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Introduction

Relevance of the research topic:

In 2020 Georgian Dream, for the third time in its history, won general parliamentary elections and received 48.22% of the total votes. The party has been a major parliamentary actor for more than a decade. Georgians have repeatedly voted for the party founded by the billionaire businessman and politician Bidzina Ivanishvili to represent their interests and views in Parliament. However, the party is not coping with this function.

Walking through the centre of Tbilisi, one is certain to see a large number of European Union flags hung in there. Since Saakashvili's presidency, Georgia's people have strived to integrate European values and practices into their home country. European integration is one of the primary directions of Georgia's development. According to public opinion polls conducted by the National Democratic Institute (2022), Georgians demonstrate continuous support for EU membership: 75% approved it in September 2022. Nevertheless, the reform process aimed at meeting the Copenhagen criteria has stagnated for many years.

According to the European Parliament report, Georgia has significantly failed in terms of the essential democratic norms and political obligations agreed upon under the Association Agreement during the last two years (Mikser, 2022). This period was also marked by the parliamentary crisis, the solution of which Georgia actively cooperated with the EU representatives. For instance, following the meeting with the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, the government and the opposition struck an agreement. Nonetheless, it was not implemented since the ruling coalition expanded its authority and reduced the room for the opposition. The European Commission also acknowledged such a situation, as Ursula von der Leyen, on the 17th of June 2022, mentioned that they grant Georgia a status for the European perspective but not a candidacy as Georgia needs to meet several conditions before granting it a status (von der Leyen, 2022).

Such actions by the major Georgian party show the real tendencies of European integration. Even now, when the Georgian government filed an application for EU membership owing to favourable international conditions, it did not guarantee that the European integration process would continue. According to the Centre for European Policy Studies (Nodia, 2022), among the 'Associate Trio', only Georgia is now showing negative tendencies in European integration with rising violations of the EU's core ideals regarding democracy and the rule of law.

The puzzle of this paper is that while Schumpeter's minimalistic notion of democracy says that if elected leaders do not fulfil the popular will, they have a chance of not being elected to the next term, the case of Georgia shows a different approach. Even without

implementing reforms for European integration, the Georgian Dream remains a dominant party for more than ten years. This paper concentrates mainly on the agent-centred approach, contending that such tendencies may be explained by the cartelization of the dominant party.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate how the cartelization of the ruling Georgian Dream party resulted in stagnation with the European integration of Georgia and why the opposition failed to challenge that.

The research objectives of this paper:

1. Discuss the existing major party classifications and define the concepts of catch-all and cartel parties.
2. Examine the possible opposition strategies as a response to cartelization.
3. Trace the evolution of the Georgian political landscape and its influence on the party developments there.
4. Analyze the historical progression of European aspirations in Georgia and examine their correlation with the major political parties.
5. Assess the recent cartelization of the Georgian Dream party and its influence on the decrease of European integration.
6. Explain the factors contributing to the opposition's inability to challenge and change the existing status quo effectively.

The object of the paper: the Georgian political and party systems.

The subject of the research: the party cartelization of the ruling party in Georgia

The methods of this research:

This is case study research for the in-depth examination of the Georgian political environment. I also employed a historical analysis as a method for the chronological evaluation of the country's political evolution in order to show the structure of relations within it.

Theoretical foundations:

This study utilized several theoretical concepts, including Otto Kirchheimer's concept of a catch-all party and, the key one for this research, the cartel party concept by Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair. As well as the theoretical works on the opposition by authors like Marc van de Wardt, Michael Keren, Sean Hanley and Allan Sikk.

The source base primarily consists of secondary sources such as the analysis of think tanks (including German Marshall Fund, Chatham House, and Carnegie Europe) on the Georgian political system by authors like de Waal, Gegeshidze, Kelly and Kramar; the works on the historical development of Georgia; and the studies on Georgian European integration as well as on the recent European involvement in Georgian domestic politics.

Contents: This paper includes the introduction, three chapters that consist of six sub-sections, the conclusions and the bibliography.

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1. Political Parties and Electorate Engagement: A Theoretical Analysis of Party Classification and Opposition Strategies

The study of political parties has long fascinated social scientists, theorists, and philosophers, who have attempted to comprehend their genesis, categorization, and how they interact with voters and other parties. For the purpose of this study, this paper will not focus on the discussion on how we should define the political party as it will use the definition proposed by the famous Italian political scientist Giovanni Sartor, who defines a political party as a named political group that occurs during election periods and is capable of fielding candidates for political roles, regardless of the degree of electoral freedom (Sartori, 1970, pp. 324-332). Instead, this part of the study examines major theories and frameworks that might give a better grasp on party classification and the relationship between parties and the electorate. For the purpose of the analysis, it is essential to identify clear party classifications. While various categorizations exist in the literature, this paper will focus on the most prominent and relevant scholars, with a special emphasis on the academic legacies of authors such as Kirchheimer, Katz and Mair. Special attention will be given to the definitions of catch-all and cartel parties, which may help explain the Georgian Dream party's domination in Georgian politics over the past decade.

Following an examination of party classifications, this part will further investigate the dynamics of political engagement, emphasizing voter interaction and power dynamics within the system. This involves the examination of the theoretical works on innovative strategies and tools employed by the opposition to mobilize their desired electorate and secure electoral victories in various contexts. For instance, to expand voter engagement and confront dominant cartel parties, opposition parties need to consolidate both internally and externally. Forming coalitions and adapting agendas to deemphasize divisive issues can lead to a catch-all strategy and increased electoral success. While

using contemporary instruments such as digital tools for citizen-initiated campaigning and capitalizing on "newness" or anti-establishment rhetoric can further boost opposition parties' chances of winning elections.

1.1. Political Party Evolution and Classification: From Mass and Catch-All Parties to Cartel Parties

Even though humanity had different ways of representing their political will, in one way or another for centuries, party organizations are a pretty recent phenomenon for that purpose. János Simon proposes to categorize the major theoretical perspectives on the emergence of modern parties into three distinct approaches (Simon, 2003, pp. 3-4). The first one is the context-dependent approach. It highlights the interdependence of the historical expansion of voting rights and the institutional development of parliamentarism. The second approach deemphasizes the parliamentary factor and shifts its focus to the broader emergence of political rights, particularly freedoms of association and assembly. They allowed for greater interaction and cooperation among the individuals, who later would demand the representation of their political demands on the different levels through parties. The third one is more of a revolutionary approach that focuses on the changes in people's mindsets in that period. There is also a possibility to subdivide this approach into two smaller ones based on scholars' approaches: the modernization development one (more moderate) and the historical breakings one (more drastic) (Simon, 2003, p. 4).

Nevertheless, what was for sure is that parties were a response to the changing reality and new people's demands as a result of modernization. Scholars are using different aspects to categorize political parties, including ideological stances, financial means, organizational structure, membership, and many others. Steven B. Wolinetz tried to summarize 2 of the major Western approaches and organize them into groups (Wolinetz,

2002, pp. 137-165). It's crucial to recognize that this classification is not universal and doesn't cover all possible aspects.

The first group focuses on membership participation. The key figure for this group is Maurice Duverger, with his work *Political Parties* (1954). In his work, he distinguished between cadre parties, which have a limited party membership, and mass parties, which have broader, more inclusive membership rules. Even though the nature of membership has blurred since then, the use of a two-dimensional classification based on active membership size and involvement remains a popular tool among modern scholars for distinguishing different types of political parties (Koole, 1994; Ware, 1987). However, party membership is declining today, and not just in Europe, as Wolinetz acknowledges (Wolinetz, 2002, p. 144), but also in other regions, including post-Soviet space. Therefore, this approach shows big limitations in the changed reality of 21 century.

The second group focuses on the support-gaining function of parties. The primary scholar here is Otto Kirchheimer, who introduced the idea of a catch-all party. As mentioned by André Krouwel (2003), Kirchheimer did not provide a precise and consistent definition of the catch-all party, and his ideas evolved significantly over time. Nevertheless, Kirchheimer (1966) defined five central components of this concept, including (a) minimizing ideological constraints, (b) strengthening top leadership groups, (c) down-graded role of individual party members, (d) deemphasis of specific social-class or denominational clienteles, and (e) fostering connections with various interest groups for financial backing and electoral reasons. As János Simon mentions, this concept emerged after the Second World War as a response to the increased ideological indifferences and the rapid consumerism among people (Simon, 2003, p. 12). With being more pragmatic in their values, catch-all parties' primary aim is to gain support from a diverse selection of the electorate.

