The Orthodox Church and the Reframing of Georgian National Identity: a New Hegemony?¹

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Tatia Mebagishvili – Ilia State University, tatia_mebagishvili@iliauni.edu.ge
Elene Gavashelishvili – Ilia State University, elene.gavashelishvili@iliauni.edu.ge
Konstantine Ladaria – Ilia State University, kladaria@yahoo.com
Shota Khinchagashvili – Ilia State University, geoliberali@gmail.com
Sergo Ratiani – Ilia State University, sergo_ratiani@iliauni.edu.ge

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Abstract

In this paper we present findings from a wider project that investigates the role of the orthodox church in contemporary processes of collective identity construction in Georgia (South Caucasus). The Georgian society is currently in a transition process where the Soviet values, norms and system of relationships are being devaluated whereas new ones have not yet been established. We assume that the Orthodox Church has been strengthening its influence on society and contributing much to the construction of national identity since Georgia regained independence in 1991. We argue that in this process, the content and practical meaning of Christianity have been redefined so as to accommodate interests of leading powers and that its ideology is likely to replace the Marxist-Leninist one.

Our study builds on the existing literature and an extensive body of both primary and secondary data: archival research, an analysis of the press and ecclesiastic publications, the World Values Survey and CRRC Household Surveys. Apart from these, in-depth interviews and several case studies are foreseen as well. However, as this project is actually in process, we present in this paper findings from the first step of our analysis, i.e. media analysis.

We believe that this project will have a large societal relevance by contributing to open discussion of the issue in the public sphere of the country. Besides, our paper reaches beyond the Georgian case and tackles the issue of the future of democracy and of religion-based nationalism in the South Caucasus.

Introduction

Our research’s overall aim is to envisage Georgian collective identity and its ethnocultural and religious dimension in post-Soviet period. After being the part of the Soviet Union for 70 years, Georgia is currently going through a transitional period, still searching for its identity. Twenty years have passed, but controversies and discussions over the issue are getting more and more intensive. Various articles are being published on who we are and what kind of people we are as Georgians. Actually, the Georgian Orthodox Church (from now on referred to as GOC) seems to give a solution by generating the formula according to which to be Georgian is to be orthodox.

The project in general addresses one of the fundamental issues of the transformation process - identity-building, which, in turn, inevitably touches upon the issue of relationship between politics and religion. In fact, one of the spheres where the relevance of the GOC and its growing importance in the development of Georgian national identity can be observed is the field of politics (and we are going to do it in future steps of the research). We assume that as the GOC’s role grows, it considers itself to be the bearer of the ideology of the state. The GOC possesses symbolic capital, which politicians try to use. Functionally, the GOC assumes an ideological function and tries to provide the government with certain ideological backing. This may be manifested by the fact that politicians and different political parties are trying to benefit from the GOC’s growing authority in this field. This way, they hope to acquire a sort of legitimacy. As regards the GOC, we think that it is trying to make use of the government and the politicians’ policies in order to improve its own situation, politically as well as economically. In fact, the first step of our research – media analysis suggests that indeed, politicians speak for the GOC intensively.

This leads us to view the economic situation of the GOC: in October 2002, the President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze and the Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II signed the so-called “Concordat”, the Constitutional Agreement between the state and the Apostolic
Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia. This agreement granted the GOC a privileged, tax-free status in Georgia.

In order to grasp the situation, one should take history into account. In the later decades of the soviet regime, the government changed its aggressive policy towards the GOC, “reconciled” with it and tolerated its existence while maintaining control over it. Therefore, churches continued to function, but they were subordinated to the government’s control (e.g. there was no guarantee that a confession made in the church would be confidential and would not be misused by the state agencies). Today the GOC is independent, but in the transition period from totalitarian to post-totalitarian system it remained untouched, therefore, we suspect that its ideology is likely to replace the Marxist-Leninist one.

In the following sections, we briefly discuss the state of research in identity studies in Georgia, more specifically – national and religious identities. Next, we clarify our understanding of the basic concepts and theoretical perspectives in literature about nationalism and secularization. Then we move to the methods employed (and to be employed) and, finally, the first findings from our research.

**Identity Studies in Georgia**

The study of contemporary Georgian national identity, as well as modern Georgian nationalism, is still a relatively virgin field of academic enquiry. Before the fall of Soviet Union, Georgia was interesting to international academic community mainly for linguistic, literal and historical studies. Furthermore, after the declaration of independence and after entering the community of sovereign states (United Nations), part of the international scholarship became preoccupied mainly with regional studies in the prism of international relations (security and economic issues), especially on the background of interethnic tensions and armed conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. Despite the growing number of informative literature on conflict and post-conflict situations, little has been done in the field of political anthropology and identity shift studies. Needless to say, the (attempts for) fundamental societal changes after the Rose Revolution in Georgia (November 2003) needs more attention.

Along with national identity, academic literature frequently overlooks the problem of building a modern secular state. This is not surprising as Georgian history – according to the data historians have provided so far – intrinsically connected these two issues, which are the subject of our research.

Not exceptionally, the resurgence of religion since the ‘90s represents one of the most important socio-cultural aspects in Georgia. Despite hot debates over the issue, the growing number of informative articles and critical essays in Georgian periodicals, systematic study and monographic works on Georgian collective identity and its social dynamics are scarce. Among few exceptions one could mention World Values Survey (2006) – research projects supported by Soros Foundation and Household Surveys by CRRC on yearly basis; however, the conceptualization of the issue is yet to be done. In terms of sacred and secular spaces, the Georgian case is especially instructive in the region since, according to the surveys mentioned above, the renaissance of religiososity is far stronger than in Armenia and Azerbaijan.
Basic concepts and theoretical perspectives

The main interpretative tools and analytical notions applied in our work come from methodological and theoretical tradition of social constructionism. It is a set of various theories of sociology of knowledge and social epistemology, aspiring to analyze different aspects of collective life of humans and socio-cultural system, its functioning, dynamics and interrelation of its constituent elements, etc. Its main objective is to reveal socially determined and constructed nature of collective life, practices and ideas, notions, values and cultural elements, those that are traditionally perceived of as a priori “given”, unquestioned and natural. From this perspective, the notion of identity will be viewed as an ever-changing category, stressing on the process of communication, actors, agents involved, process of interpretation, mediation and distribution of collectively appreciated public perceptions, distributed through symbolized and abstracted meanings. Hence, the basic understanding is that social constructions, be they identity or belonging, are never static - they are constantly in change, frequently negotiated, contested, - dynamic and ambiguous elements to observe, especially in case of a society undergoing fundamental and rapid reorganization of social and political life that (rather indirectly) generates redefinition of social constructs.

