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EUROSCEPTICISM AND RELIGION IN GEORGIAN FAR-RIGHT GROUPS' POLITICAL AGENDA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Similar to other European countries, Georgia has seen a rise in far-right movements with a specific political agenda. Three far-right political parties, characterized by public demonstrations and radicalism, are particularly similar in rhetoric and messaging. Their main messages are built on the narrative of defending the Georgian nation from degradation and threats to Christianity. The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Georgian Idea, and Georgian March - National Movement are the most prominent among these parties. Apologia of the Christian religion and failed attempts to gain electoral support are their common denominators. However, their attitudes towards Europe and European integration are not homogenous. The following work demonstrates that they have substantially different Eurosceptic attitudes. More specifically, the analysis of the mentioned parties' election programs, charters, interviews and official pages reveals that their views fall under various types of Euroscepticism. For instance, the "Alliance of Patriots" fall within the "Soft Euroscepticism" of Szczerbiak and Taggart, which opposes the idea of European integration; however, it does not fully support the existing institutions and policies of the EU. "Georgian Idea" may be considered under the "Conditional Euroscepticism" of Vasilopoulou, rejecting political integration but not opposing cooperation among nations sharing common European characteristics. "Georgian March" falls under "Hard Euroscepticism" of Szczerbiak and Taggart, according to which European civilization is superior and acceptable, but the political liberalism and policies of equality of the EU are unacceptable and incompatible with the preservation of European civilization. In addition, in order to explain the minor electoral support of similar Eurosceptic parties, the work uses a theory based on research by Montgomery conducted in thirteen European countries, according to which individuals that are more religious are less likely to support radical right-populist parties.

Key words: Georgia, far-right, parties, Euroscepticism, religion.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of ultra-nationalist movements and their anti-Western rhetoric in recent years has threatened liberal-democratic values in European countries. Discontent with existing EU policies among EU member states and Western European countries in particular, as well as skepticism among non-EU member states towards European values and European integration, has resulted in the rise of similar groups. Eastern Partnership countries, including Georgia, were no exception in these regards. Aspirations to preserve national identity, characterized by nationalism, grew into ethno-religious nationalism over the years among Georgian society. This gave rise to various types of ultra-nationalist and extremist parties that identify themselves with conservative ideologies and are hostile towards individuals with liberal views. This matter is relevant as it threatens Georgia's future and its potential to become a truly democratic state. Additionally, these political parties' attempts to use religion as a political instrument deserves scrutiny. The following work comprehensively analyzes and studies this topic. More specifically, it aims to answer the following questions: *what is the attitude of far-right nationalist parties towards Georgia's European integration? How and how successfully do the far-right groups in Georgia use religion for their objectives? How can the actions of Georgian far-right nationalist parties be explained with the help of the research done on European countries and using existing theories?*

In order to provide answers to these questions, it is essential to initially contextualize the topic. Today the majority of the parties identify themselves with national and conservative values, while in addition to these values, at least ten parties participating in 2020 Parliamentary elections have openly expressed right-nationalist and non-liberal views (Gozalishvili 2020). Out of these ten subjects, we can identify three political parties that made clearly radical statements or stood out with violent actions and were able to occasionally mobilize significant support. These political parties are the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Georgian March - National Movement, and Georgian Idea. Selecting these three political subjects for research is also justified by the fact that they have tried to use a strategy of protecting religious feelings and values as a "positive" instrument to gain public trust.

Out of the mentioned three political subjects, the first is a two-term parliamentary party with a relatively stable voter pool. The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia has been participating in politics since the 2014 local government elections, in which the party received 4.72% of the vote, and 6.56% in 2017. As for parliamentary elections, the party received 5.01% in 2016 and 3.14% in 2020, according to the official records (CEC 2020). If the election results are recognized by all parties, it will provide the opportunity to ask questions on the reasons behind decreasing voter support for the Alliance of Patriots. However, decreased percentage indicators do not mean much for parties that do not recognize the legitimacy of the 2020 Parliamentary election results, since in their view, the results do not reflect the country's political reality; they claim this is because of the possibility of rigged elections. Therefore, it is hard to come to any conclusions about the support of this particular party based on the 2020 parliamentary election results.

The Georgian Idea party is a non-parliamentary faction and their members are associated with the Orthodox Parents' Union. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the party gained 0.17% of the votes, while its support in the 2020 Parliamentary elections increased to 0.43% (CEC 2020). Georgian March was registered as a political party for the 2020 parliamentary elections after having come to the public's attention as an ultra-nationalist protest group in the preceding years. The party received 0.25% of the votes in the 2020 elections, even though they had had higher expectations (Publika 2020).

Despite the fact that the 2020 parliamentary elections were not recognized as legitimate by any of the mentioned parties, it is still possible to draw theoretical conclusions based on their [election] results from the previous years, as well as by comparing their results to those of other leading political parties that hold an openly pro-European stance. More specifically, conclusions can be drawn on the reasons behind these ultra-nationalist groups' inability to gain large voter support. In order to analyze this, the research focus is on the practice of using religion as a political instrument and deceptive Eurosceptic attitudes among these groups.