As Wolinetz (2002, p. 146) mention, some scholars like Panebianco (1988) attempted to clarify the concept of the catch-all party by providing some form of categorization. However, this paper will not go into the detail of those aspects but rather will focus on

the idea of cartel parties that expands the scope of Kirchheimer's concept. It was introduced by Katz and Mair (1995) as a response to the 1970s' shift in parties' focus towards administrative capabilities and efficiency, with an emphasis on promoting policies through state-owned media and public broadcasting. It was the next evolutionary step after the catch-all parties. The cartelization of parties led many leaders to view politics as a vocation and a source of financial security. For the purpose of this paper, later, it will be argued that was exactly what happened with the Georgian Dream party in Georgia, which transformed from the catch-all party into what might be now called the cartel party.

To do that, the paper also acknowledges three important elements of the party cartel concept proposed by Klaus Detterbeck (2005). Firstly, each case of cartelization might pose unique causes and patterns through which this institutionalization happens. Secondly, the cartel thesis should avoid assumptions and return to the initial state of core elements. Thirdly, whether the conditions of a party cartel emergence are favourable or unfavourable could be defined by three aspects: (1) institutional parameters such as electoral systems and the degree of institutionalization within the parties themselves; (2) political traditions of a country; (3) professionalization of politics which might facilitate a long-term cartel formation in a country. Detterbeck (2005) supports that proposal by showing the differences in party cartel formations in four Western European countries: the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany and Denmark. However, those nuances are also important for understanding cartelization in other regions, including Georgia.

The essential characteristic of cartel parties, which is key for the next parts of this thesis, is the emphasis on governance over-representation of citizens' interests and identities. Nevertheless, that kind of party is not fully ignoring the representation of voters but rather does that to a limited extent. According to Henrik Enroth (2017, p. 125), the issue with the cartel party is not its incapacity to represent but rather the difficulty in defining when and how it does or does not do that. To understand that, the author proposes to focus on the mechanisms of objection as part of the representation.

Enroth says: "The complication is that while the represented must be able to object to what is done in their name in order for representation to be representation, they must not generally object, lest representation ceases to be representation" (Enroth, 2017, p. 130). But in a cartel scheme, the mechanism of the conventional objection, such as voters' exit to the different representatives, is highly limited due to the accumulation of resources under cartelization. Therefore, the cartel party is experiencing limited pressure from the electorate, which leads to the greater unattachment of the party from the political demands of the people. Katz and Mair mention that 'the growing incorporation of parties within the state, their increasingly shared purpose and identity, and the evermore visible gap that separates them from the wider society, have contributed to provoking a degree of popular mistrust and disaffection that is without precedent in the postwar experiences of the long-established democracies' (Katz & Mair, 2009, p. 760). As a result, people are starting to look now for different ways of objection through contentious politics or other forms of civil society representation. For instance, this paper will provide a greater overview of Georgian protest in the next part for political representation.

This approach, like most of the other Western models, has limits when used in post-socialist countries, particularly those in the post-Soviet area, due to the complexity of the situation there (Kopecek & Hloušek, 2013, pp. 1-14). However, this paper argues that this model is the most applicable one in the explanation of the Georgian Dream party predominance over the last decade. To do that, it will be useful to refer to the work by Alenka Krašovec and Tim Haughton (2011) on the Slovenian case. They are proposing to use three indicators to evaluate the extent of cartelization there: (1) the balance of power between the party in public office and the party's central office; (2) the size and scope of financial resources obtained from the state; (3) the voting patterns of MPs on legislation and other acts related to state funding (Krašovec & Haughton, 2011, p. 200). However, this research found that in the Slovenian case, only partial cartelization happened.

What is also important to acknowledge, cartel parties are not just beneficiaries of state linkages, but they are also highly dependent on that. Therefore, they are trying to preserve the status quo and remain connected to the government as long as possible. In her work, Nicole Bolleyer (2009) discusses how the strategy of cartel parties changes depending on whether they are in opposition or in government. For instance, the author's analysis of the Irish party Fianna Fáil shows how the party might experience cycles of transitioning from a cartel party to a catch-all party depending on whether they are in government or not (Bolleyer, 2009). This strategy allowed them to decrease their vulnerability while they had more limited state linkages in opposition. Moreover, the author posits that the strengthening of party-state ties could be a consequence or an indicator of the internal weaknesses in the organizational structure of a cartel party.

While the above typologies were primarily focused on Western parties, it is also crucial to note that various typologies of specifically post-socialist parties exist. For instance, Herbert Kitschelt (1995, pp. 447–472) proposed to focus on voters' demands, precisely what they are seeking from successful political parties. It helps to identify three ideal types of parties: (1) charismatic, (2) clientelistic, and (3) programmatic. The first group refers to parties that voters choose due to key individuals there, such as prominent politicians, well-known media figures and so on. The organizational structure there is primarily dependent on and centred around a leader. The second group is concerned with prospects of personal material or non-material gains. The parties are organized based on patronage-client relations. The third group includes voters who seek indirect benefits from collective improvements following a party's victory. In order to clearly articulate their standings, a wide and well-developed organizational structure could be found here.

However, the most famous typology of the parties in the region is the one made by Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (2003). They are proposing to divide parties into 15 different 'species.' They were criticizing the previously existing typologies for their inability to encompass the full spectrum of existing political parties nowadays. So author

proposed to base a typology on three criteria: (1) the structure of the party's formal organization, (2) the content of the party's programmatic commitments, and (3) the party's strategic approach and behavioural norms (Gunther & Diamond, 2003). The first criterion includes parties based on large grassroots memberships, having networks focused on specific interests, heavily utilizing modern mass communication techniques, or maintaining thin organizational structures. The second one distinguishes between parties with clearly defined ideologies, pragmatic or non-ideological stances, or those dedicated to advancing the interests of particular societal groups. The third and also the last criterion emphasizes the differences among parties that are more tolerant or pluralistic, moderately adherent to democratic norms, or explicitly anti-system. Although this typology is comprehensive and highly beneficial for comprehending today's political party setting, it does have its own limitations. As Lubomír Kopecek and Vít Hloušek (2013, p. 2) noted, it can be overly broad, encompassing multiple disparate aspects of analysis.

However, neither Kitschelt (1995) nor Gunther and Diamond (2003) focused on the aspect that is crucial for the idea of this paper. Specifically, this study focuses on the party-state relation throughout time and how that impacts both dominant and opposition actors. It does not mean that I disagree with the typologies mentioned above but instead emphasize the other aspects. Therefore, the cartel party concept becomes crucial as an approach to explain the nature of interactions between the party and the state, particularly those predominant for some time period. The broader typology would shift the focus of the paper.

1.2. Challenging Dominant Cartel Parties: Opposition Consolidation, Engagement, and Innovation Strategies

While a cartel party that takes a dominant position in the government benefits from the decrease in political representation, the opposition to such a situation needs to

increase the voters' participation and, consequently, the parties' stances. There are different explanations for how to do this. One of the ways is to increase consolidation of opposition: both internally, for each party, and externally, between them. Regarding external consolidation, let's refer to the work of Gary W. Cox (1997). Cox argues that if the opposition wants to win the election against the dominant party, they need to join forces and coordinate their actions (Cox, 1997, pp. 238-251). He uses case studies from Chile, India, Italy, and Japan to illustrate how lack of coordination may contribute to the opposition losing elections, especially when the opposition has a major ideological split. However, to overcome this and increase coordination, the opposition requires greater access to financial resources, which are typically predominant by the party in power (Cox, 1997).

As mentioned by Michael Wahman, 'opposition coordination is more common when the incumbent regime is weak' (Wahman, 2013, p. 4). Therefore, it requires a big effort to unify parties with different stances to challenge the predominant party. Parties can create a coalition by forming a combined candidate list or separate lists with stated intentions to collaborate in a future legislature. In any case, as shown by Michael Wahman's research, forming opposition coalitions substantially boosts the chances of winning elections, with a 29% higher predicted probability of success (Wahman, 2013, p. 15).