Hence, social identity is a central notion for the study. It can be defined as the cognitive phenomenon derived from one’s feelings and knowledge of self (internal dimension - self-identification) referred to group membership, the one that is shared with others and also represents a mechanism for self-categorization (external dimension) (Jenkins 1996: 23, 83), (Rosenberg 1979), (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, Wetherell, 1987), (Tajfel, Turner 1986: 94-109). It is a “social” aspect of personal self, individual perception which determines the notion of “us”— internalized group membership. Belonging (self-categorization) inevitably produces in-group and out-group dimensions in social perception, where the strength of (belonging to) the former leads member of one group to reveal and display in-group favouritism. It comes from basic psychological drive to attain positive image and esteem of the self (self-concept) (Tajfel, Turner 1986), typically via comparing one’s group with others’ and stressing positive bias toward a group one belongs to (positive distinction and comparison).

It is important here to define other several terms relevant for the discussion. We deal with Georgian society - large social group representing (the core unit of a) political community (Georgia), consolidated by collectively perceived sameness and shared values. Hence, the notions of nation and national identity are central here.

There are numerous accurately formulated, classical (sometimes mutually exclusive) definitions of a nation. Most of them seem to agree in seeing nation as an imagined collectivity sharing several basic elements such as territory, language and/or culture (Gellner 1983: 6-7), (Anderson 1991: 6), (Kymlicka 1995: 11). This imagination is attainable through the transmission and distribution of common culture (process of homogenization), generating shared national identity (“identity” understood as a sense of belonging, self-identity, reciprocally recognized by members of collectivity in social interaction). National identity itself is a complex phenomenon with a number of social dimensions, among which collective mnemonic aspect is central for us. It is worth emphasizing that national identity not only stresses the in-group similarities vis-à-vis the other group. The differentiation maxim is illustrated on the case of disintegrating Yugoslavia (Ignatieff 1999: 91-102); it also needs a discourse - sense of “sharing [collective] fate” (Bhabha 2000: 19).
Transformed nationhood and nationalism in Post-Soviet space (field of Nationalism Studies)

First of all, there is already a rich analytical, theoretical and methodological tradition of interdisciplinary studies of nationalism and (specific) national identities. In our case it is especially relevant to note the works that are concerned with rising nationalism(s) in the post-Socialist world. Undoubtedly, post-Communist transformation of collective identities is impossible without reflecting on pre-existing totalitarian system and its institutions. Brubaker’s perspective (Brubaker 1998: 285-288) is especially illuminating: he timely criticized the “repressed” paradigm in the discussion of nationalisms—which in this case would erroneously surmise federal, multinational state system of USSR as the political organism which supposedly conserved and only delayed previously existing nationalisms with its supranational discourse and Soviet political structure. Affirming that Soviet policy was antinationalist but nothing less than national in its essence, he fairly concludes that USSR “went further than any other state before or since in institutionalizing territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental social categories. In doing so it inadvertently created a political field supremely conducive to nationalism” (Brubaker 1998: 272-305). Similar conclusion is drawn from Walker Connor’s foundational studies of Soviet national policy (especially work of 1984).

Counter-secularization hypothesis and civil religion (field of sociology of religion)

The process of resurrection of public religions worldwide, starting up from the 1990-ies, brought about the necessity to revisit certain theory in social sciences. Namely, it challenged the expectation of religions’ diminishing role in public sphere after the process of modernization - view of 19th century that became orthodox in 1950-ies.

According to this dominant theory, the processes of modernization and secularization should be viewed in direct interrelation. If the past institutions and modes of thinking were saturated by the phenomenon of sacred, the latter’s influence were undermined by the processes of modernization, rationalization and bureaucratization. This perspective predicts that these processes will ultimately eradicate the sacred from public space and will leave it to the domain of private life. However, the early 1990-ies saw the emergence of alternative concept which called the mentioned theory of secularization in question (see e.g. works of Peter L. Berger and Jose Casanova). The rise of public religions in contemporary world, be it the case of newly disestablished block of socialist countries, Islamic states, Latin America or USA, represents the empirical basis for rethinking old theory. Hence, the new theory suggests that today the world is religious as ever and the faith in inevitability of secularization was just a mere illusion of the Enlightenment. Today religion plays a decisive (often problematic) role in the process of democratization, representing a backlash of conservative values in the face of liberalization and “Westernization”.

We try to put the Georgian case in context of rich theoretical literature and see where and how it can be situated among the biggest trends of secularization theory: does it rather fit with the demand-side perspective, according to which the importance of religion gradually decreases with the advent of industrialization? Does it support the supply-side theory, which suggests that religious actors play a major role because public demand for religion is constant? Or does it add value to the third perspective, i.e. the thesis of secularization based on existential security (Inglehart, Norris 2004)? Another point we try to clarify is whether we have a kind of civil religion (Bellah 1967) in Georgia.
Firstly, there are theories which take functional differentiation as the key concept in understanding secularization (Emile Durkheim, Steve Bruce, Thomas Luckman, Karel Dobbelaere). According to these theories, the importance of religion will decrease with the advent of industrialization, and whatever religious leaders and organizations try, society will gradually become indifferent towards spiritual declarations. On the one hand, functional differentiation results in the fact that religion loses influence over other spheres of life, on the other hand – it causes the privatization of religion. However, later studies showed that functional differentiation and privatization of religion does not necessarily bring the devaluation of religion, thus this component has been removed from the content of secularization (Giga Zedania 2009: 10). Starting from the functional differentiation theory, we need to see how separated different spheres are in Georgia, and how private is religious faith as well.

Secondly, we borrow from the classic approach of existential insecurity (Inglehart, Norris 2004), which we consider as another instance of side-effect of institutional and societal transformation. According to this theory, the level of religiosity depends on the feeling of existential insecurity – the more insecure people feel the more religious they are. Insecurity can be caused not only by poverty or war, but by special leader or occasional events like fear of terrorism and natural disasters. We try to compare the 6 hypotheses (the religious values hypothesis, the religious culture hypothesis, the religious participation hypothesis, the civic engagement hypothesis, the demographic hypothesis, and the religious market hypothesis) tested to check how far Georgia fits with existential security theory. However, the most interesting point for us in this theory is the claim that existential insecurity affects people in their early age, so that they might become religious even at more secure times as adults. The Georgian case could be in agreement with this theory, considering that the most religious group in Georgia today consists of the youngest adults, who were brought up in the worst economic and political conditions – the beginning of 1990-ies.