Table 1: Support to the Alliance of Patriots, Georgian Idea and Georgian March - National Movement in the elections.

Source: Central Election Commission of Georgia 2016, 2020. Available at: <https://cesko.ge/#none> (Accessed on March 17, 2021).

Parties	The Results of the 2016 Parliamentary Elections	The Results of the 2020 Parliamentary Elections
• Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	5.01%	3.14%
• Georgian Idea	0.17%	0.43%
• Georgian March - National Movement	----	0.25%

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research question, the work analyzes the main messages of ultra-nationalist political parties in Georgia and the motivation for using religious narratives in their discourse. In addition, based on the identified narrative, the work analyzes their views on human rights, freedom of speech and expression, minority rights, and the elimination of various forms of discrimination – topics that are essential for Georgia's European integration.

Using the case of Georgia to analyze these topics, the work is based on theories in scientific literature and research on the tendencies of interactions between nationalism and religion characterizing Eastern and Western Europe. To identify the role of religion in electoral support for populist radical groups, the work uses theories of Montgomery (2015), Mayer and Moreau (1995), Lubbers (2002), Norris (2005), Arzheimer and Carter (2003).

Additionally, a significant portion of the work explains the homogeneity of Euroscepticism among right-wing nationalist parties. To do so, the work uses the theories of Szczerbiak and Taggart (2003) that differentiate between two forms of Euroscepticism – soft and hard; Vasilopoulo (2011), who identifies three types of Euroscepticism, one of which is identical to the concept rejecting Euroscepticism of Kopecky and Mudde (2002); the work also uses the Pappas classification (2016), offering the categorization of the political content of radical movements into populism, anti-democracy and nativism.

Regarding methodologically, the work is based on the analysis of primary and secondary literature. More specifically, the work uses meta and content analysis of existing research and academic articles that focus on the actions of radical right political parties (Onwuegbuzie 2012). The work is based on complex textual descriptions that round up the major facts and apply them to the Georgian context to answer the research question.

Ultra-nationalist parties, standing out with radicalism, destructive actions and public protests, represent the research population. Therefore, the research objects were purposely selected based on similar characteristics (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Among the parties selected for the research are the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Georgian March - National Movement, and Georgian Idea. The features of the activities are described in details in the following chapter. The research period covers contemporary period, specifically events over the past decade.

Information on the aforementioned ultra-nationalist political parties and their objectives and views are gathered from sources such as party charters, their election programs, pre-election campaign interviews, research, reports, and the official Facebook pages of the parties. In order to strengthen the arguments on their political discourse and actions, several examples are cited from these parties' daily political activities which demonstrate their xenophobic and homophobic attitudes and their attempts to use religion as a shield. To illustrate this, the work uses situation analysis, such as the attempt to cancel the screening of the movie "And Then We Danced", the attack on the journalist Giorgi Gabunia, organizing the Georgian March protests in 2017, and protesting the ownership of land by foreigners at the Justice House.

HOW DO THE ULTRA-NATIONALIST PARTIES TRY TO GAIN THE SUPPORT OF VOTERS?

Alliance of Patriots - To gain the trust of the voters, the parties use both positive and negative discourse, and the Alliance of Patriots is no exception. It uses plans, messages and steps taken to gain public trust that are positive from their perspective. For its positive agenda, the Alliance of Patriots appeals to voters' adherence to Orthodox Christianity and resorts to "apologia of the Church in public statements" (Zarandia 2017). Their rhetoric is focused on maintaining the status quo instead of establishing a new one. More specifically, it puts emphasis on preserving national identity and traditions, which they consider to be closely tied with Orthodoxy. In their view, the proposition for military neutrality and the start of direct dialogue with Sokhumi, Tskhinvali and Moscow to restore Georgia's territorial integrity – ie. to turn Georgia into the Switzerland of the South Caucasus region – can be discussed in terms of positive discourse. Social issues - one of the priorities of Georgian population - also stand out in their public addresses. Party program promises focus on improving the social conditions of the country's people by increasing pensions and opening free municipal clinics; however, the ways to achieve these objectives are not clearly outlined in the program (Alliance of Patriots election program 2020). It is also important to note that they claim to be "the people's party".

The Alliance of Patriots attracts the attention of voters with rhetoric focusing on the threats to nationalism, patriotism, values and identity. Protection of religion and religious feelings also comes first in their **negative** discourse. However, the emphasis is made on preserving religious-cultural and spiritual heritage. A relevant example of this is their "Protect Gareji" protests, during which the party stood out with xenophobic statements against Azerbaijanis (Kandelaki 2019). Xenophobia was also evident in their Turkish sentiments in their attempts to refuel historic, religious and cultural stereotypes against Turkey. To gain the support of the voters hostile to Turkey, "Protect Adjara" was one of the slogans of the Alliance of Patriots during the 2020 election campaign, which hinted at perceived threats to the Adjara region from Turkey. Furthermore, banners held by party supporters depicting the map of Georgia showed the Adjara region marked in the same way as Georgia's occupied territories, a deliberately provocative tactic (Radio Liberty 2020).