Regarding intra-party consolidation, the party might adjust their agenda. Marc van de Wardt (2012) conducted an analysis of 197 political parties in 14 Western European countries between 1986 and 2006 in regard to their European integration stances. He finds that parties tend to emphasize less or even totally avoid the issue if their electorate is divided on it. It allows the parties to decrease the level of internal division and improve their rankings. Parties are shifting their positions more towards a catch-all strategy. This might increase the chances of the opposition getting elected.

The other way to increase party engagement is the implementation of more horizontal relations with the electorate. Rachel K. Gibson's article (2013) examines how that might

be achieved through the growing digitalization of politics. In particular, the authors highlight the recent phenomenon of 'citizen-initiated campaigning' (CIC), through which political parties and candidates employ the Internet to delegate some of the essential tasks in mobilization to their volunteer base. It consists of four key activities: 'community building, getting out the vote, generating resources and message production' (Gibson, 2013, p. 187). Such an innovative approach allows for the mobilization of greater key supporters and access to new groups through person-to-person interactions and, as suggested by the author, might contribute to the emergence of new virtual affiliations of members, expanding the scope of the traditional model.

One of the classic strategies to increase engagement is by enlisting the support of popular local figures, such as politicians, artists, and others, to create a connection with the community. Nevertheless, it poses challenges if such campaigning becomes too individualized and challenges the general party stances. Instead, a party should rather insist on the localization of the national campaign through the adaptation to the needs of locals. Findings by Rune Karlsen and Eli Skogerbø (2013) show that there are three factors that might influence that: 'a parliamentary system, the parties (locally/regionally) control the nomination of candidates, and the electoral system is based on a proportional system with no preference voting scheme' (Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2013, p. 436).

Among the other ways to challenge the dominant party might be that the used for winning elections in a hostile environment might be broader usage of innovative instruments such as digital technologies for spreading information about different candidates and educational programs for opposition candidates (Gorokhovskaia, 2019). The informational campaign through the Internet might be used to show the previous achievements of opposition candidates, introduce the program statute of the party, as well as reveal the previous failure of the competitors. While training can increase candidates' understanding of the political reality, show them instrument how to engage broader voters groups, create consolidated stances for all of the opposition candidates and improve their strategies.

For the new parties, the winning strategy might be actual newness itself. Alan Sikk (2012) analyzes this phenomenon in the Baltic countries of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. What was interesting as all of those 'new' parties were not introducing specifically new approaches or issues to politics but were rather fighting for some form of 'purification' through the introduction of new anti-corruption legislation, fighting unemployment, and some anti-establishment rhetoric. They do not really try to introduce new ideological stances, but they rather want to challenge the already existing incumbents. As the author mentions, 'newness' promotes change in an indistinct direction as it can be beneficial for political parties as it appeals to large groups of discontented voters, necessitates lower information costs due to ambiguous policy commitments, and when combined with mainstream ideologies, carries a lower risk of discouraging potential voters (Sikk, 2012, p. 478). However, this newness may present challenges for an opposition party seeking to form a coalition, as it represents an unfamiliar and untested actor for potential partners.

This 'newness' could also be mixed with the anti-establishment strategy. Seán Hanley and Allan Sikk (2014) describe those parties as anti-establishment reform parties (AERPs). They tend to adapt to the already existing cleavages and ideologies of the country and combine them with the criticism of political elites in order to demand new ways of doing politics. They pose 'three core features: (1) a politics of mainstream reformism, (2) usually framed in terms of anti-establishment appeal to voters and (3) genuine organizational newness' (Hanley & Sikk, 2014, p. 523). The researchers found the most common driver of such emergence of the Eastern European AERPs was the popular perception by the voters of rising corruption among the current political incumbents rather than the economic challenges (Hanley & Sikk, 2014, p. 530). Therefore, it is crucial for the opposition to recognize and address these social demands to secure increased support from the electorate.

For more radical stances, an opposition might adopt a strategy of challenging not just political opponents but a system as a whole. Those anti-system parties are trying to

weaken the legitimacy of the entire political regime. Michael Keren argues that 'the anti-system party is marked by its adherence to an imagined community obliging it, and the entire system, to a standard of perfection' (Keren, 2000, p. 109). To be successful, these parties must build strong links with the media in order to resonate with the electorate and, more crucially, to create the perception that nothing is impossible by blending real and virtual realities. The question is if the other opposition parties can also adapt to this strategy of appealing to perfection.

2. From Soviet Legacy to European Affinity: Understanding Georgia's Political Evolution and Post-Independence EU Aspirations

After Georgia joined the Council of Europe on 27 April 1999, the Speaker of the Parliament, Zurab Zhvania, proclaimed a famous phrase during the Parliamentary Assembly: "I am Georgian, and therefore I am European" (GeorgianJournal, 2013). It is undoubtedly nowadays to almost anyone living in Georgia that they are part of a wider European family due to their strong historical and cultural ties with the continent. Since 2004, after the Revolution of Roses and the election of Mikheil Saakashvili as the President of Georgia, and up until today, the European Flag featuring twelve golden stars arranged in a circular pattern on a blue background could be found in front of major public and governmental buildings in Tbilisi and other big cities. For almost two decades, Georgian people have been clear with their attitudes towards the joining of the European Union, with recently 81% interviewed claiming that Georgia should be part of it (Formula News, 2023). However, such a clear position on the Europeanization of Georgia was not an immediate moment but rather a result of a long previous process.

In this part, I will examine the historical progression of Georgia's political landscape following its independence and its pursuit of closer ties with Europe. First of all, this paper will shortly review the legacy of the USSR and the first decades of independence to explain how they shaped the state-building and forming of the political system there. In particular, I will focus on the impact of the early political instability of the first years, as well as the strong centralization of power later, on contemporary Georgian society. This analysis will provide valuable insights into the current pre-condition for the dynamics of party relations there and the nature of their disputes, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the present trends. Second of all, this study will review the history of Georgia-EU relations throughout the last decades and what has influenced them. While the first decade following Georgia's independence will be briefly discussed, the major focus will be on the post-2003 period, which is marked by the transformative

changes following the Revolution of Roses and the explicit pro-Western trajectory adopted by Georgia. Another crucial moment that will be discussed here is the parliamentary elections of 2012, in which the previous ruling party, the United National Movement, was defeated by the opposition. As a result, they were no longer able to unilaterally determine the trajectory of the country, and European integration was now part of internal bargaining processes. This examination will provide light on the causes that have shaped the current Georgian political environment, resulting in the dominance of pro-European orientations within political parties.

2.1. Navigating the Path to Independence: The Interplay of Personal Politics and Factional Fragmentation in the Modern History of Georgian Statehood

Georgia proclaimed independence on 9 April 1991; however, the process of state-building was marked with difficulties from the very beginning. Following the fall of the Georgian Communist Party, the dominant party during the Soviet era, a large political vacuum emerged. Numerous pro-independence parties began competing for power in the new political landscape. However, from the very beginning, these parties struggled to consolidate their positions and coordinate their actions, resulting in political fragmentation and subsequent instability (Demetriou, 2002, p. 868). According to Stephen Jones (2015, pp. 38-39), there were four factors that contributed to the disruption of new movements in Georgia: (1) personal conflicts, (2) internally authoritarian ruling with the parties, (3) aggressive tactics with no rules for a power struggle, and (4) a lack of societal mechanisms to moderate party policies from below.

While these pro-independence groups also failed to recognize the presence and desires of other minorities in Georgian society, particularly those from the Abkhaz and South Ossetian territories. This contributed to increased tensions between different ethnic groups and led to an increased role of local authorities. Consequently, the lack of central power capable of effectively managing those inter-ethnic disputes after the

withdrawal of the Communist Party, coupled with an enhanced role of local authorities, led to the further escalation of conflicts. Moreover, economic clans started to emerge.