Thirdly, we formulate our research question in relation to the religious market theory (Rodney Stark, Roger Finke 2000), which is based on supply-side perspective. The theory states that conditions of religious pluralism and freedom positively affect the level of religiousness – the more competition there is, the more religious people are. This is particularly interesting for Georgia, as both religious freedom and pluralism are problematic. By signing the “Concordat” (the Constitutional Agreement between the state of Georgia and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia) in 2002, the Georgian state gave certain privileges to the GOC, and therefore, religious competition became uneven. Established or not, the GOC benefits from the same conditions. However, the high level of religiosity in the country seems to suggest that religious market theory does not explain all cases.

Fourthly, there is the issue of civil religion (Bellah 1967). The links implicitly existing between national and religious identities necessitates us to analyze what we are dealing with: religious nationalism or civil religion? Specifically, we try to (a) characterize the emerging “civic” and “liberal” type of nationalism of political elite and (b) how it is being challenged for hegemony in religious discourse of institutional “author” of another version of Georgian identity – the GOC.

Inevitably, this is shown on the background of State-Church relations, including but not restricted to legal dimension. The pool of data to generalize upon will be constituted by printed media, as well as by interviews and pre-election campaign material in order to do a qualitative analysis.
Methodology

Defining how the GOC operates to influence people’s view of national identity is a very timely issue which has not been studied yet. It is a complex issue which needs to be addressed accordingly, from different sources. Therefore, we decided to base our research on several qualitative methods, which would give us a relatively complete picture of the matter.

First of all, we started with collecting relevant data existing in Georgia: researches, articles, and the “Concordat” itself. The data provided by Values Survey undertaken in 2006 by Soros Foundation and Household Surveys done by CRRC on yearly basis, which is available online, shows the impact of religion upon people’s understanding of national identity, as well as their idea about the church and its role. It is important to know how people view “religiousness” and whether they include it in their understanding of national identity.

Apart from these researches, we have studied public press. It is the field where the GOC’s activities in public sphere can be seen, and here we can examine what is the ideology that the GOC was and is spreading, both its content and forms of enunciation.

We analyzed the most popular (the mostly sold) public newspapers of 3 different time terms: 1989-1991, 1999, and 2008-2010. They were available at the National Library in Tbilisi. As we were limited in time, we could not have afforded to extend our study to more years. However, we did not choose these time terms arbitrarily: they reflect 3 different stages in Georgian history after the soviet past, with 3 different governments. We took the first term as a crucial period in building national consciousness - it was the time when the Soviet Union collapsed, and when the first national movements appeared in Georgia. We compared this period to the third term, i.e. to today, as well as to the year 1999 that we picked as a middle-term not only because there was a different president ruling the country, but because the state’s policy in general and its orientation had changed.

The purpose of the analysis was to see the presence of religion in public press. We examined whether ecclesiastic figures talked about nation or nationalism, or whether state figures talked about religion. In the latter case, we would also identify our potential respondents (if still alive) for the next step of our research. Moreover, assuming that the press responds to public demand and publishes articles accordingly, we judged that articles about religion written by journalists or simply sent to the publisher were to be considered as well.

As regards the “Concordat”, the Constitutional Agreement between the state of Georgia and the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia, this is perhaps the most relevant document in religion and secularization studies in Georgia, as it touches upon the issue of religious freedom. According to the 20-point religious freedom index (http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/ 06/07/2011), the state should not favour one religion. Defining upon religious freedom in Georgia helped us judging about religious competition, and therefore, enabled us to locate the Georgian situation in the context of religious market theory.

After having analyzed all these data, we started to work on questionnaires for in-depth interviews that we are actually carrying out with 2 different groups: clerics from different regions of Georgia, and politicians. This method aims not only to establish how “The Ideal Georgian” is and which values are favored by GOC, but also to define how the GOC and State relate. All researchers of our team are actually interviewing clerics throughout the country, and then we will deal with politicians.

Finally, we intend to study some cases. On the one hand, we chose to see two pre-election campaigns: for the presidential elections of 5 January 2008, and for parliamentary elections of 21 May. These cases should not be left out in this research, because they reflect the best the manipulation of politicians with GOC authorities and vice versa. On the other hand, we will investigate the important issue of the “Union of Orthodox Parents” and the
newly born “Public Orthodox Movement” in Georgia, as the GOC’s and the state’s reaction towards their deeds means a lot. Two researchers will be charged to study the pre-election campaigns, while two others will deal with the cases of orthodox movements.

For the pre-election campaigns, we will have to study TV spots, as political parties advertised on TV. We hope to get them from a person that is working for public broadcasting and is also a partner of the university.

As regards the religious movements, we will focus on their activities in the latest years (from 2008) and search for the GOC’s and state’s reactions in the media (on television as well as in the press). This will be an easier research as we will use the inductive method, limiting our scope to the exact period when the activity in question had happened. Moreover, most of contemporary data either published or casted are available online.

During all the research process, we have been meeting with the whole team regularly, at least once every two weeks, in order to recapitulate all the work done and discuss the following actions.

All these considered, to define how the GOC operates to influence people’s view of national identity, we have to follow several steps and, as this is a very timely issue, have to be ready for unforeseen events that might occur during the research process – like, for example, the creation of a new movement called “national-religious movement” in April 2011.

Preliminary Findings – the Space of Religion in Media Discourse

Our preliminary findings are mostly based on the analysis of public press and the study of relevant researches carried out in Georgia.

The general striking observation about public press is that in 1989-1991 religion is much less present than in the papers of 1999 and 2008-2010. This shows the dynamics of the issue gaining actuality. However, most important for our research is the way religion is represented, the ideological content of religious faith prevailing in newspapers.

We grouped the relevant information from the selected newspapers inductively in different categories across the three time terms, and complemented them with data provided by World Values Survey 2008 and European Values Study 2008. The next subparagraphs concern these thematic categories from two or all three time terms of the study.

Messianism and Reclusion

Messianic and reclusive ideas are very frequently observed in the papers of 1999 and 2008-2010. However, there is an interesting point in 1990, which could be considered as the beginning of messianic ideology – the sacralization of Georgian nation by the Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II, who announced that “From today on, anyone who assassinates a Georgian, regardless of the victim’s blameworthiness, will be declared as an enemy of Georgian nation. The murderer’s name and surname will be registered in the Patriarchate’s special book and be transmitted from generation to generation as shameful and condemned.”

The idea of Georgia's particularity – favouring reclusion - has always been backed up with the argument that Georgia is St. Mary's share country. By 1999 this ideology is already


Note: all the quotes are translated by the authors and all the sources are in Georgian language.