It is noteworthy that the Alliance of Patriots aims at defeating liberal tendencies in Georgia (Zarandia, 2017). The party members stand out with their anti-Western rhetoric; however, it mostly implies a negative attitude towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and skepticism towards opening a NATO military base in Georgia. The fact that Facebook deleted fake accounts related to the Alliance of Patriots that were engaged in anti-Western propaganda is also a fact worth mentioning (Buziashvili 2020). However, the Alliance of Patriots do not refer to European integration in a negative context, and some of its members even publicly support the idea of European integration (Chichua 2020). Against this background, the party has never protested Russian occupation with public demonstrations (Kandelaki 2019), and in August 2020, one of the leaders of the party, Irma Inashvili, visited Abkhazia. After the news broke in the media, she justified her visit with religious motives. Additionally, the Russian analytical portal "Dossier" published documents that discussed the possibility of Russian sources financing the Alliance of Patriots (Dossier 2020). Party leaders deny the information, yet their actions and rhetoric have led to public speculation that this might be true.

The Georgian Idea party mostly stands out with its negative rhetoric. Topics that appear in a relatively positive agenda and do not include contradictory policies relate to the increasing involvement of the Church in the education system. The second topic not falling under the negative context of the program covers state subsidies for health and social care (Georgian Idea election program 2020). Every other promise or statement is formulated in the context of opposition, protection or rejection. The party elevates the preservation of people's morale and strengthening of the Orthodox Church at the highest level (Georgian Idea Charter 2014). Furthermore, priests have been actively involved in the election campaign of Georgian Idea (Democracy Research Institute (DRI) 2020).

The party members express messianic and isolationist rhetoric (Sartania 2019). The party tries to spread its ideas mostly using its Facebook page, where they try to instill fear from external threats and the degeneration of Georgian values (Sartania 2019). They indirectly relate these supposed threats to Georgia's European integration and spread the opinion that the Association Agreement with the EU implies taking children away from their parents (Public Broadcaster 2020). More specifically, in relation to the introduction of a 'children's code', one of the leaders of the party, Levan Chachua, stated that "Georgia will soon have a unit of juvenile fascists" (Myth Detector 2020). In addition, in a pre-election interview he noted that he is proud that he opposed the law on anti-discrimination since he and the like-minded people around him do not want to legalize "perversion" in the country. Additionally, he noted in one of his interviews that they "fight against the political system managed by foreign countries" (Public Broadcaster 2020). Georgian Idea party members also note with pride that "with like-minded people, they stopped the attempt to alienate land plots to foreigners" (Public Broadcaster 2020). Asked about why voters should support him, Levan Chachua answered, "because I was actively involved in May 17 events with the clerical hierarchy and also participated in the cancellation of the Kazantip 'Narco sex - festival'" (Public Broadcaster 2020). Therefore, the main characterizing markers of this party seem to be the use of religion as a political instrument and deceptive Euroscepticism. It is also interesting that relations with Russia as a country with a shared religion is important for the party. The party does not oppose cooperation with Europe, but says nothing about supporting the European integration process.

Similar to Georgian Idea, **Georgian March** builds its messaging on **negative** discourse. However, compared to the previous two parties, it has clearly outlined and identified program objectives implying the establishment of a national, traditional, Georgian state, "which will take its worthy place in the world community" and reach the development based on the principles of traditionalism and conservatism. Their objective is to "extend the existence of Georgian identity" (Public Broadcaster 2020) and use Ilia's words "Language, Homeland, Faith" as the main slogan of the party (TV Pirveli 2020).

Georgian March, like Georgian Idea, tries to set the mood among the public that the Georgian nation is under threat. Georgian March focuses on religious sanctities and puts ethnic Georgians and Orthodoxy under one category. Their main message expresses the pathos of saving ethnic Georgians and considers migration and the LGBT community as the main causes of Georgians' 'degradation'. Therefore, they are known for their homophobic statements and demonstrations of racist and xenophobic symbols. Their main target is George Soros and his Foundation, which they consider to be an institution for spreading 'perversion'; they also frequently refer to Muslims as the enemies of Christian identity (Sartania 2019). The party tries to instill fear amongst the public, and the idea that one day Georgians may become ethnic and religious minorities in Georgia.

The leaders of Georgian March supported the United States' Trump administration, as well as Marine Le Pen's view of Europe, and therefore oppose liberal-democratic values (Euronews Georgia 2020). Similar to the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, the party's view is that "Georgia will light up when it becomes the Switzerland of Caucasus" (Publika 2020). Georgian March tries to gain the support of voters for whom everything Georgian is superior, and those who believe that Orthodox Christianity is an inseparable part of being Georgian. Leaders of Georgian March, publicly or online, are actively trying to demonstrate Georgian historical or religious actors as heroes (Sartania 2019).

