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**Georgian foreign policy towards Russia: Comparison of the Saakashvili
and Ivanishvili era**

Diploma thesis

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I hereby declare that I have written the submitted thesis independently. All the sources used have been adequately referenced and are listed in the Bibliography.

In Olomouc

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List of abbreviations

DCFTA – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

CFP – Comparative Foreign Policy

COPDAB – Conflict and Peace Data Bank

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CREON – Comparative Research on the Events of Nations

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization

GD – Georgian Dream

GDP – Gross domestic product

EU – European Union

EUMM – European Union Monitoring Mission

FPA – Foreign Policy Analysis

IR – International Relations

JCC – Joint Control Commission

MAP – Membership Action Plan

NSC – National Security Concept

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

SGS - Société Générale de Surveillance

UN – United Nations

UNM – United National Movement

US – United States

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

WEIS – World Event Interaction Survey

WTO – World Trade Organization

Introduction

Since the restoration of the Georgian independent state in 1991, Russo-Georgian relations have undergone a number of fundamental changes – from the initial stability, through gradual deterioration and subsequent war in 2008, to the effort to normalization and the current schism caused by the political crisis after the 2020 parliamentary elections. Within those thirty years, several foreign policy decision-makers on both Russian and Georgian side have taken turns. Even if each of them represented a period characterized by specific aims and challenges and specific foreign policy strategy, certain aspects of the continuity in the foreign policy course set in 2004 can be seen until nowadays (Markedonov 2021).

There can be seen a certain progress in the relations between Russia and Georgia when comparing its current stage with the situation in the late 2000s. However, this progress would have not been possible without many individual steps taken in foreign policy by the decision-makers in both countries. In this work, the author explains the development of the decision making process in the foreign policy of Georgia and analyses specific steps that led to the changes in the Russo-Georgian relations.

To understand the development and changes in the Russo-Georgian relations, it is necessary to get a deeper knowledge of historical, societal and political events that shaped the foreign policy decisions made by several decision making entities. The survey on foreign policy development is important for several reasons. It shows and proves the magnitude of each step – even the one that seems the least influential – taken in the foreign policy making process and explains how each decision can lead to either negative or beneficial consequences for each country.

Subject and goal of the work

This work illustrates the development of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia by comparing two consecutive periods of the Georgian foreign policy making process. These two periods are characterized by the governance of two Georgian political parties – the United National Movement (UNM) between 2004 and 2012 and the Georgian Dream (GD) between

2012 and 2020.¹ It also shows the sequence of events and decisions taken in foreign policy making processes that were crucial for the development of the Russo-Georgian relations in several areas such as security, economy, human affairs and others (according to selected variables). This work seeks to understand the foreign policy decision-making process by pointing out specific events and categorising them. It seeks to do so in order to provide an understanding of the foreign policy outcomes and their impact on the security, political and economic situation in Georgia.

As the title of this work suggests, in this research the author focuses on the foreign policy of Georgia towards Russia and compares two different time periods of the foreign policy making processes. These time periods are limited by the governance of two significant Georgian political entities – Mikheil Saakashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili. Both of them served as Georgian prime ministers at the very beginning of each surveyed time period. Both of them also served – at least for several months – as leaders of the governing parties, the UNM and the GD.

The author decides to indicate the surveyed periods as “Saakashvili era” and “Ivanishvili era”. The Saakashvili era starts with presidential elections in January 2004, which followed the Rose Revolution² and ends with the parliamentary elections in October 2012, as the Ivanishvili’s party GD gained the majority of the vote and formed the new government.³

The second period, the Ivanishvili era, starts with the parliamentary elections in October 2012, when the newly established Georgian Dream party won the elections and Ivanishvili became a prime minister and ends with parliamentary elections in 2020. Both time periods last 8 years, therefore, the author considers them suitable for comparison.⁴

¹ The author observes the governance of the Georgian Dream party in the years 2012-2020, even though its rule further continues, as the Georgian Dream party won the parliamentary elections in late 2020.

² Rose Revolution is a designation for a series of anti-government protests held in Tbilisi in November 2003 that led to the resignation of the then President Eduard Shevardnadze and the appointment of a new president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili (Kandelaki 2006: 4). See chapters 2.2.6 and 2.2.7.

³ This period is characterized by several milestones, such as the initial euphoria caused by the Rose Revolution, rise of authoritarian practices and public unrests, deteriorating relations with Russia, Russo-Georgian war in 2008 or political crisis in 2009. During these 8 years, Saakashvili’s United National Movement was the governing party.

⁴ The second surveyed period is characterised by gradual negotiating with Russia on one hand and the European Union on the other (Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014). As in the first surveyed period, there were strong anti-government demonstrations.

Although Ivanishvili was not active in politics between 2013 and 2018, the author decided to keep the naming of this period as “Ivanishvili era”, in order to maintain a uniform style of naming for both periods. In addition, the GD was governing during the whole 2012–2020 period which is why the author considers it important for this research to keep this naming – because the ruling party has been preserved.

Methodology and research questions

For this study, the author sets the following research questions:

1) How did the factors influencing the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia differ in the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era?

2) How has Georgia’s foreign policy towards Russia in the Ivanishvili era changed from Georgia’s foreign policy towards Russia in the Saakashvili era?

This work is the qualitative comparative case study. In particular, the author uses the method of structured focused comparison. The method was first introduced by Alexander George in 1979 as a response to the increase of the demand for more systematic applications of qualitative methods and empirical findings (Drozdova and Gaubatz 2010: 1) and is characterized by its emphasis on a selection of only certain aspects of the surveyed historical case (therefore *focused*). Further, it uses general questions when collecting the data (therefore *structured*) (Kaarbo and Beasley 1999: 377). In this method, it is necessary to categorize relevant events into specific categories to identify the area in which the case or group of cases is studied (George and Bennet 2005: 58). Further in this study, the author calls these categories “variables”.

In her research, the author uses the diachronic type of comparative study, which enables her to compare two different time periods in one case (one country) (Karlás 2008: 68) This type of study enables to focus on the development of a specific phenomenon in a longer period of time. The studied phenomenon is then considered as a process (Scholz 2009: 72–73). In practice, the author compares two different periods in which two different decision-making entities governed in one country.

Selection of Variables

In order to conduct the comparison, the author presents a set of specific variables which help to answer both research questions. The set of variables for this work is created in accordance with the current FPA and constructivist research. When creating the set of variables, the author takes into account the current research on Georgian foreign policy as such. The author also differentiates between the set of independent and dependent variables. A set of independent variables aims to find the answer to the first research question. On the other hand, a group of dependent variables helps to answer the second research question.

Several authors were trying to understand what drives the decision-making process in Georgian foreign policy. According to some of them, ideas, ideology, social order preferences and public opinion are perceived as the main factors playing a key role in Georgian foreign policy making (Kakachia, Mineashvili 2015: 1–2; Gvalia, Iashvili, Siroky et al. 2013: 102). In general, political elites are seen as one of the main decision-making entity when it comes to the foreign policy making process (Kakachia, Mineashvili 2015: 3). In the Georgian case, Kakachia and Mineashvili consider its foreign policy as strongly elite-driven (Kakachia, Mineashvili 2015: 3). In the context of the elite-driven foreign policy, Gvalia, Iashvili and Siroky also point out the importance of ideas. According to them, ideas of an elite entity can affect the perception of external threats, can determine the interpretation of foreign policy outcomes, and can also serve as a roadmap to show the range of available policy options (Gvalia, Iashvili, Siroky et al. 2013: 109). The term “ideas” is defined as beliefs held by individuals that affect foreign policy outcomes (Tannenwald 2005: 17–20). Besides the factor of the ideas of the political elite, the factor of domestic political environment is also considered as a very influential one in the Georgian case. As Kakachia and his colleagues state, domestic issues have had the biggest impact on Georgian foreign policy and its external relations. They further outlined six general factors that, according to them, shape the foreign policy in Georgia such as the following: economy, political culture, national minorities, public opinion, institutional structures, and leadership (Kakachia et al. 2013: 15).