3 “Kviris Pašitra” N1 (193) 4-10 January 1999, p. 5; N2 (194) 11-17 January 1999, p. 8;
N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25; N36 (229) 6-12 September 1999, p. 8;
radiant and has found its expression in a negative attitude and fear towards other religious denominations, ecumenism, the “West”, globalization and modernity.

1. Other religious denominations

Even though most of the aggression is directed towards Jehovah’s witnesses, there is a manifested concern and intolerance towards “sects” and other religions in general. To take the broadest examples, the editor of the paper “Patriarchate’s News” clearly states that water blessed by other religions is easily spoiled, whereas the Patriarch himself assesses “the massive introduction of other religions” as a very dangerous problem, against which the state needs to take “decisive measures”. Moreover, no other Christian denomination is bearer of truth except from the orthodox one: “according to rumors from the Vatican, Saint Mary blames Catholic priests in breaking Christian laws and blesses orthodox Christianity”. It is not accidental that on Resurrection day in Jerusalem, the divine fire gets animated only in the presence of an orthodox Patriarch. A journalist concludes that “If no other religion apart from orthodox Christianity manages to get installed in Georgia, then its territorial integrity will be secured as well, whereas where other religion manages to set foot, the danger of losing the territory will appear.”

It should be singled out for our research that in an interview, when the Patriarch was asked about the role of orthodox Christianity in forging Georgian nation’s consciousness, his answer implied the idea that separating from orthodox roots deprived the Georgian people from their vocation and from the ability of creating worthy pieces of art. As a journalist writes, “In spite of such immense and frequent invasions, Georgia survived, what made it endure? God shielded it.” Later, on 28 November 2004 at a Sunday mess in St. Trinity Church of Tbilisi, Ilia II was precise too: “it is extraordinary that this small nation has created immense culture and added it to the world heritage. Certain bigger countries, bigger nations than us in number have not managed to do it. It means that our Lord gives us this strength, this skill. It is known that more than 5 million Georgian people live in Turkey. They are Muslims and so narrow-minded by this religion that they could not create anything during the last centuries. By contrast, in spite of being constantly involved in wars and conflicts, in spite of never having peaceful time, Georgian orthodox man has always been creating – and still is – marvels.”

Despite the strongly articulated messianic messages found in 1999, we can still encounter several articles (12 out of 280) which suggest that God exists for people of other religious faith, or these people are as worthy as orthodox Christians and miracles can happen with them too (11 of these articles are taken from foreign newspapers). By contrast, we have

7 “Kviris Palitra” N52 (245) 27 December 1999-2 January 2000, p. 3.
11 “Kviris Palitra” N52 (245) 27 December 1999-2 January 2000, p. 3.
13 http://www.patriarchate.ge/?action=qadageba_show&id=126 (04.07.2011)
not met such articles in the papers of 2008-2010 anymore. It seems the power of GOC has grown again between 1999 and 2008, but even if it was not the case, anyway the results of World Values Survey 2008 suggest its fair influence: they show that only 3% of Georgian population “completely trust” people of another religion and 31% “trust a little” (others either do not trust very much or at all).  

2. Ecumenism

Ecumenism is unilaterally viewed as a bad thing. In 1999 it is a subject of pride that GOC left the ecumenical council on 20th May 1997, and that all contracts with “heretics” have been abolished on 8th October 1998. This decision of the Patriarch is judged as “savior of spiritual life” and it is highlighted that “the Georgian church is the only one on earth that publicly denounced and condemned the soul-ruining denominations of recent times.”

In a later issue of the same newspaper, the rector of Theological Academy distinguishes between two types of ecumenism: “There is a certain form of ecumenism which is considered as heretic. Along with this, there exists an ‘Orthodox ecumenism’ as well, if we may call it so. A famous American theologian, archpriest Georges Florovsky explains that ecumenism is heresy when it denies Orthodoxy’s uniqueness in the process of uniting denominations.”

Therefore, the GOC favours the unification within Orthodoxy, “without any dogmatic or conceptual compromise … Orthodoxy has nothing to compromise.” Because the Christ’s church is one (as He didn’t establish many), the road to salvation is also one – it lies in Orthodoxy.

3. The West

The GOC’s ideology is definitely anti-western. According to it, “the west demagogically uses the notions of freedom, equality and justice, depriving them from their true meaning.” The west’s material well-being is based on force and hypocrisy. It is from the west that “heretic literature” is introduced in Georgia, as well as humanitarian aid which offer physical salvation in exchange of the spiritual one. In general, “the West” is viewed as a spiritless area, focused only on physical salvation, and the Patriarch Ilia II repeats it on a Sunday mess on 26th December 2004: “according to statistical data, the rates of suicide is highest exactly in developed countries. It often happens that a wealthy person commits suicide, and they do it because they have nothing but this wealth, their soul is empty; they have no faith, no hope and no love.”

Western values are compared and even contrasted to Eastern values, the former being transient, the latter – eternal: “western civilization, using means of this world, tries to establish paradise on earth, whereas the East considers human life as a preparation for eternal

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N32 (225) 9-15 August 1999, p. 23 (2 articles); N34 (227) 23-29 August 1999, p. 23;
N37 (230) 13-19 September 1999, p. 23 (2 articles).
N29 (222) 19-25 July 1999, p. 23;
N31 (224) 2-8 August 1999, p. 23;
N32 (225) 9-15 August 1999, p. 23 (2 articles); N34 (227) 23-29 August 1999, p. 23;
N37 (230) 13-19 September 1999, p. 23 (2 articles).
16 “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25.
17 Ibid.
18 “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25.
24 http://www.patriarchate.ge/?action=qadageba_show&id=132 (4.07.2011)
life. The west has made of man an inculpable fetish, while the East is hoping for true God until today.25 Religious individualism, as a European value, is also viewed as a negative fact.26 The western values include “entertainment, freedom—which often ends in freedom from morality—and, most importantly, debauchery. Debauchery is a tempting fruit, easily reached, but baneful. This is why they have made of the massive debauchery process a syndrome that is difficult to prevent. They offered everything easy and simple, simplified and ruining doctrines of different sects in exchange of our dogmatic orthodox teaching.”27

Such inability of distinguishing good from evil, eternal from transient, gives birth to the principle “everything is acceptable”—this is how the west “tries to mingle and unify all religions, nations and cultures” and becomes dangerous28.