Similar to the Alliance of Patriots, information on Russian funding became public for Georgian March as well (Gogiashvili & Tsetskhladze, 2018), even though the party representatives categorically deny any connections with Russia. Estonia's intelligence report states that Georgian March is involved in anti-Western propaganda and "aims at rattling public support for joining the European Union and NATO". The document also notes that these forces try to create internal tensions and escalate conflict within Georgian society, which will have a negative impact on Georgia's European integration (Radio Liberty 2020).

Negative and positive discourses used by these parties to get the voters' support is structurally listed and illustrated in the below table (2).

Table 2: Thematic analysis of positive and negative discourses/messages of parties.

Parties	Positive Discourse/Message	Negative Discourse/Message
The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apologia of the Church; 2. Direct dialogue with Sokhumi, Tskhinvali and Moscow to restore territorial integrity; 3. Desire for Georgia to become the Switzerland of the South Caucasus; 4. Opening free municipal clinics; 5. Improving social conditions - increasing pensions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protecting religion and religious feelings; 2. Maintaining religious-cultural heritage; 3. Xenophobic statements towards Azerbaijanis - protest "Protect Gareji"; 4. Hostile attitudes towards Turkey - protest "Protect Adjara"; 5. Desire to defeat liberal tendencies; 6. Fight against foreign ownership of land.

Parties	Positive Discourse/Message	Negative Discourse/Message
Georgian Idea	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing the role of the Church in the education system; 2. State subsidies for health and social care. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preserving the morality of Georgian people; 2. Protecting the society from LGBT community; 3. Reminding the society on permanent foreign threat; 4. Fear of degrading Georgian values; 5. Fighting against the foreign ownership of land; 6. Halting the process of alienating agricultural land plots on foreigners; 7. Referring to Kazantip as "Narco-Festival"- protecting the youth from depravity.
Georgian March - National Movement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Desire to establish national, traditional, Georgian state that will take its 'worthy place' in the global community; 2. Expand the existence of Georgian identity; 3. "Georgia will light up when it becomes the Switzerland of the Caucasus"; 4. Demonstrating Georgian historical or religious actors as heroes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protecting religious sanctities; 2. Protection against perversion; 3. Pathos to save ethnic Georgians; 4. Considering immigration and LGBT community as main threats of Georgians' degeneration; 5. Demonstrating racist and xenophobic symbols; 6. Targeting Soros, his foundation, and Muslims as main enemies.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSES OF THREE POLITICAL PARTIES

The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Georgian March - National Movement, and Georgian Idea are mostly characterized by similar rhetoric common to all three. Their tactics are also similar, particularly in terms of using religious faith in political messages, the spread of anti-liberal attitudes, deceptive Euroscepticism, and loyalty towards Russia. In order to clearly illustrate the mentioned tendencies in brief descriptions of party profiles and to strengthen the argument of their contradictions with liberal democracy, it is important to discuss several cases and instances when these groups expressed their anti-liberal sentiments in the name of protecting religious values and national identity.

HOMOPHOBIA AND RESTRICTION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Clear examples of homophobic attitudes and restricted freedom of expression came during the protests against the screening of the movie “And Then We Danced” and the attack on the journalist Giorgi Gabunia. In the first instance, Georgian March and Georgian Idea were actively participating in the protests, when they did not allow members of the public to attend the screening by blocking the movie theaters and insulting individuals interested in the film, which scared some of the viewers away and forced them to leave the areas (Kvirikashvili 2021). Georgian March and small groups associated with this behavior were also participants in the protest against Giorgi Gabunia, when they were requesting an apology from Giorgi Gabunia for mentioning the name of Christ in an inappropriate manner and therefore insulting the religious feelings of Orthodox adherents. In this case, there is an issue with freedom of expression, since Giorgi Gabunia was punished for declaring his opinion; the radical right-wing groups forfeited the possibility of trying to solve the issue by highlighting that the journalist’s utterances may have constituted a breach of the Journalistic Ethics Charter, which may have ended the problem without violence. Instead, the members of Georgian March attacked Giorgi Gabunia, which was followed by the launch of criminal proceedings against them (Civil.ge 2018).

RESTRICTING THE FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND EXPRESSION, HOMOPHOBIA

There are multiple cases of restricting the freedom of assembly and expression based on homophobic attitudes. One of the most vivid examples was the confrontation on May 17, 2013, and due to the consistent violence against them, sexual minorities are not able to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia in open, public spaces. These groups became targets of attack from religious-conservative groups from their very first attempts to hold their events, and to prevent the celebration of this day, the Patriarchy initiated “Family Purity Day” to be celebrated on May 17. In the name of “Tbilisi Pride”, the last attempt of the LGBT community to hold a protest was in 2019, while ultra-nationalist groups also gathered in Vera Park at the initiative of the businessman Levan Vasadze, also attended by representatives of Georgian March and Georgian Idea. Religious symbols were abundantly used during the protest, and Levan Vasadze himself was present with a wooden cross. In parallel to this, the so-called “Gavrilov Protests” were held, in which a significant part of the Georgian population protested a Russian MP sitting in the chair of the Chairman of the Parliament and addressing MPs from that position. Meanwhile, members of the ultra-nationalist groups remained in Vera Park to continue protest. One of the leaders of Georgian Idea, Guram Palavandishvili, even mentioned that running the de-occupation protest was less important than his own faction’s rally (Palavandishvili 2019). Avoiding the protest over Russia’s occupation of Georgia’s regions raises further questions about these groups’ covert pro-Russian attitudes.