Similarly to the Ukrainian case later, the first elected President of Georgia was the previous Chairman of the Supreme Council there – Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The major difference here was that Gamsakhurdia was not a typical representative of *nomenklatura* but was a dissident and a vocal opponent of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. According to Spyros Demetriou (2002, p. 870), this period was characterized by the President's attempts to consolidate his power by strategically appointing loyalists to prominent positions within previously existing security and economic institutions inherited from Soviet Georgia, as well as exerting influence over the media through manipulation. He also tried to regain the bigger control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia by force, which would eventually lead to the war, first in South Ossetia and later in Abkhazia as well; both were backed by the Russian military. The employed strategies provoked resentment, underestimated the role of other political actors, and failed to control Georgia's complicated clan-based power structures, eventually resulting in political instability and culminating in a coup d'état that overthrew Gamsakhurdia. Nevertheless, the pro-Gamsakhurdia forces were unwilling to relinquish power, leading to a civil war between them and the government military, primarily concentrated in the Samagrelo area of western Georgia. Those events left a profound and long-lasting impact on Georgia, characterized by extreme political polarization and significant moral, political, and historical ramifications (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021, p. 7). By 1993, the central forces of the new President, Eduard Ambrosius de Shevardnadze, managed to win the civil war, the full control over the region was regained only in the early 2000s.

Therefore, the first few years of independence left a complex legacy that posed significant challenges for future political leaders. Firstly, previously established in the Soviet era, the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the autonomous oblast of South Ossetia, backed by Russia, were able to gain de facto control over the regions. Secondly,

local elites in other regions, especially in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara and in the historic area of Mingrelia, managed to independently consolidate significant power and influence. Thirdly, economic and political elites who were not directly or were only partially associated with government systems also accumulated substantial authority. All three of the aforementioned aspects indeed played a role in contributing to varying degrees of warlordism, political violence, endemic crime, and territorial disintegration during the 1990s in Georgia. Fourthly, there existed both horizontal and vertical power struggles within the state structures themselves, resulting in the disintegration of the state's institutions, polarization and fragmentation (Demetriou, 2002, pp. 874-875). All of that was a legacy that would be hard to overcome later.

The first years of Georgian independence were also marked by political disunity, economic collapse and political gridlock. The first period after gaining independence, the Georgian political system could be referred to as the initial stage bases (Melikidze, 2020, p. 135). During that time, Georgian political parties were able to disseminate the experiences of other countries and take the first substantial steps towards building a party system, despite early stability issues.

The entire decade of the 1990s can be aptly described as a turbulent period for Georgia. On top of the abovementioned issues, the country was economically devastated after the civil war, with thousands of people displaced. The disintegration of the centralized USSR's economy exacerbated the situation, with industrial decline reaching 80% and high unemployment rates (Demetriou, 2002, p. 875). It was followed by huge inflation and poverty levels exceeding 90%. Until 1995, the fragmented Parliament were unable to find a consensus and pass any major legislation to make substantial reforms. Combined with the other issues, the situation was progressively pushing the state towards near-total failure.

The second President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, tried to regain the state's sovereignty through the consolidation of centralized power and reconstruction of essential institutions. As mentioned by Archil Gegeshidze and Thomas de Waal (2021,

p. 7), Shevardnadze was the first Georgian leader to intentionally contest his predecessor's legacy in order to establish his own legitimacy; this trend continued following political upheavals in 2003 and 2012 (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021, p. 7). He pushed for the process of dismantling paramilitary groups and effectively reduced the influence of local criminal elites, making significant progress towards achieving this objective. What's more important for this paper, Shevardnadze was the first to successfully establish a broad-based catch-all party in Georgia – Citizen's Union of Georgia (Demetriou, 2002, p. 877), a strategy that would later be replicated by key political actors across the board. This new party consisted of numerous renowned and influential figures, including previous reformers among the dissidents and proponents of the pro-independence movements, the so-called 'red directors' – heads of major economic enterprises, and *apparatchiki* – high-ranking government officials of the Soviet era. Such novelty in strategy enabled him to consolidate political power and promote essential economic reforms that would result in noticeable improvements in economic growth (Demetriou, 2002, p. 878). Moreover, they were also able to adopt the new Constitution of Georgia in 1995, which would further facilitate the state's consolidation. Giorgi Melikidze describes this period as a development stage of parliamentary elections (Melikidze, 2020, p. 135).

However, the consolidation process in the second half of the 1990s was also hindered by different aspects. The central government maintained partial authority over the territory of Georgia, not just in the de facto uncontrolled areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but also in a number of other regions where its control was restricted despite being nominally governed. The state's capacity to function properly was also hindered due to the lack of financial resources and a shortage of personnel. Throughout this period, the internal political rivalry for power remained intense. Endemic corruption was also used by different political actors to expand their influence. This period indeed stabilized the state, but it was rather more of a temporary patching of immediate issues

rather than implementing the substantial and transformative changes required for the country's long-term development.

The major changes started to happen after the Rose Revolution in 2003. As a result of it, young and promising Mikheil Saakashvili was elected as the third President of Georgia in January 2004. At the same time, the Parliament approved Constitutional Amendments that expanded the President's influence over the legislative branch through the right to disband. Furthermore, the position of Prime Minister was established, and the President was given the authority to remove the Cabinet of Ministers. He promised to conduct a series of major reforms to rebuild Georgia, combat corruption, regain the unity of the state, promote democracy and increase economic stances. He was seen as a statesman that would bring stability and prosperity. Therefore, the overwhelming majority (96%) of the vote was in support of Saakashvili's presidential candidacy. In less than a month, his political party, the United National Movement, together with the allies from the United Democrats, were able to secure the constitutional majority in the new Parliament. This was a "winner-takes-all" situation that would now become regular and contribute to the weakening of democratic institutions (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021, p.2). This was a permanent election campaign stage in the parliamentary election cycles of Georgia (Melikidze, 2020, p. 136).

Giorgi Melikidze (2020) argues that even though since the independence of Georgia in 1991, the political landscape has been characterized by personalized parties, this process intensified after the Rose Revolution. As it was mentioned above, the Citizen's Union of Georgia was primarily characterized by broad standings that were not based on ideology or a strong program; the CUG was primarily focused on the leadership of Shevardnadze and, to a lesser extent, the personalities of other prominent figures. This trend, observed among other parties as well, had a significant adverse impact on the institutionalization of the party system and frequent shifts in party support among electoral bases (Melikidze, 2020, pp. 124–126). The electoral victories of Saakashvili and his United National Movement party further exacerbated the tendency towards

personality-centric parties. According to Melikidze (2020, p. 125), there was a notable trend of forming "satellite" parties in the aftermath of the Revolution, characterized by a primary focus on the personalities of leaders rather than clear programmatic stances and intended to capture votes that would otherwise support genuine opposition parties. It allowed Saakashvili to further strengthen his position.

Despite the promises of further democratization, Lincoln A. Mitchell (2009, p. 172) notes that Saakashvili's presidency was rather characterized by the expansion of institutional capacities and consolidation of the state rather than the promotion of democracy. Upon assuming office, he inherited a seriously weakened state characterized by a lack of resources, an inadequate infrastructure, corrupted police and military, and limited authority over the nation's territory. Saakashvili decided to consolidate greater authority in order to carry out reforms, which was partially at the price of democratic rights. The central government was able to concentrate the authority over the executive branch, limit media freedom, repress civil society engagement, take steps to stifle non-state players seeking political influence and streamline decision-making processes by prioritizing efficiency over deliberation. Nevertheless, economic growth failed to reach a number of socioeconomic groups, leading to ongoing poverty and unemployment in significant parts of society (de Waal, 2011, pp. 2-4).

Together with the team, Mikheil Saakashvili was able to improve tax collection, increase the level of service provision, and significantly lower levels of corruption. They successfully leveraged foreign direct investments (FDI), implemented economic liberalization measures, and fostered an improved business climate; combined with global economic growth, these efforts led to significant economic improvements in Georgia. By strengthening the military and reforming the police system, Saakashvili now had an increased power to persecute criminal authorities and regain the integrity of the Georgian territories. In May of 2004, the central government peacefully but with the usage of force regained control over the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, which was ruled by Aslan Abashidze for the previous decade.

However, Saakashvili prioritized state building in the expanses of democracy. This period was characterized by a notable absence of representation and checks and balances within the governance structure leading to the rise of unrealistic expectations among the incumbents. For instance, Mitchell (2009, p. 180) argues that the later decision to resolve territorial conflicts with de facto uncontrolled regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by the military means in 2008 should be attributed directly to the challenges posed by the lack of robust decision-making processes, broader political representation, and a more open media environment.