This character of the west has an explanation in history: it all started in 1059 when “the western church left the orthodox realm”29, when eternal values began to devaluate, giving place to transient values. The separation of the churches caused the rise of secret orders and societies like those of freemasons and Zionists, which “fight against orthodox church and nation-states”30. Such societies are today “ruling the world” as they are connected with big international organizations like “NATO, UNO, the Vatican, special-service agents of USA or other countries.”31

An openly anti-western and pro-Russian politician, Vakhtang Goguadze, links the western interests to Lenin’s (as an evil, anti-religious figure) by stating that “instead of implementing certain satanic interests of the west in Russia, this immense orthodox country, by the means of the revolution (it is no news that the revolution, namely Lenin, was backed up by the west), it happened the opposite way.”32

It should be noted, however, that in GOC’s view, Russia is not a part of the West. It is assessed separately, even distinctively from USSR. While USSR is often judged as evil, Russia as an orthodox Christian country not only cannot be bad or enemy, but according to St. Mary, has a “special destiny”33. At the same time, the Catholic church will see a crisis.34 According to the same Vakhtang Goguadze, the west fought against USSR in the name of national values, and after having defeated it, they were intending to eliminate those values in the name of cosmopolitanism.35 By going against national values, the west goes against God itself, as “God gave divine individuality not only to man, but to nations as well.”36 Anyway, now that they have successfully achieved the first step of their plan, they are fighting against national values: “It was directly indicated in Allen Dulles’ programme (Allen Dulles—the founder of Central Intelligence Agency in the USA): we have to do our best to grow these people dull. We have to confuse them, so that they cannot distinguish good from bad. To achieve this, we should destroy their nationality, their national spirit, we should corrupt their youth, instill hatred towards different people, especially the Russian nation.”37 Consequently, Russia cannot à priori be part of the west. A Russian official, the vice-mayor of Moscow,

25 “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25.
28 “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
who is Georgian from origin, has even constructed a church in Georgia – and this is a welcomed fact, without any questions or comments.\(^{38}\)

In the period from 2008-2010, the same spirit is maintained despite the war of August. According to the best-seller newspapers of the period, the responsible for this war is the pro-western government of Georgia, and thus Russia is a kind of supreme judge keeping its role of the west’s balancing force. The western globalist culture follows a freemason scenario and their only impregnable fortress is orthodoxy.\(^{39}\)

Even as far as in 2010, on a Sunday mess on 12th December, the Georgian patriarch referred to Dostoyevsky (pay attention, a Russian writer – from orthodox world) and carefully belittled the west again: “Iliia II spoke about human views towards beauty as well. ‘Dostoyevsky said that beauty will save humankind. He meant supreme beauty – the Lord’, - said His Holiness. According to the patriarch’s declaration, it is almost impossible to find in Europe a woman wearing a dress – everyone wears trousers.”\(^{40}\)

4. Globalization and Modernity

As globalization and modernity are western phenomena, the GOC is of a clearly anti-modern and anti-globalist orientation. It views westernization and globalization (thus NATO and EU) as processes driven by freemasons, who aim at ruling the world.\(^{41}\) Freemasonry is “a secret international-cosmopolitan organization, who aims at uniting the world as one country by the means of a universal revolution. It aspires to turn all religions into one super-religion and fights against the orthodox church and nation-states.”\(^{42}\)

It is understood that uniting the world is an artificial, forced process, which breaks the bounds of nationality, faith, traditions and culture. This process serves the interest of the west, namely, the world rule, as “with one political course, it will be easier to manipulate”\(^{43}\). It is declared that “the whole orthodox world is threatened by globalization” and as a proof for this statement, they refer to Zbigniev Brzezinski, who would have said that orthodoxy is their first enemy on their way to world integration.\(^{44}\)

Modern values represent a danger because they distance people from Christian teachings – because it is a direct threat to orthodoxy,\(^{45}\), because boundaries are open to “heretic literature” and it opens the way to the devil.\(^{46}\) Not surprisingly, the devil is very tricky and careful – “Satan assumes the name of goodness and glides in our pocket as silently as a snake. For example, democracy is a noble name by its true content”.\(^{47}\). The devil influences human thinking by different means of rendering people “zombies”. These means include publicity of foreign products like “Coca-cola” or “Sprite”, “unbearable noise in the street, at work, in the market, never-ending simple-plotted TV serials, a whirlwind of all kinds of dizzying information, the turning on and off of electro energy, social problems, fear of tomorrow etc. Such kind of “self” produced zombie methods unconsciously become the

\(^{38}\) “Kviris Palitra” N44 (2376) 1-7 November 1999, p. 2.


\(^{40}\) http://www.patriarchate.ge/?action=news_show&mode=news&id=587 (12.07.2011)

\(^{41}\) “Kviris Palitra” N5 (197) 1-7 February 1999, p. 23.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.


\(^{46}\) “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.

reason of our dullness and foolishness, which later turns into a tendency, sometimes – a lifestyle, and it can even become a tragedy.”

Worst of all, GOC sees in the global political system and modern political ideologies eschatological signs: “The west uses all means to achieve its goal. This is the sign of apocalyptic time. The universally driven integration looks very much like cancer, whose metastases steadily reach the whole world, and here is the veiled reference to the allegory according to which cancer first kills the body, and then dies itself.” In Georgia, only the GOC is resisting this world integration ideology of the enemy – GOC can solve not only spiritual, but political problems as well. Special emphasize is made on the role of the patriarch in driving Russian troops away from Georgian territory after the war.

Globalization process covers other dangers as well: it changes lifestyle and values system, which are contrasted to those of pre-modern times. This is well articulated by the patriarch on the Sunday mess of 26th December 2004: “In general, man has acquired a lot of knowledge in recent years. I emphasize – a lot of knowledge, and not deep; and along with it, a relatively superficial thinking as well. Man superficially values everything: in science, culture, in everyday life as well; they care about today and does not seem to think about the future. … Our ancestors were different. Although they knew less, they had thought deeply and their reasoning was deepened too. This used to help them much.”

In fact, certain nostalgia for the old, “traditional” times is obvious, and it is contrasted to modernity: “people today have become little physically too, not to mention morality and spirituality. Such a devaluation of sex, such a spread and accession of immorality are far more miserable than famine … In old times people used to have fear of God.” – says a very respected old man in an interview.

The trend of contrasting “good old times” to today has spread over the field of art: certain music, especially rock, is thought to have evil origins, whereas certain movies are blasphemes. “It is wholly possible that listening to any kind of music or watching any kind of film will ‘dirty’ our conscience in such a way that our ear or eye will not notice anything”. As the Georgian patriarch affirms on 12th December 2010, “music used to ennoble people before, now it ruins. There exists music and antimusic.”