XENOPHOBIA AND ANTI-SEMITISM

A clear example of xenophobia and anti-Semitism is the Georgian March rally that organized on Aghmashenebeli avenue in 2017 in protest of an Iranian citizen insulting a Georgian girl. However, there was no reaction to Russia’s recent decision to move its occupation line by another 700 meters in Bershueti. Another illustration of xenophobia was a protest at the Justice House in 2018, when the assembled far-right voters prevented foreigners from entering the building to receive services.

This way, the protesters were opposing the ownership of land by foreign citizens. The murder of Vitali Saparov, meanwhile, was a very unfortunate and tragic case of anti-Semitism, pointing at the involvement of far-right groups. All the above-mentioned cases characterize far-right groups, such as homophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and restricting freedom of expression, which all together contradict the values of liberal democracy; all of this combined partly determines their Eurosceptic attitudes.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE TYPES OF EUROSCEPTICISM: HOW RELEVANT ARE THE THEORIES FOR GEORGIAN REALITY?

Radical right groups differ from each other in multiple ways; however, each one of them is characterized by some form of nationalism, as well as opposition to the pan-nationalism of the EU's structure. Eurosceptic rhetoric typically supports a more protectionist economy and the return of national borders, contradicting the entire paradigm of economic and political integration as initiated by the Schuman Declaration (1950).

To begin with, the European Union is a political project. According to Stiglitz (2017), the initial economic integration project was traditionally envisaged as a part of a later political endeavor. The European Union is a political project in the way that it creates and represents a realm, built on fundamentally similar political liberal legislation in parallel with the subsidiary principle, which, at the same time, leaves legislative powers to the national parliaments of member states in a number of areas. The second reason why the European Union is essentially a political project is its role in the post-1989 world, when the European Union was joined by Eastern European states, which then led to incentives for democratization in aspirant countries such as Ukraine and Georgia. In these types of countries, the European Union is almost a synonym for concepts such as democracy, political freedom, transparency and other ideals of an "open society". Therefore, the European integration factor is commonly perceived by scholars as one of the primary sources of democratization and political reform by aspirant countries. In the case of Georgia, it is based on the fact that the prospect of Georgia's European integration is dependent on the country's comprehensive implementation of the Association Agreement it signed with the EU, envisaging political liberalism and the establishment of a culture of equality. Therefore, Euroscepticism may be derived from economic, cultural, and political factors.

Georgian far-right movements carry out anti-Euro Atlantic policies in the name of protecting ethno-nationalist ideas and Christian values. More specifically, they oppose fundamental political freedoms, a culture of equality, and an anti-discrimination philosophy. In practical-political terms, all these can be perceived as actions against EU integration since Georgia's EU membership is dependent on the country's implementation of political commitments undertaken by the Association Agreement. Therefore, any political rhetoric against fundamental freedoms, liberal democracy, and the culture of equality may be considered as a form of Euroscepticism in the contemporary Georgian context.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF EUROSCEPTICISM?

In which Eurosceptic groups do the three political parties fall under according to the existing scientific theories? In wider terms, Euroscepticism implies the unity of political views that oppose the idea of the European Union. However, this skepticism is not directed towards the idea of European civilization, but towards the European Union and the idea of integration. Eurosceptic parties and politicians often, but not always, are populists at the same time, characterized by opposition towards liberal policies on migration.

While discussing populism, Takis Pappas (2016, 22) reminds us of the importance of “intelligent disaggregation” in perceiving the concepts. He marks out the political language of populism, nativism and anti-democracy, which the media frequently unites under the term “populism”. The term lacks any scientific basis, while also diminishing the precise perception of the events. Euroscepticism, lacking a definitive and uniform definition, should be the subject of similar scientific skepticism as well.

Famous typology offered by Taggart and Szczerbiak identifies two types of Euroscepticism: hard and soft Euroscepticism (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2003, 3). Hard Euroscepticism is a more radical version that opposes all forms of European integration, whether this is political and economic. Therefore, hard Euroscepticism supports the unconditional exit of the country from European political and economic institutions. This radical view is based on the belief that the EU “is the embodiment of negative values”.

Unlike hard Euroscepticism, soft Euroscepticism is simply critical towards specific policy courses of the EU, especially when the parties believe that their national interests are not sufficiently considered (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2003, 3). However, soft Euroscepticism does not represent “a principled opposition to European integration or the EU membership”: it is simply a “qualified opposition to the EU positions” (Taggart 1998, 225). Therefore, soft Euroscepticism does not advocate leaving the European Union and does not necessarily oppose further integration either. However, it is countering the existing political practice and certain aspects of the existing arrangement - the status quo - and hence requests necessary changes.