Besides the internal factors that influence the country’s foreign policy decision making, it is important to pay attention to the external factors as well. For Georgia, these factors are the relations with its foreign partners and neighbouring states, such as Russia, the United States (US) the European Union (EU) or Turkey (Kavadze 2020: 20). According to Kavadze, Russia

has always played a significant role in the formation of Georgia's foreign policy. Russia aims to maintain its domination over the Georgian territory for military, security or economic⁵ reasons. Through domination over Georgia, Russia could accomplish domination over the South Caucasus as such (Kavadze 2020: 21–22).

Another factor in the Georgian foreign policy making is Georgian relations with the West, notably with the US, EU and NATO. In the question of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia in particular, this factor plays a significant role. When looking at the Georgian foreign policy development processes right after gaining independence, there can be seen a lack of experience in foreign policy making, such as with democratic processes. Kakachia and Mineashvili stress that there was no strategy nor ideology in foreign policy except the main premise determining Georgia's belonging to Europe (Kakachia, Mineashvili 2015: 3–4). Subsequently and gradually, several major ideas about foreign policy were created by the Georgian political elite. These identified Georgia as a European country and rejected Georgia's membership in the orbit of Russian influence (Gvalia, Iashvili, Siroky et al. 2013: 110). For instance, the Act of Restoration of State Independence of Georgia adopted on 9th April 1991 states that "*Georgia did not join the Soviet Union voluntarily*" and that *the entire period during which Georgia was forced to be a member of the Soviet Union was marked by bloody terror and repressions.*" (Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia 1991). In addition, integration with the West and Euro-Atlantic political and military institutions was then seen as the only possible means to reach modernization (Gvalia, Iashvili, Siroky et al. 2013: 110).

To get a complete picture of the factors influencing the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia, the scheme created by Kavadze and showed in figure 1 can help. It outlines the main areas of factors, such as the ideas of leaders, domestic political and societal issues and the role of external actors, such as Russia, US, EU and NATO.

⁵ Gas and oil pipelines passing through Georgia from Azerbaijan undermine Russian monopoly on the gas and oil delivery to Western Europe (Kavadze 2020: 22).

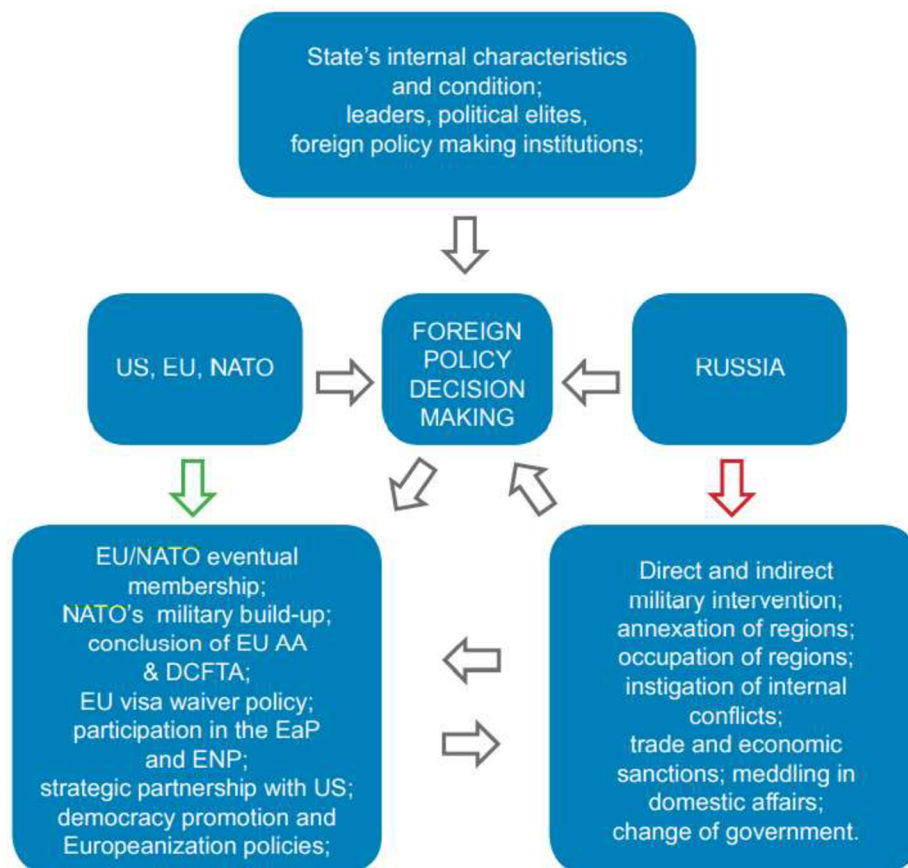


Figure 1: Factors influencing the foreign policy of Georgia (Kavadze 2020: 30).

In order to answer the first research question “How did the factors influencing the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia differed between the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era?” the author presents the set of independent variables. She uses the findings of the current research on the factors influencing the Georgian foreign policy together with findings of the study conducted by Stephen Andriole, Jonathan Wilkenfeld and Gerald W. Hopple. The study of Andriole and his colleagues introduces a framework for the comparative analysis of foreign policy behaviour of countries and presents a set of variable components consisting of the psychological, political, societal, inter-state and global fields (Andriole, Wilkenfeld & Hopple 1975: 182). The set of variable components created by Andriole et al. were useful when creating the set of variables for this work. Notably, the author of this work uses the psychological, political and societal components outlined by Andriole et al. The set of variable components introduced in the study conducted by Andriole and his colleagues is shown in figure 2.