The second term of Saakashvili was characterized by low levels of democratic engagement outside of election cycles. De Waal (2011, p. 2-4) highlights that although the revolutionary spirit of the government continued to play a role in driving forward new reforms, it also faced criticism for a perceived reluctance to interact with the broader public through genuine consultative processes. But what allowed Saakashvili to remain in the office? Thomas de Waal (2011, p. 8-9) identified three primary reasons for that: (1) Saakashvili's personal charisma and effective political communication; (2) the lack of consolidation among opposition and ineffectiveness; (3) high levels of economic resilience in Georgia after the war and the global financial crisis. The second aspect would be later successfully targeted by the Georgian Dream party during the next election cycle.

Archil Gegeshidze and Thomas de Waal (2021) argue that the contemporary Georgian political landscape is still characterized by the idea of "winner-takes-all." Currently, there are two major parties that are now in rivalry: the ruling Georgian Dream party, which that main its position since the election in 2012, and the previous ruling party of Saakashvili – the United National Movement. Gegeshidze and de Waal (2021) acknowledge the society's continued polarization but argue that conflicts are primarily rooted in a top-down struggle for elite power and competition over financial resources rather than ideological differences. While this polarization resulted in strong party affiliation among their respective support bases, it also fostered cynicism among a

considerable portion of society, who became apathetic to both parties (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021, p. 9). It leads to negative tendencies, such as a lack of trust in democratic institutions, deficient parliament, and judicial crisis, and contributes to the persistence of a politicized law enforcement system.

2.2. Towards the West: The Evolution and Implications of Georgia's European Choice in Post-Soviet Politics

Starting in 1991, the newly emerged Georgian state was caught between Russia, the previous colonizer, and the West. Georgia was able to maintain a delicate balance between multiple geopolitical forces throughout the first decade. The first decade of independence was characterized by intense competition among alignment and non-alignment movements (Kakhishvili, 2021). As Levan Kakhishvili (2021, p. 184) highlights, it is critical to recognize that the non-alignment movements of that time should not be regarded as neutrality but rather as demonstrations of anti-imperialism and the defence of newly obtained sovereignty. In the early 1990s, Western political and security institutions were cautious in recognizing the emergence of 15 new republics after the dissolution of the USSR, while Russia sought to reintegrate them back into its sphere of influence. Therefore, taking the non-alignment stances at this point was rather a way to declare resistance towards new Russian integration projects.

However, in the second half of the 1990s, parties started to declare stronger pro-Western stances. Specifically, the Shevardnadze's party Citizen's Union of Georgia started shifting towards the West from 1995 to 1999 (Kakhishvili, 2021, p. 187). There could be seen a few reasons for that, including broader integration of Georgia into the international organizations, increased tensions with Russia and their pressure towards security agreements, and centralization of political power. It was further institutionalized in Georgian foreign policy after the 1999 elections and escalated during the Pankisi crisis when Russia accused Georgia of supporting Chechen militias and violating its

space. As Georgia gained further support through the US-Georgia Train and Equip Program, they were able to restore control over the region by themselves and push militias out. As a result of these tensions, as well as a desire to safeguard its sovereignty and connect with Western institutions, Georgia decided to apply for NATO membership in 2002 (Kakhishvili, 2021, p. 188). Subsequently, the Citizen's Union of Georgia also took a stronger pro-Western alignment.

After the Revolution of Roses, Mikheil Saakashvili aimed to restore the relationship with Russia. Therefore, the United National Movement took non-alignment stances (Kakhishvili, 2021, p. 188). However, the tensions between the neighbours increased shortly after. At this point, Georgia was balancing between three possible long-term development models (de Waal, 2011, pp. 27-30): (1) "Old Georgia" model, which refers to the return to the traditional values and historical ways of doing business; (2) "Singapore" model, that aims to embrace minimal government, maximum liberalization and deregulation of the market; (3) "European Choice" model that suggest the alignment with the European values and ideals. The last model is of particular interest to us, as even though it was clear that no immediate prospects of joining the EU were seen, it still became predominant in Georgian political discourse. The pro-Western stances were getting stronger.

It all culminated in a full-scale war in 2008. According to James Nixey (2012), Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia had several purposes, including showcasing military strength, harming the prestige of the Georgian government, and hindering NATO enlargement in the region. Although Russia's direct influence over Georgia has decreased since then, they continue to try to exert influence through the implementation of sanctions and restrictions, as well as through indirect political leverage. The diplomatic relations were also terminated between the countries. However, the pro-Western trajectory has become undeniable to the majority of Georgians since then.

After the parliamentary elections of 2012, the new political party gained power – the Georgian Dream. According to Levan Kakhishvili's (2021) two-dimensional model, the

Georgian Dream had a stronger alignment position compared to the United National Movement but rather slightly less confident standing towards pro-Western or pro-Russian orientation. It wanted to keep its orientation with the West as it did with signing the Association Agreement with the EU, but also aimed to normalize relations with Russia.

The recent study by Sandro Tabatadze (2022) shows how European integration still remains among the key ones for most of the major political parties in Georgia. The author was able to identify three groups of parties based on their pro- or anti-European stances (Tabatadze, 2022, pp. 248-251):

(1) Parties with no strong position on European integration. This group includes parties like the Democratic Movement-United Georgia and the Labor Party. While they acknowledge certain threats in the process of European integration, they do not take anti-EU stances;

(2) Pro-European parties that clearly declare their position. This group includes two major Georgian parties (the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement), as well as the Republican Party and the Free Democrats. They all stress the importance of greater integration with the EU;

(3) The anti-European group consists of only the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. They perceive the integration with the EU as a challenge and fear further escalation with Russia due to that.

It is clear that the majority of the key political parties in Georgia are openly pro-European. What's also important, this study (Tabatadze, 2022, p. 251) indicated that the major predictor determining party manifestos was whether the party was in government or opposition rather than party ideology.

3. The Dream Deferred: Georgia's Stalled EU Integration and the Role of Political Cartelization

As can be seen in the second part, the prospect of European integration is currently undoubtedly in the official stances of most of the major parties, including the ruling Georgian Dream party and the main opposition one – the United National Movement. However, during the last few years, Georgia under the leadership of the Georgian Dream party stagnated with the increasing integration with the EU. In 2022, Ukraine and Moldova were granted official candidate status to the EU, and Georgia was expected to be given the same. However, due to the recent political challenges, stagnation with the implementation of reforms and deterioration in relations, Georgia did not receive the candidate status but was only recognized as a future possibility of such status. It was not an unexpected decision but still highly disappointing for the Georgians. Over the last few years, the tensions between the EU and Georgia were increasing as the Georgian Dream party did not conduct all of the necessary reforms and started to use some of the anti-Brussels rhetoric. But why did the Georgian Dream party and the appointed by the government recently delay the European integration of the country? This section argues that it is the result of the cartelization of the parties and their decreased reliance on fulfilling the demands of the electorate. In particular, after the recent cartelization, they are now able to conduct a bare minimum in European integration and maintain their dominance even while ignoring popular demands.

In this part, the paper will overview two key developments. First, it will focus on the evolution of the Georgian Dream Party. In particular, it will show how the political group managed to win their first election and transfer from the opposition into the government through the adoption of a catch-all approach and a threefold strategy. Such manoeuvring led to the situation of "winner-takes-all" and gave the Georgian Dream a resource to start the process of cartelization. The first subsection will then examine the gradual cartelization and its subsequent impact on European integration. Second, the

paper will analyze the strategic countermeasures adopted by the opposition parties, especially the United National Movement, to contest the ruling cartel party. It is argued that the inability to innovate and consolidate the inter-party stances effectively resulted in their failure to change the status quo of the Georgia political landscape.

3.1. European Aspirations Amidst Political Transformation: Understanding the Georgian Dream's Transition from Catch-All to Cartel

The Georgian Dream party owes its establishment to Bidzina Ivanishvili, the wealthiest individual in Georgia, possessing a net worth exceeding \$6 billion in 2011, according to Forbes Georgia (2021). Ivanishvili made his fortune during the privatization epoch of the 1990s in Russia. Ivanishvili returned to Georgia after 2003, although it was only in 2011 that he officially declared his intentions to become a politician. His political campaign centred on introducing a fresh wave of politicians and facilitating a comprehensive constitutional reform (Doward, 2011). Merely months after this announcement, the Georgian Dream made its first appearance in the Georgian political landscape in 2012.