However, Szczerbiak and Taggart have frequently become targets of criticism for being overly rough and non-dynamic. In response, Vasilopoulou (2011) developed an alternative typology characterized by more dynamics, offering a more diverse and clear picture. Vasilopoulou identifies three types of opposition to the project of European integration: rejecting, conditional, and compromising. Rejecting Euroscepticism recognizes only common cultural, historical and religious European characteristics, but radically opposes a common European institutional agenda, any kind of cooperation within transnational EU framework, or the integration-centric idea of “more Europe”. The objective of this type of Euroscepticism is to restore national sovereignty and establish complete national control over political and economic matters. Discourse wise, this type of Euroscepticism is reflected in political concepts such as national freedom, sovereignty and national self-determination (Vasilopoulou 2011, 232). British National Party (BNP) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) are examples of Rejecting Euroscepticism. Both of these parties were actively participating in the “Leave” campaign during Brexit, advocating for the UK to leave the EU. They were guided by the ideas of national sovereignty and freedom. Therefore, Vasilopoulou’s “rejecting Euroscepticism” is basically identical to “hard Euroscepticism” of Szczerbiak and Taggart or “Euro-reject” of Kopecky and Mudde (Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 300).

Similar to hard Euroscepticism, Conditional Euroscepticism opposes existing political practice as well as further integration. However, conditional Euroscepticism acknowledges a common cultural and religious identity and shares the principle of European cooperation. Similar to “rejecting” Eurosceptics’ group, “conditional” Eurosceptics also go against the principles of trans-national organizations and reject existing institutional balance because it is considered as “unacceptable and damaging for the sovereignty of nation-state”. However, at the same time, conditional Eurosceptics acknowledge the importance of cooperation among nation states at the European level (Vasilopoulou 2011, 232). This form of Euroscepticism coincides with “soft Euroscepticism” in many, but not in all, cases. Finally, another form of Euroscepticism, compromising Euroscepticism, acknowledges common European culture and identity and supports the principles and practice of integration, yet opposes “future build-up of European state” (Vasilopoulou 2011, 233).

UNDER WHICH CATEGORY OF EUROSCEPTICISM DO THE VIEWS OF SELECTED THREE PARTIES FALL?

The Alliance of Patriots, which is closest to the nativist political tradition, does not openly oppose human rights and is least characterized by the statements against the LGBT community in particular: at the very least, this is not a public and significant aspect of their party political discourse, despite populist conservative rhetoric, and the xenophobia and conservative social ethics voiced by party members concerning other matters. In something of a paradox, the Alliance of Patriots – largely perceived by the public as being “pro-Russian” - does not oppose EU membership, but is an active opponent of Georgia’s NATO membership. However, the general discourse and political rhetoric of the party places it in the Eurosceptics’ camp. According to the typology discussed above, the Alliance of Patriots holds the “soft Euroscepticism” of Szczerbiak and Taggart. It does not campaign against the idea of European integration, yet does not fully support the existing institutions and policies of the EU; similar to the nativist political parties of Western and Eastern European countries, the political rhetoric of the Alliance of Patriots illustrates the psychology of a “small nation”, which is expressed in its worry that national sovereign interests may not be sufficiently taken into account during integration into the European area. In these regards, the Alliance of Patriots is the classic demonstration of soft Euroscepticism.

According to the Pappas typology, **Georgian March** is not only nativist, but also an aggressive political force. Even though Georgian March does not openly oppose Georgia’s integration in the European Union, its political rhetoric is clearly against the idea of membership. Radical conservatism and populist, xenophobic, Islamophobic, racist and homophobic rhetoric of Georgian March is clearly not compatible either with the normative ideals of the EU, or with Georgia’s political objectives undertaken by the Association Agreement on its path to integration. Therefore, Georgian March, in its essence, is the demonstration of hard Euroscepticism. Similar to Orban’s Hungarian discourse, political rhetoric of Georgian March is also based on the idea that the European civilization is superior and acceptable, but the political liberalism and politics of equality implemented by the EU are not, and go against the traditional Christian civilization of Europe.

Among the three parties discussed in this work, **Georgian Idea** represents the most radical form of Euroscepticism in terms of its discourse. Unlike the previous two parties, appreciating European civilization and common European cultural, historical and religious features, Georgian Idea is a political movement with purely nationalistic ethics. The party’s messianic and isolationist political rhetoric is based on the ideas of Georgian civilization and morality, while depicting European integration as an opposing phenomenon to the notions of a traditional family and morality. Georgian Idea welcomes friendly relations with Russia as a historic partner with a common religion, and opposes NATO integration (Sartania 2019). Georgian Idea does not entirely, or at least not pragmatically, reject cooperation with the EU. Therefore, Georgian Idea corresponds with Vasilopoulo’s “conditional Euroscepticism” that rejects political integration, but does not oppose cooperation between the nations sharing common European characteristics. The table (3) below illustrates foreign policy visions and the levels and types of Euroscepticism for all three parties.

Table 3: Thematic analysis of foreign policy visions of three parties and determining their Euroscepticism.