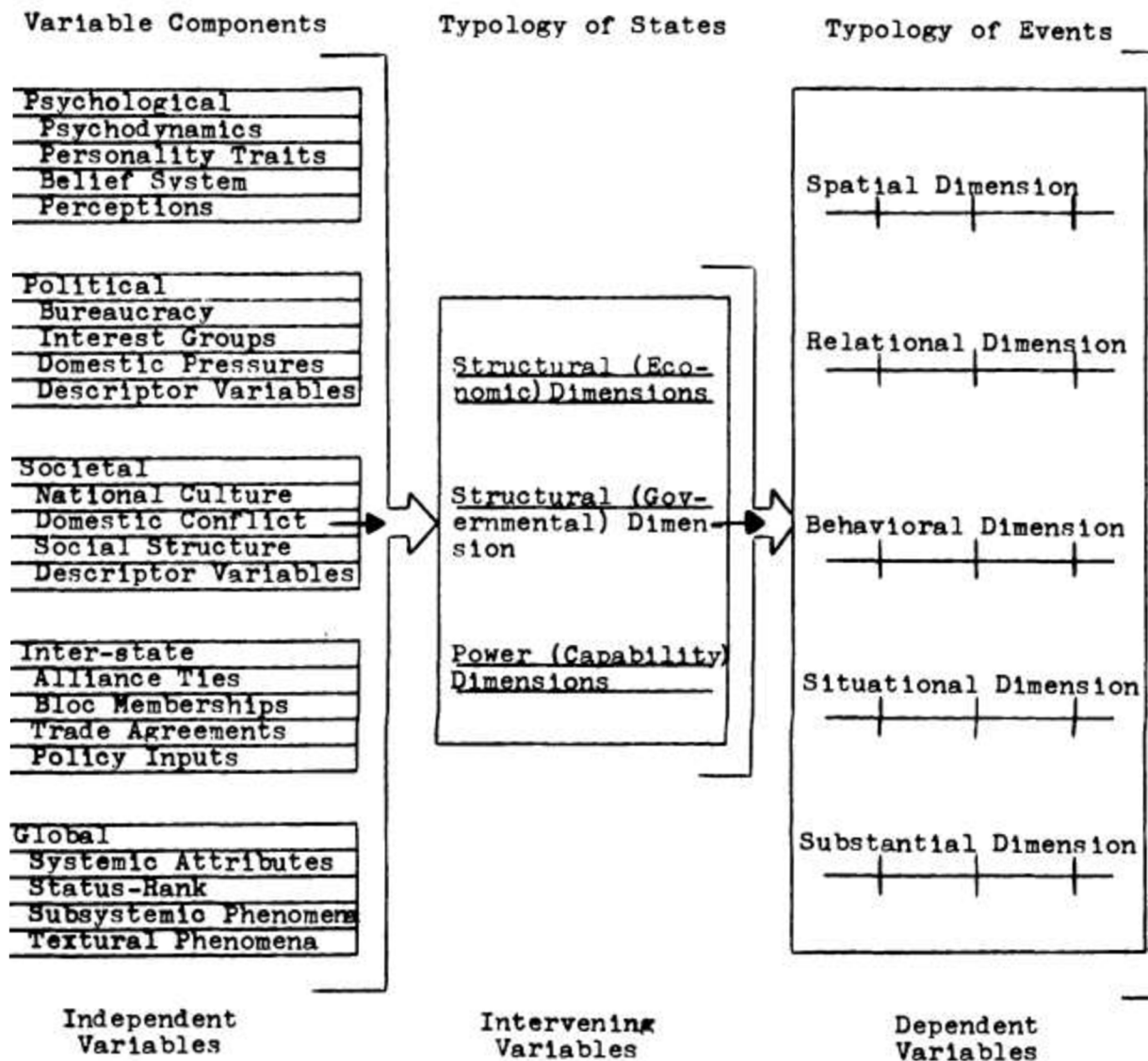


Figure 2: Set of variable components created by Andriole, Wilkenfeld and Hopple (Andriole, Wilkenfeld & Hopple 1975: 182).

In this work, the following set of independent variables is used:

- **Personality of the leader**

This variable relates to the values, beliefs, attitudes, ideas, past experiences or social background factors of relevant decision-makers. For this work, the personalities of the two main decision-makers – Mikheil Saakashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili are studied.

- **Political performance**

Into this category, all the events related to the political performance in Georgia within the surveyed periods will be included. That means, political and constitutional changes, party competition and others.

- **Socio-economic performance**

This variable integrates events relating to social and economic facts. This variable gathers data referring to economic growth and trade, but also internal tensions, frustrations of the public or other non-political events related to public opinion.

- **Georgian relations with the EU, NATO and the US**

This variable associates all events related to Georgian relations with the western structures, such as the European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the United States. Unlike the previous three, this variable does not relate to internal or domestic issues. The author includes the three entities – EU, NATO and the US into the same category, because the Georgian relations to all of them lead to the integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, which, according to Kavadze, increases Russia's insecurity. It also serves as a trigger for Russia's actions aiming at the maximization of gaining control over the territory, which was for decades part of Russian territory and is strategically valuable in terms of improving Russia's prospects of defence (Kavadze, 2020: 31).

- **The question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia**

Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions still officially remain part of the Georgian territory. The relations between the central Georgian government and the two regions have been cold since Georgia gained independence. These two regions have played and still play a significant role in the Russian foreign policy towards Georgia, such as in Georgian foreign policy towards Russia. For that reason, the author considers it as an important part of this work to analyse, how events related to South Ossetia and Abkhazia influenced the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia. However, in 2008, several crucial events took place which meant that South Ossetia and Abkhazia could no longer objectively be perceived as a full-fledged part of the cohesive state of Georgia. These events included the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, Russia's subsequent

recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and related Russian financial, military and political support to both regions. As a result of the outlined changes, Georgia's activities towards South Ossetia and Abkhazia have directly been reflected in Russian-Georgian relations. For these reasons, the author of this work decides that from a certain moment (event), Georgian action towards South Ossetia or Abkhazia will be classified into the group of dependent variables. This will place such action among those events that Georgia has undertaken against Russia itself.

The author selected one specific event that marks the change in the perception of Georgian action towards South Ossetia/Abkhazia and is beginning to perceive it as an action towards Russia. Such an event is the publication of a Russian President's Instruction that pledges Russian support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia on April 16, 2008 (Putin 2008). All foreign policy decisions and events that Georgia has taken in relation to South Ossetia and Abkhazia after that moment, will be considered as steps taken by Georgia towards Russia. The author will therefore rank them among the group of dependent variables.

- **Russian action towards Georgia**

All the action referring to activities that Russia took in relation to Georgia will be classified in this variable. The Georgian foreign policy towards Russia is influenced by the Russian foreign policy towards Georgia and vice versa. Therefore, the author considers this category as another important part of the set of variables.

The second research question asks *how Georgia's foreign policy towards Russia has changed in the Ivanishvili era from the Saakashvili era*. To answer it, the author presents a set of dependent variables focusing on the Georgian foreign policy outcomes. The author categorizes relevant events into variables related to specific foreign policy outcomes. When creating the set of dependent variables, the author uses the Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB) codebook, which was created by Edward Azar in 1993. The COPDAB codebook presents a list of components of international and domestic events or interactions of countries – both towards one another and within their domestic environments (Azar 1993:2). In the codebook, Azar presents the following variables: symbolic political relations; economic relations; military and strategic relations; cultural and scientific relations; relations regarding

the physical environment and natural resources; relations about human/demographic/ethnic issues; political order and law/organization relations and a residual category (Azar 1993: 10). When creating the set of dependent variables for this work, the author takes inspiration from Azar's work and uses some of the variables created by him. The set of the dependent variables for this work is as follows:

- **Political relations**

The variable refers to events such as diplomatic meetings or bilateral discussions, visits, expressions of friendship, but also to arrests of "enemy agents" or rhetoric.

- **Economic relations**

Into this category, all events referring to economic interactions are collected. Giving the example, this might be the case of trade agreements, common market activities, taxes, price and wage increases and others.

- **Military and strategic relations**

This group of events involves interactions in the military field, such as troop deployments, military exercises, wars, bombings, airspace violations, ceasefire violations, etc.

- **Resolutions and legislative norms**

Into this category, all the events related to legislative norms and political resolutions adopted by the Georgian authorities are classified.

- **Role of the media**

The last variable used in this research deals with media. The author considers the media problematics as an important one since the spread of information plays a significant role in the way how the public opinion is shaped in the current Georgian society (Kokashvili 2005: 210; Transparency International 2020a).

To find the answers to both research questions, the author collects data about the activities that shaped the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia from 2004 until 2020. Each

action is categorized into a specific variable (independent or dependent). With the help of the set of variables, the author compares each period – Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era – and evaluates the results.

Work structure

The work is structured into four main parts – theoretical, contextual, analytical and comparative part. Each of them includes several subchapters that better structure the content of the whole work and refer to different aspects of the surveyed topic.

The theoretical part serves as the basic anchoring of the research in theoretical approaches. It introduces concepts as Foreign Policy Analysis and Comparative Foreign Policy which the author decides to use as the key concepts for this work. It also puts these concepts into the constructivist approach – and the holistic constructivist approach in particular, which is one of the main approaches in the field of International relations. It also explains the relevance of the application of the Comparative Foreign Policy concept for the constructivist approach.

The second part of this work is called the contextual part. Therein, the author focuses on the facts and circumstances that accompany and complete the issue of the researched topic. This part is structured into two main subchapters outlining the context of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia. Firstly, it focuses on the history of Russo-Georgian relations, secondly, it pays attention to the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia in the period after the gain of independence and before the Rose Revolution in 2003. In the author's opinion, to understand the differences in Georgian foreign policy towards Russia between Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era, it is necessary to understand the context of the Russo-Georgian relations and its development throughout decades, to some extent also centuries. For that reason, a subchapter focusing on the development of Russo-Georgian relations is included in this work.