During their initial elections, the Georgian Dream Party adopted a catch-all approach to increase their chances and to expand the potential electoral base throughout different socioeconomic groups. Their campaign platform was designed around pragmatic solutions, such as the promise of an increased social welfare state, restoration of territorial integrity and more profound integration with the EU. They emphasized the possible material gains for the electorate and focused on patron-client relations with the voters, as in the clientelistic approach described by Herbert Kitschelt (1995, pp. 447–472).

As was mentioned in the second part, it would be hard to say that the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement had strong opposing ideological stances. However, they were highly polarized against each other. Gegeshidze and de Waal mention three

particular challenges that are increasing due to such polarization (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021, p. 10): (1) socioeconomic and environmental concerns; (2) increasing alienation in the conflict zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; (3) tensions between traditional orthodox values and European cultural modernization. All of them are fueled by the deeper polarization of the society. Ian Kelly and David J. Kramer (2021) pinpoint two internal factors contributing to the instability of Georgia's politics, which include the ruling party's drive towards centralized power and the widespread scepticism about an independent judiciary. Therefore, to increase their chances of transitioning from opposition to ruling party, they devised a multi-pronged strategy.

First of all, they were able to consolidate their stances with other opposition actors. They accomplished this by forming a coalition with other parties, including the Republican Party of Georgia, the Conservative Party of Georgia, the Industry Will Save Georgia, the National Forum, and the Our Georgia–Free Democrats. This united front secured 54.7% of parliamentary seats, establishing a majority in the Parliament. Such a strategy is the quintessential measure to undertake in almost every case when opposition movements are striving to challenge the dominant party, according to Gary W. Cox (1997), and in the case of the Georgian Dream party, they could afford that owing to their financial capacity.

Second of all, the party highlighted its distinctiveness by drawing a clear line between the "old incumbents" and the "new agents of change." As it was mentioned in the first part, this tactic is commonplace among emerging parties in post-socialist countries. Typically, those 'new' parties aim to cleanse the country's political landscape by championing anti-establishment stances or pushing for reforms (Sikk, 2012, p. 467), and Ivanishvili effectively capitalized on this through his constitutional reform agenda. The Georgian Dream party managed to use their own novelty to their advantage.

Third of all, and lastly, they increased the internal party consolidation and focused on high-profile public figures. As it was outlined earlier in the first part, the parties tend to downplay certain issues to enhance the unity of their members (de Wardt, 2012), and the

Georgian Dream was no exception. To do that, they decided to promote their party through influential personalities such as Bidzina Ivanishvili himself, the renowned footballer Kakhaber Kaladze, and the popular Georgian poet Miriane (Guram) Odisharia. These strategies, in conjunction with the others mentioned above, laid the groundwork for the Georgian Dream Party's electoral success.

Following the electoral success and securing the majority seats in the Parliament, Bidzina Ivanishvili became the Prime Minister of Georgia and led the government from October 2012 until he was succeeded by Irakli Garibashvili in November 2013. At the same time, the Georgian Dream's candidate won the presidential elections – Giorgi Margvelashvili became the 4th President of Georgia. They also won the majority of the local elections in 2014. This mirrored past electoral trends, resulting in yet another "winner-takes-all" situation (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021, p.2). The recent first elections and the sustained reliance on electoral support prevented immediate cartelization of the party, resulting in a more gradual process than it was with the United National Movement after 2004. However, the party's leverage increased after the 2010 Constitutional Amendments came into force in November 2013, which transferred the authority from the presidential office to the Parliament. This period was marked by strengthening the relations with the European Union, evident in decisive steps towards the liberalization of the visa regime starting in 2012, ratification of the Association Agreement in 2014, and the eventual visa-free agreement proposed by the European Commission by the end of this Georgian Parliament's term in 2016. The latter came into power a year later. The party was still compelled to respond to the majority of public demands because they feared voter retaliation during the following election cycle. However, the government gradually started to centralize power, imitating Saakashvili's techniques of putting pressure on opposition politicians and the media; there were evident moves to create a one-party rule and take authority over the judiciary (Kelly & Kramer, 2021, p. 17).

The second parliamentary election for the ruling Georgian Dream party was in 2016. The Georgian Dream coalition during those elections also included the Social Democrats for the Development of Georgia, the Conservative Party of Georgia, and the Green Party of Georgia. Meanwhile, the opposition was chiefly represented by the United National Movement, with additional smaller parties, including previous allies like the Our Georgia–Free Democrats, and the Republican Party of Georgia. During those elections, the Georgian Dream had significantly stronger positions due to its widespread presence across all levels of government as part of the cartelization and advancement with political and social issues, such as the pro-European steps in foreign affairs. Therefore, despite the reduced size of their coalition, they were able to win the election and secure even more seats compared to the previous elections. The country's mixed voting system was one of the main elements that contributed to this outcome. Out of a total of 150 parliamentary seats, 73 members were elected using a two-round voting procedure in single-member districts under majority rule. It allowed the Georgian Dream to secure 71 places. While through proportional representation, they secured 44 seats out of 77 in total. Therefore, the opposition parties, especially the United National Movement, felt dissatisfied with the results.

The stronger cartelization of the party characterized this period as they were now less reliant on the direct voters' representation and were deeply integrated with the government on all levels. As the level of polarization increased and the ruling party began to reduce the degree of representation, various protests began to occur during this period, serving as a striking expression of the complex political environment. The study by Phillip Oravec and Edward Holland (2019) greatly illustrates how such protests shape the Georgian political system. The authors focus on two movements that happened in 2017-2018. The first one is the White Noise, it was a response to the arrest of two local rappers in the club due to the possession of marijuana. It triggered the public to demand the liberalize the narcotics laws. Despite the official statements by prime minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, the issue was progressing slowly, and it was the Constitutional Court that

eventually legalized the recreational usage of marijuana, showing the lack of social reforms from the Georgian Dream-led government. The second protest was a reaction to the light punishment given to two suspects who killed two juveniles. This caused a chain of protests led by Zaza Saralidze, the father of one of the boys who was killed. The key demand was a fair judiciary system and the resignation of Georgia's Prosecutor General. Eventually, social unrest led to the resignation of prime minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili himself.

Undoubtedly, the pivotal protest of this period happened in 2019: the so-called "Gavrilov's Night." This occurrence was triggered by Sergei Gavrilov, the controversial Russian State Duma member, who is known for his previous endorsement of the "independence" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia - the Georgian territories that Russia currently occupies. Gavrilov, as Chairman of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, sparked outrage by taking the seat assigned by the protocol for the Head of the Georgian Parliament and delivering the speech on the brotherhood of Georgia and Russia. Subsequently, this act catalyzed a widespread public protest, with a multitude of Georgians expressing their disapproval of the state's direction under the leadership of the Georgian Dream.

The primary demands of these protestors included the transition from the prevailing semi-proportional electoral system to a fully proportional one and the renunciation of Irakli Kobakhidze – Georgia's Parliamentary Chairman. Eventually, Kobakhidze resigned, and the ruling Georgian Dream party agreed with the demands to change the electoral system. However, they failed to do that. Therefore, following severe negotiations with the opposition parties facilitated by the representatives from the EU and the US, the existing system was amended through the endorsement of the new seat distribution: the majoritarian system in single-member constituencies would elect a mere 30 MPs, with the remaining 120 determined through proportional representation. Nevertheless, the fully proportional system should be implemented only by 2024. Those agreements became known as the "March Agreements" (Lomsadze, 2020). However,

according to the opposition. However, the opposition claimed that one of the terms of the agreement was the release of political prisoners. Therefore, even protests did not result in the satisfaction of people's demands by the cartelized ruling party.

Among the incumbents, the notable exception was the winning presidential campaign of Salome Zourabichvili, who was an independent candidate but supported by the Georgian Dream. However, she is known for being ready to take bold anti-party stands sometimes, including vetoing the legislative proposal. After the pressure from the West, she issued pardons for two political figures: Irakli Okruashvili and Giorgi Ugulava.