However, the most interesting part concerns technical progress and information flow as the most dominant signs of modernity. They are highly disapproved by the GOC: “Everything went wrong… because of technologies”, it is considered that computers and virtual reality have an unhealthy influence over people. The scientific-technical achievements are viewed as tools for exercising massive psychological influence over people. As the patriarch states in the last issue of the year 1999, the rapid development of science and technology caused nihilism and indifference in developed countries, and so the spiritual development of people lagged far behind the technological one. Five years later, his

50 “Kviris Palitra” N5 (197) 1-7 February 1999, p. 23.
52 http://www.patriarchate.ge/?action=qadageba_show&id=132 (4.07.2011)
55 “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25.
57 http://www.patriarchate.ge/?action=news_show&mode=news&id=587 (18.07.2011)
61 “Kviris Palitra” N52 (245) 27 December 1999-2 January 2000, p. 3.
position seems to have intensified as he says on the Sunday mess of 26th December 2004: “spiritually and morally man is lagging behind scientific development. Unfortunately, not only is he lagging behind … even worse happened – he gradually went backwards.”

Overall, negative attitude and fear towards other religious denominations, ecumenism, the “West”, globalization and modernity were part of GOC’s reclusive ideology, which was manifested most explicitly by two facts throughout the year 1999: a unilateral protest against bringing religious icons to an exposition abroad (in the USA), and a unilateral negative view of the Pope’s visit to Georgia. Today, in 2011, we are still witnessing a protest against new biometric passports. The protest is explained by dangerous chipcards which have an evil influence on humans.

Sacred and Secular – Merged Spheres

Articles concerning religion can be categorized from another point of view as well – those that do not make a distinction of sacred and secular spheres. This makes a big category: it includes all the above mentioned statements about Georgia as St. Mary’s share country and the spirit of compliance and nostalgia towards good old (pre-modern) times when Church and State were together. We encounter in issues of each period religious interpretations of and interference in secular events (like globalization, western values, art etc.). In 1999, the famous slogan by the Georgian enlightener Ilia Chavchavadze “Fatherland, Language, Faith” is also interpreted religiously (by the Metropolitan Nikoloz of Bodbe). He suggests that patriotism is fulfilled only in religiousness, and that Ilia Chavchavadze has probably borrowed his slogan from Grigol of Khandzta who was a Georgian orthodox monk living in 8-9th century.

The mere fact that to be Georgian à priori means to be Orthodox (but not vice versa) erases the border between sacred and secular. Even the territory of Georgia is metaphorically viewed as a sacred entity, a church – the most famous church is Georgia, Svetitskhoveli – which is wounded by the conflict in Abkhazia. Metropolitan Nikoloz says, “So we can imagine a nation. Faith – as its soul, Fatherland – as its body, and Language – as the linker of body and soul, i.e. as its spirit.” However, a different opinion is expressed about it once in mid-1999: somebody believes that a Muslim Adjarian is dearer than an Orthodox Russian, but the editorial staff of the paper immediately react on the same page: “what if you were asked: ‘who is dearer – Arab Abo (a saint who changed his religion into Christianity) or Ordjonikidze (a Georgian who helped Georgia’s integration in the USSR), Assyrian David of Gareja (a monk) or Georgian Beria (Laurent Beria – a Bolshevik), Armenian Shushanik (a saint) or etc.’? The question is not posed as follows – faith or fatherland, the question is –

64 “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26 July-1August 1999, p. 25; N41 (234) 11-17 October 1999, p. 6; N42 (235) 18-24 October 1999, p. 2; N44 (237) 1-7 November 1999, p. 8 (2 articles); N45 (2377) 8-14 November 1999, p. 6 (2 articles); N46 (2378) 15-21 November 1999, p. 6 (2 articles); N47 (240) 22-28 November 1999, p. 8; N49 (242) 6-12 December 1999, p. 8.
65 http://www.bolojamze.ge/ (19/07/2011)
faith and fatherland. Besides, this is not our opinion; this is St. Ilia’s (Chavchavadze) opinion.”

The question seems closed with this, and there are only one-sided opinions since then. For example, it is clearly stated that “GOC is not nationally biased, contrary to other churches. In our case, it is the nation itself which is specifically distinguished as orthodox (Christian).”

The patriarch himself affirms in an interview: “Our nation with its whole essence has internalized orthodoxy; Georgian nationality and Christianity have become identical concepts.”

As the first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia had said, “the cause of Georgia’s all misery lies in our loss of faith. We have lost love for God and unless Georgian man does not regain faith, there is no rescue for us.”

Linking Georgia’s misery to loss of faith becomes more intense from 2008 to 2010. The commonly repeated sentence that “Georgia will shine”, which means the return of the old glory and welfare for Georgia, has a religious meaning and is achieved through the practice of true religion: orthodox Christianity.

If we look aside from newspapers, religion and politics not only are not strictly differentiated, but their interference has a certain legal basis – the constitutional agreement signed in 2002 between the GOC and the State of Georgia. This document, acknowledging the special role of GOC in Georgian history, grants it certain privileges in decision making as well as economically.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the margin between sacred and secular spheres is not evident in people’s thought either. This is shown, on the one hand, by the fact that the patriarch is viewed as the president’s adversary in terms of authority, on the other hand, by the world values survey 2008. According to its results, 58,7% think that the church can solve social problems, whereas in 78,2%’s opinion, it gives answers to the problems of family life.

This is anchored in public press as well: priests can change people’s life. Apart from social and family problems, respondents of WVS were asked to give their opinion about the following statements: 1) “politicians who don’t believe in God are unfit for public office” – 51% strongly agrees and 32,2% agrees. 2) “Better if more people with strong religious beliefs in public office” – 47,9% strongly agrees and 37,1% agrees. 3) In contrast, only 22,7% agrees strongly and 28,7% agrees to the statement that “religious leaders should not influence government”.

As regards other spheres, the GOC cares about them too: namely, the patriarch can easily subordinate art to religion by saying: “I think a Centre for culture and art should be established, where future generation will be brought up. … the young person grown up with this art and this faith – first of all, orthodox faith, love and hope, with this culture – cannot become a drug-addict, a thief, nor a criminal, nor do anything wrong.”

These words make not only the identification of art and religion, but contain an appeal towards the government as well, that such a Centre “should be established”.