The third, analytical part of this work deals with the research questions. Therefore, it is the crucial and longest part of this work. By categorizing specific events in both Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era into selected variables, the author analyses the development of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia. The analysis provides a basis for a comparison of both periods and for thus for answering the research questions.

In the fourth part of this work, the author provides a comparison of the two eras and thus, tries to find answers and their complex, detailed explanations to both research questions. In the conclusion of this work, the author summarizes the findings of the whole work and repeats the answers to the research question in a brief but concrete way. In the conclusion part, the author also comes back to the theoretical approaches and reflects the sufficiency of the particular theoretical anchoring and methodology for this work.

Critical evaluation of the used literature and sources

In this work, the author is using both primary and secondary sources. In the first, theoretical chapter, the author is using the sources dealing with the theoretical concepts, which are mainly scientific articles relating to the research approaches in the field of International relations, referring to Constructivist, Foreign Policy Analysis or Comparative Foreign Policy concepts. In the book *Theories of International Relations*, written by a collective of authors, Christian Reus-Smit approaches the concept of Constructivism and lists its types according to their relevance to a different type of research. Another core text for the theoretical part of this work is the study made by Valerie M. Hudson and Christopher S. Vore. In their article *Foreign Policy Analysis Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, published in *Merton International Studies Review* in 1995, they outline the characteristics of the Foreign Policy Analysis approach and the Comparative Foreign Policy in particular. These two texts serve as the core basis on which the author builds the rest of the theoretical part.

The second, contextual part of this work is based on the sources consisting of scientific articles or books related to the Georgian foreign policy as such, Georgian foreign policy, Russo-Georgian relations or the history of Georgia, Russia or post-Soviet space. These topics are the subject of research by several scholars, of whom the author used mainly texts written by authors like Ronald Grigor Suny, Stephen Jones, Thomas de Waal, Christoph Zürcher or Ronald Asmus. Their precise works provide the author with an overview of the historical and contextual facts about the Caucasian region and the Georgian statehood. The monography written by R. Asmus then refers to the development of the deterioration of Russo-Georgian relations before the Russo-Georgian war and describes the events that led to the Georgian military conflict with Russia. In this context, it is important to note that the used literature slightly differs in the question of an initiator of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. The question of whether the war

was initiated by the Georgian or Russian side remains according to some scholars unresolved. Although Asmus stresses that the first attacks came from the Russian side (Asmus 2010: 215), other researchers are stating the actual military conflict was started by Georgian attacks (Cheterian 2009: 158). The author of this work does not aim to bring a final statement about the real initiator of the war, rather, she aims to work with facts and to draw attention to the disagreement on a specific issue in the scientific environment.

The third, analytical part of this work is based on the sources that are mostly non-scientific texts, such as newspaper articles, press releases, reports or web pages. Much of the data used for this research were collected on publicly available sources such as online newspaper articles or webpages. The majority of data was taken from the Georgian website Civil.ge operated by the non-governmental organisation UN Association of Georgia, supported by USAID, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (Civil.ge 2009). Also, several expert reports of non-governmental organisations operating in Georgia were used for this research. To the most beneficial ones belong the reports made by International Crisis Group or Human Rights Watch, which focus on the issues of crisis solution and human rights and thus offer an analysis of the topic from a different perspective than scientific or news media. Besides the number of secondary sources, the author works with primary sources as well. The majority of them is used in the third, analytical part of this work.

Evaluation of the current elaboration of the topic

When focusing on the research covering the topic of the foreign policy of Georgia, it is important to point out the works of many think tanks and non-governmental organisations, such as International Crisis Group, Rondeli Foundation, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Amnesty International and several others. Their work intensified notably after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 which caused not only further security threats but also humanitarian problems on which they also report.

Besides the work of think tanks and non-governmental organisations, there are many dense studies, explaining the foreign policy making process and its outcomes from the very beginning of the Georgian statehood until recent years. One of the most recent researches, a book titled *Foreign Policy of Contemporary Georgia* written by Amiran Kavadze widely covers

many aspects of Georgian foreign policy since Georgian independence. One of its chapters focuses solely on the foreign policy of the last three important Georgian statesmen – Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saakashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili. This chapter in Kavadze’s book most closely resembles the focus of this work.

There are two prominent researchers known particularly in the context of Georgian history and foreign relations, Kornely Kakachia and Stephen Jones, both working as professors at two Georgian universities. Kakachia is a Professor of Political Science at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Director of Tbilisi based think tank Georgian Institute of Politics (Georgian Institute of Politics 2020), Jones is a Professor of Russian Studies at the Ilia State University in Tbilisi (Ilia State University 2021). In 2013, together with a group of nine other authors, Kakachia and Jones prepared a study titled *Georgian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Sustainable Security* which focuses on the Georgian foreign policy in regard with several different countries or institutions, such as Russia, European Union, Baltic countries, Turkey, Iran, etc. Many other relevant studies conducted by both Kakachia and Jones are cited in this work.

As for the topic focusing primarily on the Russo-Georgian relations, there can be found a wide range of literature sources, dealing with the history of Russo-Georgian relations (for example studies written by Charles King, Ghia Nodia, Timothy Blauvelt or Eric Lee) or Russo-Georgian war in 2008 including Russian activities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (most notably in works of Ronald Asmus or Vicken Cheterian). The coverage of this particular topic is wide also thanks to works of several think tanks focusing on the international relations in the Caucasus (Rondeli Foundation, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Crisis Group).

Although many studies are dealing with the Georgian foreign policy and the issue of Russo-Georgian relations and the history of its development, in particular, none of the studies mentioned above provides a comparison of two specific eras in modern Georgian history based on the assessment of several variables such as domestic policy, economic and social factors or relations with the West, and pointing to the concrete results of the Georgian foreign policy making process in specific fields such as diplomatic relations, security issues or economic performance.

1 Theoretical part

In the following chapter, the author introduces the theoretical pillars of this work. While working with two theoretical approaches – the Comparative Foreign Policy (CFP) and the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), as the theoretical concepts of the main focus of this work – foreign policy. Further, the author bases her work on the holistic constructivist approach of International relations. She works with the holistic constructivist approach mostly in the third part of this work, where she categorizes data into specific variables. In the final part of this chapter, the author focuses on the relevance of Constructivism to the FPA approach to provide an explanation why she uses both of these theoretical approaches in this work, and why their joint application in the same study is appropriate and not excluded.

1.1 Constructivism and holistic constructivism

Constructivism represents one of the key theories in the current international relations academic field. This approach to international relations has its roots in the late 1980s when two debates about international relations were occurring between neo-realism, neo-liberalism and critical theories (Reus-Smit 2005: 188). In 1989, Nicholas Onuf first used the term “constructivism”⁶ and developed it in his book *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. According to him, constructivism applies to all fields of social inquiry. He stresses that because all human beings are social, social relations construct us. And thus, social relations construct not only our identities and behaviour but most notably, the interactions between states (Onuf 1989: 46–47).

Onuf’s book brought a breadth of academic discussion. One of the reactions to the book occurred in an article entitled *Anarchy Is What States Make of It*, written by Alexander Wendt in 1992. In the article, Wendt stressed that the behaviour of political actors is influenced by identities and interests (Wendt 1992: 391–392), which are constructed by processes of “social

⁶ Nicholas Onuf used this term for the first time in relation to the academic field of International relations. Besides that, the term was used in the beginning of the 20th century (Soltani, Jawan, Ahmad 2014: 153).

will formation” (Wendt 1992: 410). He suggests that not only the behaviour of policy decision-makers but also external threats are constructed (Wendt 1992: 405). Another contribution to the constructivist theory was from Friedrich Kratochwil, who, together with Ray Koslowski, worked on the article *Understanding Change in International Politics* in which they emphasized the importance of domestic events in each country. They stressed that it is these events that subsequently shape the nature of international relations (Kratochwil & Koslowski 1994: 216).