<p>Parties</p> <p><u>Alliance of Patriots</u></p>	<p>Relations with Russia</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Never protested Russian occupation; 2. Party leader’s visit to Abkhazia; 3. Document published by “Dossier” on the connections between Russia and the Alliance of Patriots. 	<p>Attitudes towards Europe of European Integration</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does not discuss Georgia’s European integration issue in the negative context.
	<p>Attitudes towards the West</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “No to NATO” rhetoric; 2. Facebook administration deleting fake accounts of the Alliance of Patriots because of the anti-Western propaganda. 	<p>Characters of Euroscepticism</p> <p>Soft Euroscepticism Does not go against the idea of European integration; however, does not fully support the existing institutions and policies of the EU either.</p>
<p>Parties</p> <p><u>Georgian Idea</u></p>	<p>Relations with Russia</p> <p>Welcomes friendly relations with Russia as a historic partner with common religion.</p>	<p>Attitudes towards Europe of European Integration</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Views European integration as a threat of moral degeneration; 2. Views the Association Agreement as a mechanism to take children away from parents.
	<p>Attitudes towards the West</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opposes NATO integration. 	<p>Characters of Euroscepticism</p> <p>Conditional Euroscepticism (Vasilopulo) Rejects political integration but does not reject the cooperation among nations sharing common European characteristics.</p>

Parties

Georgian March

Relations with Russia

Estonia's intelligence report on the connections between Georgian March and Russia.

Attitudes towards Europe of European Integration

Does not oppose the cooperation with Europe in General. Sympathizes with Le Penian Europe.

Attitudes towards the West

1. Estonia's intelligence report stating that party "aims at rattling public support for joining the European Union and NATO";
2. Has anti-Soros attitudes;
3. Sympathizes with the Trump politics of the US.

Characters of Euroscepticism

Hard Euroscepticism

(Vasilopoulo):

European civilization is superior and acceptable, but political liberalism and the politics of equality is unacceptable and is not compatible with the preservation of European civilization.

Comparison of the mentioned three parties' Euroscepticism demonstrates one notable similarity that has wider implications. More specifically, in all three cases, Eurosceptic discourse is established using the language of civilization. On the one hand, Europe, as an abstract idea, culture and civilization is represented as a good and acceptable notion – but the European Union, as a specific political project, is presented as an enemy of the former idea, and is considered either less acceptable or not acceptable at all. It is noteworthy that the same language of civilization is used when we talk about the religious arguments, for which Brubaker provides an interesting explanation through the concept of "Christianism". Indeed, as noted above, in the political discourse of Georgian radical groups, Christianity is used not as a unity of theological values that could have been reflected in practical policies of far-right groups, but as Brubakerian "Christianism" - as a political position against specific phenomenon. In the case of Georgian far-right movements, this phenomenon is the European Union, which to them represents an enemy to their traditional ethics.

As has been seen, none of the parties reject the European project altogether, and do not reject European civilization at all. This may be explained by the fact that 80% of the Georgian population supports European integration, which is why rejecting the European political project entirely is not justified pragmatically. However, it is also clear that all these parties, and especially Georgian March and Georgian Idea, attack specific aspects of the policies that are inseparable parts of the normative ideals of the European Union using civilizational language and "Christianism". Therefore, using traditionalist and religious rhetoric as a political instrument in all these cases is also a form of Euroscepticism, and opposes the idea and practice of Georgia's integration in the EU.

HOW DO ULTRA-NATIONALIST PARTIES USE RELIGION IN GEORGIA AND WHAT ARE THE THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS?

As numerous research on Western European party politics conclude, European radical far-right parties use religion not for its theological-dogmatic and value-based content, but instead use it instrumentally, as an “identity maker”. For instance, based on the analysis of the French Front National, Oliver Roy notes that for populist parties, “Religion gets its notion as an identity marker in the first place, that enables them to differentiate between good “us” and bad “them” (Roy 2016, 186). Populist use of religion in Georgian politics is a traditional and frequent phenomenon, characterizing not only ultra-nationalist parties, but the political “establishment” as well. In both cases, the appropriation of the idea of religion takes place mostly through external, ritualistic forms pointing at Royian use of religion as an “identity maker”. In other words, these types of parties have few in common with Christian doctrine and dogmas in terms of politics. In general, none of the party programs reflect Christian theological dogmas. In these regards, Georgian ultra-nationalist groups start to resemble their Western counterparts that in fact carry secular political content and use Christianity to gain mass popular support or to attain other objectives.