70 “Kviris Palitra” N49 (242) 6-12 December 1999, p. 8.
71 “Kviris Palitra” N52 (245) 27 December 1999-2 January 2000, p. 3.
76 “Asaval-Dasavali” N30 (775) 27 July-2 August 2009, p. 11.
The field of education is not left without GOC influence either. In 1999, in a public school of Tbilisi, leaded by their teacher, 6-th year pupils praised the Fatherland, the Georgian language, cited the prayer “Our Father”, episodes of Jesus’ life, the prayer “I believe in one God” and psalms. In the end, a priest blessed them.1

There are other explicit signs that allow us making hypotheses about religious influence in education. Namely, if we have a superficial look at public schools of Georgia, we will certainly notice a general trend — there are on the walls of the classrooms, hung side to side, portraits of public figures and pictures of Georgian churches, sometimes — icons, and sometimes prayer rooms as well. Prayer rooms can be found in some universities too, there is even a church in the yard of Tbilisi State University, whereas orthodox movements made protest actions against Ilia State University because it does not have prayer corners. Orthodox movement leaders were collecting signatures of students approving the installment of a prayer room at the university. It was not a difficult task to do, as going against it would require enough courage and strength to face all the aggression that the stigma of atheist causes in Georgia. Refusing to sign would not have any other understanding, because the principle of secularization is still incomprehensible for the big majority of Georgians. However, we do not overview orthodox movements in detail now, as they are the subject of our future study within this research.

Religious Education

Articles bearing educational character can be roughly divided into subcategories: religious holidays, portraits of saints (including those of sacralized secular figures), history, religious news, educational-explanatory articles and didactics.

Information about religious holidays are present in every period studied. In 1991, they are mostly figured in the nationalistic newspaper “Saqartvelos Respublika”, which was the first president’s - Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s supporter.2 Nevertheless, we encounter information about religious holidays even in a pro-soviet press: these articles were about the sacralized king David the Builder and dedicated to his 900 years anniversary.3 In 1999 we find such articles in 20 issues out of 524, were they official state holidays in Georgia or not. In 2008-2010, religious calendar is published in every issue of 2008 in the paper “Asaval-Dasavali” – not to mention other irregularly published notes.

Portraits of saints (their histories, short bibliographies) are not described in 1989-1991 and in 2008-2010. We meet many of them in 19995. Some of such articles are portraits of

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4 “Kviris Palitra” N6 (198) 8-14 February 1999, p. 4; N14 (206) 5-11 April 1999, p. 4;
N27 (220) 5-11 July 1999, p. 4; N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 4; N31 (224) 2-8 August 1999, p. 4;
N36 (229) 6-12 September 1999, p. 2, p.4; N38 (231) 13-19 September 1999, p. 4;
N39 (232) 27 September-3 October 1999, p. 4; N41 (234) 11-17 October 1999, p. 4;
N45 (237) 8-14 November 1999, p. 4; N47 (240) 22-28 November 1999, p. 4;
N48 (241) 29 November-5 December 1999, p. 4; N49 (242) 6-12 December 1999, p. 4;
5 “Kviris Palitra” N1 (193) 4-10 January 1999, p. 4; N18 (210) 3-9 May 1999, p. 4;
N22 (215) 31 May-6 June 1999, p. 4; N23 (216) 7-13 June 1999, p. 4; N24 (217) 14-20 June 1999, p. 4;
saints who were secular people – kings of Georgia – and were sacralized later after their death. It seems this knowledge has become internalized in the third term, or focus is made on purely religious figures. In 1999, there are three other secular people, namely, contemporary artists and a scientist, who have not been declared as saints (one of them is still alive), but are somehow sacralized as they are described as religious and implicitly show that their talent comes from divine origin.

Historical articles become popular from the second half of the year 1999. They narrate about how the Muslims went to Germany, about sacred places, sacred objects, the language of Jesus – Aramean, the history of Georgian kings (from a religious point of view), and the crusades.

Other educational articles include religious interpretation of dreams, fate, history, information about biblical places and episodes, what is prejudice or the meaning of candle.

As regards didactical articles, the GOC’s teachings about how we should live, there are a few in 1999 and become more frequent in 2008-2010 – they were published in relevant rubrics: in the paper “Asaval-dasavali”, the rubric was called “Advices of the Monk for Secular People” (2008-2009), and “Voice of Orthodoxy” in the paper “Georgian Times”. Here was published the information about religious holidays and prayers or other practical information attached to relevant holidays. It should be noted that such prayers were also published in 1999.

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89 Ibid, p. 23; N30 (223) 26July-1 August 1999, p. 25; N37 (230) 13-19 September 1999, p. 4;


91 “Kviris Palitra” N30 (223) 26July-1 August 1999, p. 25.

92 “Kviris Palitra” N37 (230) 13-19 September 1999, p. 12; N38 (231) 13-19 September 1999, p. 25;


100 “Kviris Palitra” N8(200) 22-28 February 1999, p. 4; N20 (213) 17-23 May 1999, p. 12;

N38 (231) 13-19 September 1999, p. 4.


Mystics and Religion – compatible

This category could be conceived as indirect religious education as well. It is relevant for the second time term. These articles really abound in 1999 and both suggest that mystics and religion are compatible, and encourage faith in God. They explain odd phenomena by religious concepts; extraterrestrials believe in or serve God; Spirits inform us about God or life after death; extra sensorial persons talk about God and see themselves as faithful.

In the middle of the year 1999, the editors of the newspaper note that these persons are not qualified to cure people, they are charlatans and so it would be good in the “Europeanized” Georgia imitated Europe in taking measures against them. However, this note did not change anything in their newspaper.

Apart from mystics, there is in 1999 a certain trend to reconcile religion with science. For example, NASA’s telescopes saw a strange “city”, which would be inhabited by souls and maybe God himself; and they are also expecting to receive God’s first picture.

In 2008-2010, we do not meet any mystical-religious articles (in the newspapers studied) any more. It seems things went in a more religiously right way, even if the GOC had been censuring such blasphemes. In this period, the newspapers were mostly concerned with the political side of religion.

Church-State relations

Generally, relations between the state and GOC since 1989 have been fine at one glance, but not in the backstage. In the conditions of (soviet) state collapse, when the nationalist movement started to emerge as new political elite, it tried to use religion as its ideology. It manifested the joy that expression of faith was now permitted: so was criticized Stalin’s anti-religious policy, and so was sacralized the first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia by the nationalists, whereas the GOC stood away from this process. It was, as we saw from the study of the next time term, trying to use nationalism as its ideology – thus confining itself to ethnical sign. This shows a certain struggle for ideological power, although it might not have been as obvious at that time.