As Zhefuss acknowledged, there is no agreed definition of constructivism. But considering the specifications of Onuf’s, Went’s and Kratochwil’s constructivist approaches, we definitely can find their overlapping characteristics to create a middle ground between them (Zehfuss 2004: 10). To understand the key contribution of the constructivist approach to international relations, it is needed to mention that constructivism in international relations is not a theory of international politics in nature. Instead, it is used to study international politics based on its core idea that international relations are socially constructed (Soltani, Jawan, Ahmad 2014: 154).

In the 1990s, Christian Reus-Smit, one of the prominent constructivist scholars presented a categorisation of constructivism into three different forms – systemic constructivism, unit-level constructivism and holistic constructivism. The first category, most significantly characterized by works of A. Wendt, focuses on systemic interactions between states and thus, ignores all the domestic events happening inside each state that might influence the international happenings as well (Soltani, Jawan, Ahmad 2014: 155). According to Reus-Smit, this category excludes most of the normative and ideational forces that might prompt changes in international society or the nature of state identity (Reus-Smit 2005: 200). The second category, unit-level constructivism represents the opposite approach to systemic constructivism. It focuses only on the domestic social and legal norms and identities. Studies of National security policies (characteristic for Peter Katzenstein) can be considered as an example of the unit-level approach (Reus-Smit 2005: 200).

The third category represents an approach standing in between the previous two. Holistic constructivism bridges domestic and international explanations and influences of events and changes in international relations. In their works, holistic constructivists consider the whole range of factors – from the interests and identities of the decision-makers or a political situation of a specific country, through interstate pacts and treaties, to a condition of a global

situation. This approach tries to explain the surveyed issue in its whole complexity – it focuses not only on hard data but also uses variables like historical and cultural facts, domestic tensions, economic condition, trade agreements and many more. Among others, the most notable authors reflecting holistic constructivism in their works are Friedrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie (Reus-Smit 2005, 201).

1.2 Foreign policy analysis

The approach Foreign policy analysis and its first types occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, when authors like James N. Rosenau, Richard Snyder, H. W. Bruck, Burton Sapin or Harold and Margaret Sprout wrote their first works reflecting a need for a new approach in International relations research. They emphasized that there was no such theoretical approach in International Relations at that time, which enabled a complex survey on foreign policy with reflecting the decision-making process of policy actors, nor domestic issues of that country, nor social or cultural predispositions of the decision-makers.

The above-mentioned pioneers of Foreign policy analysis (FPA) shared a common perception on the International Relations survey in several basic premises that became the core propositions of the FPA theoretical approach. The summary of these propositions is aptly described by Valerie Hudson and Christopher Vore in their study *Foreign Policy Analysis Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*:

- to understand the nature of the foreign policy choices, is it necessary to have knowledge about the particularities of the people responsible for such decisions;
- information about these particularities needs to be incorporated as instances of larger categories;
- multiple levels of analysis should be integrated into the service of such theory building;
- concepts and theories from all the social sciences can contribute to this theory-building endeavour;
- understanding the foreign policymaking process is at least as important, if not more important, than understanding foreign policy outputs (Hudson, Vore 1995: 214).

Having conformity on the crucial characteristics of the approach, the FPA pioneers diverge in conceptualization and methodological experimentation of the field.

In their work *Decision Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics*, Snyder et al. maintained the importance of the focus on decision-making processes. In their view, these processes have the same (or even bigger) importance than their outcomes. Therefore, they challenge the foreign policy scholars to look below the nation-state level when doing research (Snyder et al. 1954: 53).

In a study called *Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy*, Rosenau developed the actor-specific theory. He stressed that to explain specific processes, one needs to understand the nature of the actors involved. At the same time, Rosenau stressed that in foreign policy research, it is needed to focus on several levels of analysis (from individual leaders to the international system) (Rosenau 1966: 98–99; Hudson 2005: 6).

The last direction in the pioneering group of FPA scholars, represented by Margaret and Harold Sprout contributed with a contextualized perception of the foreign policy and International Relations field as such. In their work *Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics*, Sprouts stressed that to explain specific undertakings (associated with strategies, decisions or intentions), it is needed to look at a psycho-milieu of the individuals making the foreign policy decisions (Sprout & Sprout 1956: 118). Thus, they provided another contribution to the FPA theoretical and conceptual anchorage.

The approach of FPA has been evolving for decades. As Hudson and Vore mentioned, after the cold war, there was a demand for a theory that would respond (or better fit) to a new world order that is no longer bipolar. The ways of describing the international arena were no longer valid in the 1990s which is why the variety of FPA approaches are currently more appropriate in the International Relations scholarship (Hudson & Vore 1995: 222).

1.3 Comparative foreign policy

Getting back to Rosenau's views on FPA, the author maintains his idea of the research based on a multilevel and cross-national theory of foreign policy that needs to be subjected to empirical testing. Realizing such need in the foreign policy research, he created the area of study called Comparative Foreign Policy (CFP) (Hudson & Vore 1995: 215). This approach was first introduced in Rosenau's article *Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy* in 1966, where he stressed that comparative politics offers an insight into the internal influences on external behaviour. As Rosenau points out, the demand for a foreign policy comparison grew

in the 1960s when the decolonization process caused an occurrence of new national actors, which, quite often, had several similar patterns (Rosenau 1968: 305). Rosenau concluded that the more states (national actors) there are in the international environment, the more contrasts arise and thus the opportunity to compare.

The core of the CFP area lies in empirical testing of specific happenings that arise of the foreign policy making processes and in their outputs. CFP researchers created the subject of the empirical testing – a foreign policy “event”, which signifies a tangible subject of the foreign policy processes. In other words, it specifies who does what to whom and how in the relations among states. Due to the specification of “events”, it is possible to compare the foreign policy making process or outputs not only within states but also between specific periods (Hudson & Vore 1995: 215). As Hudson and Vore state, *“foreign policy events can be compared along behavioural dimensions, such as whether a positive or negative effect is displayed, what instruments of statecraft (for example diplomatic, military or economic) are used to make the influence attempt, or what level of commitment of resources is evident. Behaviours as disparate as a war, a treaty, and a state visit could now be compared and aggregated in a theoretically meaningful fashion”* (Hudson, Vore 1995: 215).

To specify and categorize such events, several attempts on the events data collection were made. Already in 1968, Rosenau specifies three stages, in which the foreign policy events are happening: initiatory (influences and conditions stimulating the national actor), implementive (activities and conditions translating the stimuli of the initiatory stage into an action to modify the object in the external environment) and responsive (reactions). Building on the stages stratification, Rosenau also offers a set of variables clusters, when distinguishing between independent (internal and external), intervening, and dependent (those regarding the internal and those regarding the external behaviour) variables (Rosenau 1968: 311–314).

In a similar sense, many other attempts to categorize variables for the CFP surveys were done in more detail. Events data were collected and categorized according to specified rules. Some data collection projects gained wide attention in an International Relations scholarship, such as World Event/Interaction Survey (WEIS), Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB) or Comparative Research on the Events of Nations (CREON) (Hudson, Vore 1995: 215). The author decides to use the COPDAB data collection project in this research.

1.4 Relevance of Constructivism to Foreign Policy Analysis

In the previous paragraphs, the two theoretical approaches of constructivism (and holistic constructivism as its sub-category) and the Comparative Foreign Policy (as a sub-area of the Foreign Policy Analysis) were described. Subsequently, the following paragraphs aim to clarify why the author considers these two approaches as very complementary and compatible for this research.