Therefore, during the third parliamentary election in the history of the Georgian Dream, they were now in a more polarized society but with substantial governance leverage. This time, their alliance fell apart, with all of the allies leaving the coalition ahead of the election. In contrast, the United National Movement were able to effectively consolidate numerous smaller opposition parties around them. Despite this, the Georgian Dream emerged victorious in the election by securing both the relative majority in the proportional election (60 seats out of 150) and by totally winning the majoritarian one (all of the 30 seats). As a result, they held 90 seats in total, which was considerably less but still enough to take the majority in the newly formed Parliament. Their successful strategy as a cartel party lay in resource mobilization, underscored by governmental achievements like effectively managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of the 2020 parliamentary elections, the polarization in Georgia increased and it led to the crisis. The Georgian Dream party won the elections, but the opposition refused to recognize the elections and accused the ruling party of fraud and irregularities. The opposition parties decided to boycott the parliament, which resulted in the first time a one-party Parliament since Georgia regained its independence (Kelly & Kramer, 2021, p. 21). It further intensified after the arrest of the United National Movement Chairman Nika Melia in 2021. Those confrontations further divide society and increase political tensions.

Despite Georgia's enduring commitment to becoming part of Euro-Atlantic entities, the EU views the country's shortcomings in its legal system and intense political disagreements as major barriers to deeper integration (Smolnik et al., 2021). Therefore, the EU tried to increase their representation in Georgia by taking further from being the facilitator to becoming the mediator in the crisis resolution by appointing a Personal Envoy – Christian Danielsson. But the compromise is still not achieved. Smolnik, Sarjveladze and Tadumadze (2021) argue that such an extensive involvement of the EU in Georgian domestic politics also poses some challenges, such as the asymmetry in the EU-Georgia relations, the legitimacy of reforms and so on. However, the authors (Smolnik et al., 2021) suggest that the further involvement of the EU, and not only with the political gridlock, is essential for strengthening European integration. Recent changes to the EU's eastern neighbourhood policies, which resulted in Ukraine and Moldova receiving candidate status, as well as the open-door policy hinting at a future similar status for Georgia, could be seen as steps in this direction.

Ian Kelly and David J. Kramer (2021), however, note that while the Georgian Dream proclaims allegiance to the West, there have been instances of mixed signals regarding the country's relations with NATO, the EU, Russia, and the United States. During the first election cycles, the Georgian Dream was fighting for the electorate and, therefore, adopted the catch-all strategy, which in the Georgian case had included pro-European stances as the result of previous political developments. However, during the last elections of 2020, they could ignore that as they became non-reliant on the voters. Due to the "winner-takes-all" situation, they were able to accumulate resources in their hands and replicate a similar situation that was during the Saakashvili's times. They started to prioritize governance over political representation, which aligns with Katz and Mair's (1995) understanding of the cartel party. The lack of representation might limit citizens' engagement in the political process, which is a crucial component in preserving democratic regimes (Chabanna, 2011). It happened due to favourable political conditions, such as the institutionalization of the party after ten years of ruling position

and previous historical tendencies towards similar cartelization (Detterbeck, 2005). Georgian Dream also increased its dependence on state resources to promote political agenda and became deeply integrated within national and local governments. Moreover, as the typical representation does not work with cartel parties, it often leads to public mistrust, and the electorate has to pursue their political goals through alternative forms (Katz & Mair, 1995). As it was illustrated above, that was what specifically happened in the Georgian case.

3.2. Opposition Strategies in Georgia: Evolution, Impact, and Challenges in the Era of Party Cartelization

However, the cartelization of the Georgian Dream was enabled by the opposition's struggles to contest its dominance. In this part, the paper will trace the evolution of Georgia's opposition strategies in the face of the cartelization of the governing party, the Georgian Dream. This analysis will provide insight into how various political actors were adapting to the emerging cartelization of the dominant party and, as a response to that, started to consolidate more effectively.

As for the first election in 2012, the opponents to the Georgian Dream Coalition could be divided into two categories: (1) the prime opponent represented by the ruling party of the United National Movement, and (2) the minor parties that refused to join the coalition and failed to gain any parliamentary representation such as the Christian-Democratic Movement or the Georgian Labour Party. However, at this point, it was the Georgian Dream who was the opposition seeking to challenge the dominant cartelized party, the United National Movement.

As delineated in the preceding subsection, they succeeded with that mission and secured 85 seats in the Parliament due to a threefold strategy:

(1) they were able to consolidate the inter-party position among the opposition, leaving only smaller parties outside, as it was illustrated above;

(2) they firmly emphasized the newness of the movement coupled with an aggressive criticism of the ruling party's previous failures, a tactic that has assisted the Georgian Dream with increasing their own legitimacy (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021, p. 7);

(3) they increased the intra-party consolidation and focused on promoting particular key figures.

It led to the electoral victory, and from that moment on, it was the United National Movement who had to be innovative in their strategy to come out of the opposition.

By the 2016 parliamentary elections, the tables had turned, with the Georgian Dream emerging as the ruling actor. Their coalition had transformed due to the exit of two members throughout the first term: the Our Georgia – Free Democrats, the National Forum, the Industry Will Save Georgia, and the Republican Party of Georgia, so they became part of the opposition.

However, the major competitors during those elections were the previous ruling United National Movement party and the emerging conservative faction Alliance of Patriots of Georgia – United Opposition. The latter, as it was already illustrated in the second part of this paper, is the only major anti-European force in Georgia. It's worth noting that alongside these major players, a multitude of minor parties were present during those elections, although their impact was rather insignificant.

During those elections, the United National Movement was still the biggest opposition party, but they failed to consolidate others around them. Crucially, the party failed to exploit the fracturing of the previous Georgian Dream Coalition and the emergence of new independent players. Moreover, the United National Movement lacked any innovative strategy and primarily revolved around their previous successful policies during Saakashvili's presidency. It led to the eventual failure of the opposition and the second victory of the Georgian Dream.

The third parliamentary election in 2020 witnessed the opposition fortifying its stance, utilizing the political capital accumulated from various protests and other forms of contentious politics. As the unrest also strengthened the polarization of Georgian

politics, the opposition parties started to lean more towards cooperation. Greater collaboration was observed among them, especially following the March Agreements and negotiations prior to them. Moreover, this time the United National Movement learned from its previous lessons and was able to form a strong coalition with other minor players. It resulted in the creation of the United Opposition "Strength is in Unity" Coalition. While also signed an agreement "On Protecting Each Other's Votes" with the other major opposition parties, including the European Georgia, the Lelo for Georgia, the Girchi, the United Georgia – Democratic Movement, the Republican Party, and the Labor Party. As a result, seven other opposition parties were also able to secure parliamentary seats. Those smaller parties were also more innovative than the two main parties, which allowed them to increase their stances even with smaller resources available. The most notable example is the Girchi, the libertarian party known for its activism and inventive approach to promote its agenda and consolidate public support.

In a notable move during the 2020 Parliamentary Elections, to increase the general turnout at the 2020 Parliamentary Elections, Girchi promised to give away Tesla Model 3 cars each year for the subsequent four years to randomly chosen voters, irrespective of their political affiliations (Girchi, 2020). They framed that as a form of protest against the state financing of political parties, and they committed to subsidizing this scheme using public funds allocated to parliamentary parties until the bill cancelling state funding was passed.

Nevertheless, the ruling Georgian Dream party won once more in 2020. As previously discussed, the opposition parties did not recognize those elections and boycotted the newly formed Parliament. The opposition parties were able to consolidate their stances this time, and all refused to join the parliamentary sessions, thereby deepening the political crisis. The crisis intensified after the arrest of Nikanor Melia, the leader of the major party in opposition – the United National Movement – in February 2021. Hence, the Western representatives stepped in. As it was mentioned in the previous subsection, the EU, and also the US, mediated the process of negotiations between the ruling

Georgian Dream and other parties. Under the supervision of the EU Council President Charles Michel, both sides were able to reach a shaky agreement on the 19th of April 2021. Almost all opposition parties signed it, with the major exception of the United Opposition "Strength is in Unity" Coalition. This resulted in a fragmentation of the unified opposition stance and further complicated the political landscape.

The Strength is in Unity Coalition joined the Parliament only in May after the release of Nikanor Melia but did not sign the agreement. Eventually, the Georgian Dream Party also left the deal the same year later. The tense situation escalated once more with the arrest of the previous Georgian President, Mikheil Saakashvili, after his return in October 2021. Saakashvili began a hunger strike, and his health deteriorated over time as he was also not provided with essential medical treatment. All of that also worsened the relations with the EU afterwards. The situation was especially exacerbated after the ambiguous standing of the Georgian government in response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February, 2022. However, the latter aspect is too cutting-edge and requires further research later.