In 1999, we have a winner from the struggle: the GOC. We see the state and the GOC cooperate, the president and Metropolitans exchange rewards, and statesmen participate in religious events. However, it seems there was a disagreement about the pope’s visit to

107 “Kviris Palitra” N1 (193) 4-10 January 1999, p. 23.
110 “Komunisti” N5 (20353) 5 January 1989, p.3.
111 “Komunisti” N5 (20353) 5 January 1989, p.3.
112 “Komunisti” N5 (20353) 5 January 1989, p.3.
113 “Komunisti” N5 (20353) 5 January 1989, p.3.
Georgia: if the paper announced in issue N19 that the Georgian patriarch and the president had mutually agreed on inviting the pope\textsuperscript{115}, in issue N42 (5 months later) we read that the pope Jean-Paul II has expressed the wish to visit Georgia on his own will, and the patriarchate is against conducting mutual mess. “The president Shevardnadze declares that he does not interfere in church affairs, and deciding upon conducting mutual mess is only Ilia II’s and the Roman pope’s business.”\textsuperscript{116} If we go on reading, we cannot help noticing the GOC’s grown power: “the patriarchate has categorically warned the Georgian mass media, that in case of spreading any information without the consent of the patriarchate, all the responsibility towards God and nation will be upon the journalists and issues that will spread the information.”\textsuperscript{117} Three issues later, the president Edouard Shevardnadze comments on a religious event “not as the president, but as a Georgian and orthodox Christian”\textsuperscript{118}.

During the year 1999, two interviews were published with Ilia II. In the first one, the journalist asks him whether politics is possible without religion, and how does religion depend on politics. The patriarch replies that religion reflects eternal values, whereas politics deal with transient life. Most importantly, “in the conditions of democratic society, valuable politics is impossible without religion…”\textsuperscript{119} If we draw logical conclusions, it means that democracy is not, at the least, a good political form – because it necessarily needs religion. In the second interview, the patriarch says that the problems of the Church are also the State’s problems, and gives advice to the government about “the massive introduction of foreign religions in Georgia”: “the government should take decisive measures in order to avoid this too dangerous and real threat for Georgia, before it is too late.”\textsuperscript{120}

In 2008-2010, the public press suggests an intense ideological conflict between GOC and the state. For opposition side, the Patriarch and the GOC are the most serious force in denouncing the government. The patriarch’s moral authority is unconditional and indubitable; “God himself speaks by his lips”\textsuperscript{121}. Political parties fight for his sympathy and blame each other in using his sympathy for political purposes.\textsuperscript{122} The patriarch’s wish is enough reason to stop protesting by famine\textsuperscript{123}, ignoring his advice is evil presage\textsuperscript{124}. The patriarch is often referred to as the second Ilia, and think it is a good luck for Georgia to have such a patriarch\textsuperscript{125}.

It seems by 2008 the GOC was so influential that it became a source of legitimacy. Oppositional politicians ask for the rise of GOC’s constitutional rights\textsuperscript{126}, arguing that the government has an anti-GOC policy, and is opposed to the patriarch\textsuperscript{127}. Thus they prove that the government’s spirit is anti-national: opposing the GOC means opposing to orthodox Christianity, upon which Georgian national ideology is built.\textsuperscript{128}
Conclusion

As far as we are advanced in the research, we can claim that the GOC not only plays an important role in constructing collective identity, but has become an uncontestable super-ego which cannot be wrong and dictates the behavior to Georgians. This was the result of a progressing process: nationalism had become the GOC’s ideology since early 90-ies, and today it is spreading its ideology - in the name of nationalism - without obstacles. This is obvious in the press, where to be Georgian is explicitly linked with to be orthodox Christian. The mere fact that the mostly demanded public newspapers are highly concerned with religion and show a certain phobia towards all that does not fit within the Georgian orthodox context, designates the influence of the GOC over the people. This is suggested by messianic ideology present through the three periods, as well as an active favoring of (orthodox) religious faith, be it by denouncing the Soviet anti-religious policy and expressing the wish of reviving forgotten spiritual hearths (1989-1991), by narrating facts of miracles and reminding us that the judgment day is near (1999), by making a cult out of the patriarch (2008-2010), or by stating that our social problems are due to loss of faith (all periods).

Along with the merging of Georgian nationalism and orthodoxy, sacred and secular spheres have been merging as well. After a long 70-year pause, and with a gap of memory, the Georgian state had to learn anew how to deal with religion. To compensate all the misery the GOC saw during the soviet regime, the state signed an agreement with it and accorded it material privileges, as well as the right to make decisions upon certain issues together with the state. Today, like never before (since 19th century), religion (the GOC) has a voice in politics, in art, in education – just like the Marxist-Leninist ideology. It is a power strong enough not to be ignored easily – it is backed up by 82% of Georgian population, people who belong to orthodox church (CRRC Household Survey 2010); more than half of them have never thought about the distinction of sacred and secular spheres, and thus cannot think of them separately (World Values Survey 2008); a certain part (no matter how much) of this people even cherishes the patriarch (personal observations and recent events shown on TV). Such is the “nation” that constitutes the citizenship of Georgia, the people who vote in political elections, and thus the manipulation with religious theme in politics.

Although we were mostly focused on the GOC’s behavior and have not studied people’s attitudes or opinions in depth to check the factual influence of the GOC, they are not without being reflected to some extent in our study: above all, we assume that public press not only narrates the GOC’s ideology intended to be spread in public, but also responds to public demand and publishes articles accordingly.

N30 (223) 26 July-1 August 1999, p. 25; N33 (226) 16-22 August 1999, p. 25;
N34 (227) 23-29 August 1999, p. 4, 23; N35 (228) 30 August-5 September 1999, p. 24;
N36 (229) 6-12 September 1999, p. 23 (2 articles); N39 (232) 27 September-3 October 1999, p. 4, 23;
N40 (233) 4-10 October 1999, p. 21, 23 (2 articles); N42 (235) 18-24 October 1999, p. 23;
N43 (236) 25-31 October 1999, p. 23 (2 articles); N50 (243) 13-19 December 1999, p. 18, 23;
N51 (244) 20-26 December 1999, p. 7.
130 “Kviris Palitra” N23 (216) 7-13 June 1999, p. 8; N36 (229) 6-12 September 1999, p. 8;
At this stage of the research, we are interviewing GOC priests. Judging from our first impression, there is no strong consent and coincidence of opinions about different issues between them, even though they repeat the GOC’s official teachings. Although it is too early (and impossible) to review these findings yet, they are promising interesting results that would hopefully help the opening of discussions in the public sphere, and consequently, accelerate the building of an open society in the region.

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