A key premise that the world and international interactions between states are created by social constructions can serve as the crucial statement which can be agreed upon by both constructivists and FPA scholars. In defending this idea, Steve Smith paraphrased Alexander Wendt, saying that foreign policy is what states make of it (Smith 2001: 38). Another sympathizer of the idea of the constructivism relevance to FPA David Houghton, reminds us that already one of the first works referring to FPA, *Foreign Policy Decision-Making* written by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin in 1954, was at that time preparing the way for a constructivist theory, when maintaining the importance of the focus on decision-making processes undertaken by individual actors (Houghton 2007: 31). Further, Valeria Hudson points out that the agent-structure debate and the cultural dimension of foreign policy, both FPA premises, are constructivist concerns, too (Hudson 2002: 4).

In his article, *The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, another prominent constructivist, Ted Hopf states that the state actions in the foreign policy are constrained and empowered by social practices at home and abroad (Hopf 1998: 179). His attitude is explained in his study of the Soviet and Russian foreign policy in two different periods. In that study, he focused on the domestic identities that operated in Russia in 1955 and then in 1999. Based on the data collected, he provided a study grounded in the constructivist and the FPA theoretical concept (Houghton 2007: 36).

Giving such examples from the past and current International Relations survey, the author aims to defend the relevance of the constructivist approach to the FPA and CPF theoretical concept. When looking more closely at the key characteristics of each approach, it is clear that there are many overlapping points, which show their mutual compatibility.

For this research, the crucial theoretical concept is the Comparative Foreign Policy (as a sub-field of FPA), but since constructivism belongs to one of the main International Relations theories (and since the constructivist theory proves many overlapping views and presumptions

with the FPA approach), the author finds it very beneficial and a logical to base her research on both of these approaches.

2 Contextual part

In the following chapter, the author outlines specific moments in the Georgian modern history, of which it is necessary to inform, as they are directly related to the development of Georgian foreign policy in both eras examined (senior Georgian diplomat, personal interview, 13. 5. 2021). However, it is not a summary of the Georgian recent history, but an emphasis on the key moments that influenced Georgian foreign policy in the period examined in this work.

2.1 History of Russo-Georgian relations

To understand the making of Georgian foreign policy towards Russia in the selected periods (2004–2020), it is needed to focus on the specific milestones in the Georgian history in the period before the both studied eras. It is needed because such milestones had impact on the Georgian foreign policy making not only towards Russia but as such.

2.1.1 First contacts between the Georgian and the Russian power

Georgia is a country with colourful mythology and rich history which goes back to the 5th millennium BC (Suny 1994: 4). The history of Georgian kingdoms is mostly characterised by gradual invasions of Turks and Persians from the South and Russians from the North. The Russian Empire started claiming the Georgian territories in the late 18th century (Suny 1994: 35-41).⁷ First diplomatic activity from the Georgian side towards Russia occurred in the 18th century under the rule of Vakhtang VI, king of Kartli – one of the Georgian kingdoms, at that time under the Persian rule – who hoped for getting help from the Russian empire in his effort to unify the Georgian kingdoms. Vakhtang contacted the Russian ambassador Artemii Volynskii and declared his support for Russian intervention in Kartli with the intention to set it free from Persian rule. (Suny 1994: 54–55).

Further political ties between the Georgian kingdom and Russia continued during the reign of Erekle II and his Russian counterpart, Empress Catherine the Great, who asked Erekle for military help during the Russo-Turkish war in 1768. Erekle agreed, but only if Catherine

⁷ The time of the independence and the biggest prosperity of the Georgian kingdom began with the unification of fragmented principalities under the reign of King Bagrat III at the beginning of the 11th century (Suny 1994: 34–35). Georgian sovereignty lasted no longer than 300 years. At the beginning of the 13th century, Mongol tribes invaded the kingdom and destroyed its independence (Suny, 1994: 40).

the Great promised to protect Kartli-Kakheti against its foreign enemies (Suny 1994: 57–58). The promise of Russian protection was officially sealed with a Treaty of Georgievsk, signed in 1783 by king Erekle II and Empress Catherine the Great (Suny 1994: 58). Soon after signing the treaty of Georgievsk, in 1801, Georgian rulers were faced with the annexation of Georgia by Russia's Tsar Paul I. His successor, Tsar Alexander I. further declared the abolition of the Georgian kingdom and appointed a Russian viceroy to administrate the Georgian territory (Suny 1994: 59). Even if the Georgian kingdom lost its independence and was dependent on the Russian economy or decisions about foreign policy, it was no longer threatened by foreign enemy powers like Persia or the Ottoman Empire. Although the Georgian customs and culture were rooted deeply, all parts of civic life were since then influenced by Russia – including politics and education.

2.1.2 First Georgian attempts to gain independence from Russia

After the Bolshevik revolution overthrew the Russian Tsar Nicholas II and the Russian Civil War broke out, Menshevik Georgia was just experiencing a national awakening (Suny 1994: 180–181). While there was political chaos resulting in a civil war in Russia, three Caucasian nationalities – Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijani – used the situation and declared their independent Democratic Republics (Votápek 2019: 225).

Although the idea of an independent Georgian republic was very assertive, the reality of the Russian domination represented a considerable threat not only to Georgia but to all three newly established Caucasian republics. As the Bolshevik forces advanced and gradually conquered Russian territories, the Georgian army was defending the independence of the Georgian state. Even if the Georgian forces resisted for several months, the Red Army seized its territories in the end and Georgia succumbed to Russian and Turkish forces in March 1921 (Votápek 2019: 225–227). As a result, the majority of Georgian land was connected to Russia with some of its territories ceded to Turkey and the Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan (Lee 2017: 260). Georgia thus became one of the Soviet republics and its territory was significantly reduced.

2.1.3 Georgia within a Soviet Russia

Georgian coexistence with the Russian state was not positively accepted by the public and caused several uprisings against Russia in Tbilisi and other peripheral Georgian regions.

To subjugate the political power in Georgia, Russia abolished Georgia's main political force – the Menshevik party. Such action was met with significant public opposition and resulted in a three weeks revolt in 1924 across the country (De Waal 2018: 79). Whatever the manifestations of dissatisfaction, Red Army managed to suppress it (Lee 2017: 265). Since then, a 70 year-long period of Georgian participation in the newly established Soviet Union followed – first as part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic but since 1936 as a separate union republic (King 2008: 187).

Since Georgian nationalism was entrenched deeply, several clashes between the central Soviet power in Russia and Georgian society occurred during those 70 years of their coexistence in one state. In early 1930, several demonstrations took place in Kakheti province against the ongoing collectivization (Suny 1994: 247). The biggest uprising since then took place in 1956, after the new first secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, condemned Stalin's cult of personality. The majority of Georgians perceived it as an attack on their nationalism, as Stalin was an ethnic Georgian. Like many Georgian uprisings in the past, this one was brutally suppressed by Soviet forces too (Suny 1994: 303). The violent repressions of Georgian demonstrations were followed by frequent purges of the Georgian intelligentsia. During the purges directed by the Kremlin, several representatives of the Georgian intelligentsia and culture were removed. The fact that some party or soviet secret service leaders were ethnic Georgians, such as Lavrentiy Beria or Sergo Ordzhonikidze, did not bring any concession. Other uprisings against Soviet rule occurred in Georgia in 1975 and 1981. Both of these were initiated by academics and students to prevent the Georgian language from a gradual diminution of its importance and use in the academic sphere (Suny 1994: 310).

At the same time as the first opposition political powers were forming, opposition to Georgia's domination in separatist areas – Abkhazian autonomous soviet socialist republic and South Ossetian autonomous oblast – also began to form. Therefore, Georgians started to fear of the loss of the Abkhaz territory – hence they gathered in Tbilisi on April 9th 1989 to form one of the greatest demonstrations in Georgian history to express their disagreement with the revolts in Abkhazia. Subsequently, the purpose of the gathering redirected from the issue of Abkhazia to the issue of the Georgians' desire to gain independence from the Soviet Union (Zürcher 2007: 120–122). The demonstration was suppressed by the Soviet army with tanks and other violent measures that left many killed and wounded. However, the Georgian national movement was

determined to fight for its independence further and in March 1990, it published a declaration of Georgian sovereignty (Zürcher 2007: 122–123).