In European countries, the use of Christian religion as a political instrument by radical right parties is homogenous. According to Roy, radical right parties in Europe are “as much Christian, as they reject Islam” (Roy 2016, 187). The same is evidenced by the Roger Brubaker’s research that perceives populism as “the style of policy making” and based on the analysis of the European countries, states that Christianity is the instrument of the discourse on “civilizationism”, where Islam is represented as an enemy and the discourse on “Christianism” is introduced to counterbalance it. Paradoxically, according to Brubaker, Christianity carries the ethics of political liberalism and while criticizing Islam as a backward religion, it calls for Western virtues, including minority rights. Brubaker’s case is an illustration of the ways radical political discourse uses Christianity not in its theological essence – which in this case should have been contrary to liberal political ethics – but in a “rhetorical style” and a political position to juxtapose “Christian civilization” and “Islamic culture” (Brubaker 2017). This reminds us of the polarity mentioned by Roy: a “good us” and a “bad them”. Therefore, Roy and Brubaker’s research confirms that the populist use of religion is focused on identity and is strictly negative (DeHanas & Shterin 2018). In other words, this type of discourse determines its identity by “negating” the identity of the other. Therefore, Christianity does not have a positive understanding in this discourse; instead, it is used as an identity in the process of negating that of the other.

Therefore, under these circumstances, religion is not a system of a value se.; instead, it is a facade instrument used to achieve other objectives. With this instrument, radical populist groups state who they are and who they consider to be their friends, rather than what its positive essence is. In these regards, it is noteworthy that ultra-nationalist groups both in Western Europe and in Georgia use religion and ethno-nationalist discourse as all-encompassing ideas uniting a whole set of Eurosceptic political ideas: these include the selective protection of human rights, homophobia, anti-integrationist rhetoric, Europe’s depiction as an enemy to “traditional identity”, as well as the rejection of egalitarian ideas. Roy and Brubaker’s theories explain the case of Georgia effectively. Georgian populist groups that are the subject of this discussion - the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Georgian March and Georgian Idea - resort to the instrumental use of religious discourse and concepts. The claim to protect “Christian civilization” is in fact a mechanism for political positioning, which in practice implies the opposition to Georgia’s approximation with the EU.

HOW DO RADICAL GROUPS MANAGE TO INSTRUMENTALIZE RELIGION?

Regardless of whether or not the mentioned groups use Christianity genuinely, or just instrumentally, it is obvious that this way they try to garner the support of Christian voters. However, research carried out by Montgomery (2015) in thirteen European countries demonstrated a paradox: even though radical populist parties actively present themselves as the guardians of identity and values, they do not draw masses of Christian voters. Furthermore, Montgomery showed that the more religious the person is, the less is the probability that he/she will be prepared to vote for a radical populist party.

The findings of the Montgomery research confirm the results from the wider research traditions of the past. For instance, while analyzing the Front National case, Mayer and Moreau (1995) established that the support of radical populist parties increased among individuals that had expressed less religious sentiments. Similarly, Lubbers et al. (2002), as well as Norris, concluded that the supporters of the populist radical right are less religious than an average voter. Arzheimer and Carter (2003) established that religiosity has a small direct impact on the electoral support of populist radical groups.

The results of the Montgomery research also correspond to the Georgian political reality. Even though 89% of the Georgian population identifies as Orthodox Christian (Pew Research 2017), electoral support for the radical populist group is consistently low. This may have several explanations. Firstly, as mentioned, according to the NDI survey of 2020, 80% of the Georgian population supports the country's integration in the European Union. Therefore, it may be assumed that the majority, while considering themselves to be Orthodox Christian and use religion as the least of self-identification markers, do not identify with any party conveying Eurosceptic political messages, and ultimately make pragmatic, rational choices in favor of more mainstream and pro-integrationist parties.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Georgian far-right nationalist political parties demonstrates that their attitude towards European integration is negative. However, the categorization done in the context of the theories provided in this work illustrates that the Euroscepticism of the examined political parties differ in their styles of discourse, as well as in the quality and political essence of their Euroscepticism. First of all, it was evidenced that the Alliance of Patriots belong to the group of "Soft Eurosceptics" of Szczerbiak and Taggart, while Georgian March perfectly fits into the category of "Hard Euroscepticism" offered by Szczerbiak and Taggart; for its part, Georgian Idea falls into the "Conditional Euroscepticism" of Vasilopoulo. Similar categorization is important to ensure analytical clarity. The work demonstrated that these three parties have different political rhetoric towards the European Union and European integration, which may have different electoral impacts.

From the Euroscepticism categorization prism, we can conclude that the case of Georgia is best explained by the so-called "civilizational" paradigm, which implies the approval of the idea of European civilization and disapproval of the political project of European Union, as the agenda of political liberalism, which is also presented as being in opposition of the same European civilization. It is noteworthy that Brubakerian "Christianism" is manifested as a part of this exact "civilizational" discourse, which explains the instrumental use of Christianity by Georgia's far-right groups. More specifically, the discourse analysis of these parties demonstrates that in each case, rhetoric regarding religion, traditions, and Christianity is used negatively for political positioning – this is in tandem with identifying and rejecting the "other", which is a political rival.

Politically, this is the European Union and the process of Georgia's integration within it, while practically, it is the resistance to political liberalism, a culture of equality and a democratic environment free of phobias that characterizes these groups. However, as social research and the results of the elections demonstrate, the attempt of the Georgian far-right to appropriate religious discourse and Christian political energy is essentially failing. It may be assumed that low electoral ratings are caused by their anti-Western rhetoric when the country's absolute majority shows stable support for Georgia's integration in the Euro-Atlantic world.

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