian populism is mainly right-wing and is oriented on common origins, ethnic, cultural and religious aspects; however, coexistence and sometimes blending with leftist ideas is also evident. The elite opposing the people is represented in a different way: for the right-wing actors elites are mostly represented by liberal groups and the former government, while for the left-wing populists it is the existing government - the elite that is against the people.

Georgian populism is characterized by unanimous anti-immigrant and more specifically anti-Eastern rhetoric with different motives: right-wing actors have more radical nativist approaches than the left-wing actors, whose main arguments for anti-immigration mostly rests on social issues. There are differences in religious matters as well: in these regards, nationalist actors are less active than the ones selected for this study. At the same time, while left-wing “Labor Party” has an explicit religious pathos, they are less characterized with anti-liberal rhetoric.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Dangadze, M. (October 29, 2019). Tarkhan-Mouravi Blames Turkey for Seizing Georgian Potatoes and Tomatoes. Available at: <https://www.mythdetector.ge/ka/myth/tarkhan-mouravi-turkets-kartuli-pomidvris-da-kartopilis-mitatsebashi-adanashaulebs> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁵⁵ Dekanidze, L. (October 16, 2019). Lies of “Patriots” on 7 Mosques in Batumi and Their Full Commercialisation. Available at: <https://www.mythdetector.ge/ka/myth/patriotta-tquli-batumshi-mokmedi-7-mechetis-da-mati-sruli-komertsializatsiis-shesakheb> Accessed on: January 25, 2020.

⁵⁶ Labour.ge (2018). Main directions of the Presidential Candidate Shalva Natelashvili's Election Program. Available at: <https://www.labour.ge/en/about-us/program/article/13357--ain-directions-of-the-residential-andidate-halva-atelashvili-s-lection-rogram>. Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

⁵⁷ Ivote.ge (2016). *Election Program Parliamentary Elections 2016 (Labor Party of Georgia)*. Available at: <http://www.ivote.ge/archevnebi/saparlamento-archevnebi/saparlamento-archvnebi-2016/programebi/22779-saarchevno-programa-saparlamento-archevnebi-2016-saqarthvelos-leiboristuli-partia.html?lang=ka-GE>. Accessed on: January 23, 2020.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

And finally, there are significant differences between left- and right-wing populists in terms of foreign policy: “Labor Party” sees the strengthening of Western integration as the only alternative to defend against Russia, Iran and Turkey, while the rest of the actors try to distance from the west and support tightening relations with Russia, cover up this dichotomy with the support to the non-alignment movement and balance it with radical anti-Turkish narrative.

Considering the fact that the mentioned populist actors benefit from the support of some parts of the society, they have a potential to become a power to be taken into account on the path of the democratic development of Georgia. With strengthening the aforementioned narrative, the challenge may arise towards democratic processes, as well as on the way to Georgia’s integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.

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