2.1.4 Georgian independence and ethno-political clashes

While Georgia was on its way to independence, both Abkhazians and South Ossetians demanded their separation from Georgia, basing their demand on their ethnic differences from the Georgians. Georgian nationalism paved the way for Georgian independence but also initiated violent ethnic clashes, with Russia playing a role in it. The first president of the independent Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, intensified the nationalistic rhetoric and politics against the minorities – more precisely against Abkhazians and South Ossetians (Shnirelman 2001: 357) – which caused several violent conflicts. As a result of the ethno-political conflict between the central Georgian government and Abkhazia in 1992–93, Gamsakhurdia was ousted in a military coup. (Zürcher 2007: 127). Subsequently, Eduard Shevardnadze, who served as the leader of the Georgian SSR and later as a Minister of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union (Suny 1994: 306–308) was invited by the Georgian authorities to help resolve the political chaos in the country (Zürcher 2007: 129).

Shevardnadze negotiated and signed a cease-fire agreement with separatists in Abkhazia that was guaranteed by Russia. According to Stephen Jones, Russia played a significant role in this conflict, backing Abkhazian forces and approving its cease-fire violation (Jones 2015: 97). After the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, 3000 Russian peacekeepers were placed in the Abkhazian territory to prevent another violent outbreak. Eventually, the Abkhazian territory came under the mandate of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)⁸ (Zürcher 2007: 131).

2.1.5 Georgian relations with Russia under the Shevardnadze era

After losing the war with Abkhazia, Georgia was forced by Russia to enter into the Commonwealth of independent states. Russian troops were placed in the (still de facto) Georgian territory in Abkhazia. Russia also kept three military bases (later even five) and was allowed to use Georgian ports and airfields. With having no date for departing, Russian troops

⁸ Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional intergovernmental grouping consisted of post-Sovier countries. It was formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Suny 1994: 327–328).

were patrolling Georgian land and more than 300 km of sea borders (Jones 2015: 97). All these events indicated the undermining of Georgian sovereignty.⁹

Under such circumstances, the Russo-Georgian relations were cold. Neither political nor trade relations with the Russian Federation was possible at that time for Georgia (Jones 2015: 97–98). Eduard Shevardnadze, as a new Georgian statesman, was governing a country that underwent several violent conflicts within only a few years, had poor relations with the West, and even poorer relations with the East – the Russian Federation and CIS member states. Georgia’s economy was at its decline as the trade with countries outside the former Soviet Union crashed by more than 50% (Jones 2015: 179).

On the other hand, during the rule of Shevardnadze, a new constitution was accepted, and several economic and energetic opportunities emerged – for instance, with the approval of building a Tbilisi-Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline route. Shevardnadze also strengthened relations with the West when inviting US troops to organize a training program for the Georgian army in 2002 (De Waal 2018: 190–192).

Although Shevardnadze was re-elected as a Georgian president in 2000, the new, young political power led by Zurab Zhvania and Mikheil Saakashvili started forming.¹⁰ Shevardnadze was blamed by many for the rise of corruption and worsening relations with Russia¹¹ (De Waal 2018: 190–195), which caused both Zhvania’s and Saakashvili’s resignation from their functions. They both set up their political parties to run in the coming parliamentary elections scheduled for November 2003 (De Waal 2018: 190–195).

The parliamentary elections in late 2003 were the turning point in Georgian politics. The public was annoyed by the corrupt practices, while some also disagreed with the fact that

⁹ Later in 1999, Shevardnadze was given a promise from Russia to close its military bases on the Georgian territory (De Waal 2018: 190).

¹⁰ Zurab Zhvania served as a speaker of the Parliament, Saakashvili as a Justice Minister.

¹¹ During the second war in Chechnya, thousands of Chechen refugees fled to Georgia and some settled in a valley called Pankisi Gorge. Soon, the valley became known as a centre for drug-trafficking gangs which soon started corrupt the Georgian police. For letting the Chechen refugees in Georgia, Russian government blamed Georgians for helping Russian enemies. As a consequence, Russian aircrafts launched several intimidating bombings in that area, at the same time, Russia imposed visa requirements on Georgians (De Waal 2018: 190–192).

a former soviet leader was still the head of the independent Georgian state. They sought an alternative in the young, US-educated Saakashvili, whose party, the National Movement, won the elections. On November 22, a crowd of Georgian activists led by Saakashvili and Zhvania held a demonstration in front of the parliament building, demanding Shevardnadze's resignation. Holding roses in their hands and shouting to resign, they broke into the parliament building. During the next days after the incident, Shevardnadze resigned (De Waal 2018: 195) and new presidential elections were announced. This so-called Rose Revolution might be seen not only as an anti-corruption uprising but notably as a Georgian effort to deal with its Soviet past.

2.2 Georgian foreign policy towards Russia since the independence until the Rose Revolution

From the time that Georgia gained independence in 1991 until the Rose Revolution in late 2003, Georgian foreign policy changed in many aspects. After experiencing a series of unsuccessful violent clashes among its citizens in a civil war and wars in two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the exhausted Shevardnadze was forced to accept Russia-led CIS peacekeeping forces to enter the official Georgian territory to keep the tense relationships between Georgians, South Ossetians and Abkhazians non-violent. As a result, Russia built its military bases in Georgia. Russian units were permitted to patrol the Georgian border – both on land and at sea. The permission was included in the Sochi agreement, signed in 1992 by Shevardnadze and Boris Yeltsin who was then the Russian president (Tagliavini 2009: 14). The Sochi agreement started an era of Russian mediation and the legitimate stay of Russian troops on the Georgian territory. As a consequence of accepting the Russian-led mediation process, in 1993 Georgia was obliged to enter the CIS (Kakachia et al. 2013: 82).

At the same time, the Shevardnadze administration was taking cautious steps towards aimed integration with NATO. In 1994, Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace program, established to strengthen security relations between NATO and its non-member states (NATO 2020). Such a move was not in concordance with the Russian-led peacekeeping process. However, it was soon compensated by Georgia's signing the Collective Security Treaty – the so-called Tashkent Pact – which made it a member of a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led military alliance consisted of post-Soviet states (Nichol 2005: 4; Tagliavini 2009: 13). In the context of full Georgian CSTO membership, Georgia granted

Russia rights to build four military bases on its territory (Nichol 2005: 3). During the following year, Georgia signed a formal Georgian-Russian Friendship Treaty (Jones 2015: 249).

It might have seemed that Georgia was gradually getting more into the sphere of Russian influence. However, Shevardnadze sought to balance it by improving Georgian relations with the West, too. In 1999, Georgia joined Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, created by the European Union,¹² (Kakachia et al. 2013: 55). In the same year, Georgia withdrew from the CSTO (Nichol 2005: 4). Together with several public statements made by Georgian statements, praising its growing relations with NATO and the European Union,¹³ these activities marked the beginning of a gradual deterioration of Russo-Georgian relations.

From 2000 till 2003, there were two main indicators of a deteriorating Russo-Georgian relationship – the Pankisi Gorge crisis and a process of the so-called “passport politics” led by Russia in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Pankisi Gorge Crisis began when the Russian army launched a second military campaign in Chechnya in 1999. Many Chechen refugees fled Chechnya to Pankisi Gorge, a Georgian valley located in the region of Kakheti. As a consequence, Russian aircrafts violated Georgian airspace to harm the Chechen refugees (Devdariani 2002: 4). Meanwhile, as new refugees were coming, the valley became a dreaded area, known as a drug-trafficking centre with ties to Georgian police officers, increasing terrorism and corruption.¹⁴ Instead of asking the Russian militia to help to fight the Chechen rebels, Georgia turned to the United States. In 2002, the Bush administration launched a Georgia Train and Equip Program – a defence and anti-terrorist training. With US assistance, Georgia managed to solve the Pankisi Gorge crisis without Russia intervening in Georgian interior security (Kakachia et al. 2013: 84–88).