The Georgian Dream Party were able to ignore the opposition again and conduct policies devoid of checks and balances. As a cartel party, they started to focus more on governance rather than representation. The opposition parties failed to challenge that status quo. To a large extent, this could be attributable to the United National Movement's predominance in the opposition.

Firstly, a lot of people had negative associations with the United National Movement due to some of the controversies they did during their time in office. These residual imprints prevent the party from leveraging the newness as a factor to increase their chances. However, they took strong anti-establishment stances as a tactic. Such stances, as argued by Alan Sikk (2012), are non-ideological but rather emphasize contemporary social and political issues in indistinct directions with the aim of appealing to a wide range of the public. In the Georgian case, this included specifically criticism for slow European integration over the last few years and the stagnation in judicial reforms.

Secondly, the United National Movement tried to include more prominent figures in their parties in a bid to widen their support base, such as famous actor and singer Vakhtang Kikabidze. This strategy, however, was met with reluctance from some figures and local leaders that were not ready to join due to the party's contentious past.

Thirdly, they are failing to make appropriate use of newly available digital tools. For instance, they did not try to use digital citizen-initiated campaigning (Gibson, 2013) or to effectively spread information about the candidates through the Internet (Gorokhovskaia, 2019).

Fourthly and most crucially, they did not consolidate the opposition due to political rivalry. As it was illustrated above, they failed to fully unite all the major opposition parties, which essential for winning in a hostile environment (Cox, 1997). Moreover, it was mentioned in the first part of this paper that such a strategy raises the probability of winning by 29% (Wahman, 2013, p. 15).

In terms of minor opposition parties, the paper finds a lack of both resources and coherence as major impediments to their ability to oppose the dominant cartel party. Therefore, there is a critical need for more efficient strategies for opposition parties to contest the status quo.

Conclusions

The recurrent trend of dominating party cartelization in Georgia, as exhibited by the ruling Georgian Dream party, is not an anomaly in Georgian political history. The situation when the "winner-takes-all" have been commonplace throughout the independent history of the state (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021) and generally led to the cartelization of dominant parties. Similar circumstances were with the previous ruling party, the United National Movement, which demonstrated a significant detachment from citizens, valuing governance above representation. They became an integral part of the state building, and the state building became an integral part of them. Therefore, it was, to some extent, inevitable that the Georgian Dream would cartelize.

Drawing upon the works by Otto Kirchheimer (1966) and Katz and Mair (1995) in the first part, the paper was able to clearly define the essential for this thesis terms: catch-all and cartel parties. The idea of a catch-all party implies reducing ideological constraints, amplification of top-down leadership, diminishment of individual party members' roles, deemphasizing connections to specific social classes or denominational clientele and nurturing relationships with various interest groups for financial and electoral advantages. While the concept of a cartel party includes administrative efficiency and policy promotion through state-controlled media, and leaders often view politics as a career and financial safeguard, prioritizing governance over public interests and identities. As mentioned by Henrik Enroth (2017), it is also essential to understand when and how, in particular, the party (not) represents the constituents through the assessment of political pressure.

The contextual examination of the evolution of Georgia's political system provided valuable insights into the setting that facilitated the emergence of the cartel parties in the country.

Firstly, I overviewed the instability of the first years after independence, including the coup d'état, the civil war, economic collapse, territorial disintegration, the rise of the

local authorities and the fragmented party system. Those fundamental challenges substantially shaped the country's political environment, determining its long-term development trajectory.

Secondly, I examined the first attempts of the state to regain its sovereignty during the presidency of Shevardnadze. This period left a notable legacy within the Georgian political system, including the "winner-takes-all" tendency, the existence of a major pro-government party (the strategy of the Citizen's Union of Georgia would be later adopted by Saakashvili) and the delegitimization of previous leadership.

Thirdly, I analyzed the presidency of Saakashvili and the predominance of the United National Movement in the party system. This period was marked by further consolidation of central power and more extensive pro-Western alignment. However, the lack of democratic engagement was maintained throughout the whole rule of the United National Movement. The United National Movement also developed a novel strategy of "satellite" parties that were able to take the votes from the opposition.

Fourthly, this paper delved into the political developments after the parliamentary election of 2012. Similarly to the previous years, the "winner-takes-all" tendency remained as the new major party – Georgian Dream, was able to take over control over the parliament, the institute of the presidency and executive offices. However, this period is also characterized by the further intensification of polarization within the society.

The ruling Georgian Dream Party also rapidly became cartelized and started to shift its stance regarding European integration. Despite no official change in positions, the process of reforms that were requisite for continued progress towards the EU was hindered. Due to that factor, for instance, Georgia did not get the candidate status as did Moldova and Ukraine. Moreover, after the EU increased their involvement in Georgian domestic politics through mediation during the political crisis, an anti-Brussels attitude emerged in speeches made by senior party officials. A divergence occurred as the majority of Georgian citizens instead continued to express their belief in the European

future of the country. Such a dichotomy is possible due to the cartel nature of today's parties' relations with the other actors. The Georgian Dream Party is now able to maintain its influence through resource allocation and ignore, to some extent, the electorate. However, as it was shown during the recent Georgian protests, like any other cartel, the unconventional representation methods might still force them to reconsider their positions.

The current challenge is whether the opposition parties would be able to increase their stances against the incumbent party. The previous two electoral cycles have exposed their inability to counteract the cartelized presence of the ruling Georgian Dream party. During both of the elections, the primary contender was the previous ruling United National Movement, along with a few minor parties. In the electoral year of 2016, the United National Movement was unsuccessful in leveraging the previous Georgian Dream Coalition disintegration, consolidating other opposition parties, or pioneering tactical innovations. This sequence of missteps led to their defeat and a second victory for the Georgian Dream. While in the 2020 elections, they improved their stances and showed robust collaboration by forming the United Opposition "Strength is in Unity" Coalition and signing inter-party cooperation agreements with other major players. At the same time, minor parties revealed increasing creativity by employing novel tools to boost their campaigns. However, the joint opposition failed again due to the incomplete consolidation, lack of digital tools utilization by the major party, and unresolved controversies of the major opposition party in the past. More consolidated standings of the opposition could've increased their chance of challenging the entrenched cartel position of the ruling party, mirroring the success of the Georgian Dream itself in 2012.

In the introduction, I identified the puzzle based on Schumpeter's minimalist conception of democracy. His theory suggests that if elected leaders fail to implement the popular will, they run the risk of not being re-elected in the following term (Elliott, 1994). However, the Georgian Dream's case contradicts this, as they were able to maintain power even without fulfilling the European aspirations of their electorate for

over a decade. To answer the puzzle, I would argue that this notion works only in ideal theoretical situations where individual external factors can be effectively levelled out. In contrast, in real-world scenarios such as Georgia's, the specific national context, the opposition ambiguity, and the increased cartelization of the ruling party allowed the Georgian Dream to fortify its hold, even without entirely meeting its constituents' aspirations.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Дипломної (курсової) роботи

Тема: «Євроінтеграція Грузії: аналіз провалу опозиції на парламентських виборах 2020 року»

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Захищена “ ____ ” _____ 20_ р. *(дата не проставляється)*

Короткий зміст роботи:

Вже пройшов майже рік від того моменту, як Україна та Молдова отримали статуси кандидата в ЄС, коли ж Грузія і надалі залишається без нього. Для пояснення причин стагнації у грузинській Євроінтеграції, ця робота фокусується на кейс-стаді політичних партій Грузії та їхніх взаємовідносин всередині однієї політичної системи. Основною моделлю взаємовідносин тут визначається «картель-опозиція». В рамках неї існує домінуюча картель партія, яка ігнорує фактор репрезентації виборці та фокусується на управлінні, і опозиція, яка намагається кинути виклик цьому. Саме сучасне становище домінуючої «Грузинської мрії» як картелю стратегічно дозволило їм утримувати владу в Грузії, не задовольняючи повністю європейських прагнень своїх виборців. Коли ж опозиція не змогла порушити статус-кво через брак єдності, відсутність інноваційних стратегій і певні контроверсійності з минулого ключової опозиційної партії - «Єдиного національного руху». Щоб пояснити причини виникнення такої ситуації, ця робота поділяється на декілька частин: вступ, теоретичний розділ, історико-контекстуальний розділ, агенто-центрований розділ та висновки.