¹² Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between EU and Georgia created a framework for political dialogue, trade investment or harmonisation of economic relations (Kakachia et al. 2013: 55; Tagliavini 2009: 16).

¹³ See speech of the president Eduard Shevardnadze (Shevardnadze 2000) and Georgian Defence Minister Irakli Menagarishvili at the NATO Conference in Tbilisi (Menagarishvili 2000).

¹⁴ The connection between Pankisi Gorge rebels and a Georgian service was a clear example of the increasing corruption in Georgia, which later became one of the main reasons of the late 2003 uprising and the following Rose Revolution.

Another milestone in Russian-Georgian relations development occurred in 2002 when a large-scale distribution of Russian passports (enabling travel, pension and many other benefits) to Abkhaz and South Ossetian inhabitants began (Francis 2011: 93). Georgia immediately denounced such a move, claiming that the Russian passports distributed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia are void and null (Artman 2011: 52).

3 Analytical part

In the following part of this work, the author collects the data from both researched periods and classifies them into specific categories according to the set of variables outlined in the introduction of this work. Firstly, the author focuses on the Saakashvili era, secondly, to the Ivanishvili era. Besides the classification of each data to a matching category of variable, the author also pays attention to the time sequence of events within each of the category.

3.1 The Saakashvili era

In his inaugural speech, Saakashvili vowed to improve Russo-Georgian relations. He stressed that he will do everything to put an end to the current hostile relations (Peuch 2004). Two years later, both Russian and Georgian presidents did not spare personalized aggressive rhetoric on each other (Kakachia et al. 2013: 210). In 2008, the gradually deteriorating Russo-Georgian relations escalated into a Russo-Georgian war that left hundreds dead, many more wounded and caused a fundamental disruption to the Georgian territorial integrity.

The Saakashvili era can be divided into two shorter periods – pre-war and post-war period. The first period can be characterized by initial economic progress, but at the same time, rising corruption, worsening relations with Russia which escalated in the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 (Antidze 2007a; Human Rights Watch 2011). The second post-war period can be characterized by several attempts to normalize the Russo-Georgian relations and a decline of Saakashvili's popularity, which resulted in the change of legislative power in 2012 and executive power in 2013. The eight years-long period of the Saakashvili era is characterized by several occurrences that significantly shook Georgian's political stability.

The author gives examples for each category of variable in order to provide a complex picture of the strongly changing development of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia. When categorizing each event into a variable in the Saakashvili era, it is important to differentiate between the action taken towards Russia and the action taken towards South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Many of these actions had a significant effect on the relations between Georgia and Russia, even if the steps the Georgian government took were not directed against Russia specifically. In order to differentiate these two lines of action, the author selects one particular event which serves as a turning point in the perception of the steps taken towards South Ossetia and Abkhazia as action taken towards Russia itself. The turning point between

these two lines came in April 2008 with the publication of Russian President Vladimir Putin's Instruction – a document in which Russia pledges its support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia and stresses it would protect its citizens (Putin 2008, Asmus 2010: 213). For that reason, all the events that happened before the resolution adoption, related to the steps taken by Georgia towards South Ossetia or Abkhazia are categorized into the separate variable of The question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

3.1.1 Personality of the leader

Saakashvili was born in 1967 in Tbilisi, studied law in Kyiv, Netherlands, France, Italy and at the Columbia University in New York where he later worked in a law firm. After returning to Georgia in 1995, he was elected to the parliament and chaired the Committee on Legal Affairs (Fuller 2020). In 2000 he was appointed Justice Minister which brought him bigger visibility in the public space. Soon he became one of the strongest opponents of the then-President Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgian president at that time, which made him resign at his function as the Justice Minister (Mitchell, 2004: 343). In the next parliamentary elections in 2001, Saakashvili was reelected as a member of the Parliament, in the same year, he was appointed to chairman of Tbilisi's city council. While serving in these positions, he succeeded in enforcing several positive reforms, such as an increase in pensions or an improvement of prison conditions (Fuller 2021). In 2002, Saakashvili founded his own party UNM, which, a year later, was the driving force of the Rose Revolution¹⁵ in 2003 (United National Movement 2021).

In the presidential elections after the Rose Revolution, being held in January 2004, Saakashvili was elected with 96% of voters support (Fuller 2020). His priorities were to tackle corruption, maintain the country's territorial integrity, increase state financial reserves and launch clear Georgia's orientation towards Western structures such as the EU and NATO (Steenland & Gigitashvili 2018: 6; Saakashvili 2004). During his presidential term, he was responsible for several tangible improvements, most notably in the economy (Steenland &

¹⁵ See page 10

Gigitashvili 2018: 20-21).¹⁶ However, as Steenland and Gigitashvili note, the final years of his rule were characterised by increasing authoritarianism, corruption and criminality (Steenland & Gigitashvili 2018: 3).

It is also important to mention that during his mandate, Saakashvili had a close connection to the people running one of the most popular Georgian TV channel, Rustavi 2. Its stakeholders, Levan and Giorgi Karamanishvili are Saakashvili's friends and one of its key managers, Nikoloz Nakophia, a member of the UNM (Tsiklauri 2018).

3.1.2 Political performance

In January 2004, after the Rose Revolution, Saakashvili and his party UNM came to power.¹⁷ Soon after Saakashvili became a president. He successfully pushed for several reforms related to human rights, democracy, economy and against corruption and made considerable investments in the armed forces. (Kakachia et al. 2013: 18-19).

During the Saakashvili's mandate, several constitutional changes were introduced and came into force. The first changes, reducing the power of the parliament in favour of the president and the government, were introduced and came into force in 2004 (Andreeva 2004; Council of Europe 2004: 19). Due to the shift of the power from the legislative to the executive body, several scholars commented the post-revolutionary development as "antidemocratic" (Papava 2009: 200) or as a "mixture of democratic and authoritarian elements" (Nodia 2005: 44-45). Further constitutional amendments, mostly pushed by the Council of Europe and by the opposition, (Papava 2009: 200) were adopted in 2010 and came into force in 2013. This time, amendments were reducing the power of the president in favour of the prime minister and the government (International Crisis Group 2012).

¹⁶ Georgian economic growth after 2004 was evident, as the GDP per capita was steadily increasing between 2004 and 2012 (with the exception in years 2008 and 2009) and quadrupled by 2012 when comparing to its stage in 2003 (Steenland & Gigitashvili 2018: 20-21).

¹⁷ The so-called „revolutionary triumvirate“ took the power after the Rose revolution in late 2003. Besides Saakashvili, the triumvirate was represented by Zurab Zhvania who became the prime minister and Nino Burjanadze taking the office of the Speaker of the Parliament (Arakelian & Nodia 2005: 76).

Political representation in Georgia between 2004 and 2012 experienced three serious challenges, when thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in 2007, 2009 and 2011. In all cases, the protesters demanded Saakashvili's resignation and blamed him for rising corruption, authoritarian practices and loss of territorial integrity (in 2009 and 2011 cases) (Antidze 2007a; Human Rights Watch 2011). In snap presidential elections that followed the protests in November 2007 and Saakashvili's resignation, Saakashvili won by slightly more than 50 % and returned to the presidential mandate (Papava 2009: 205). He stayed in a presidential office until 2013, even if other protests demanding his resignation occurred in 2009 and 2011. Uprisings in 2009 and 2011 were caused by the public dislike of authoritarian practices and were violently suppressed (Economist 2009; Human Rights Watch 2011).

3.1.3 Socio-economic performance

If we focus on civil society and its manifestations during the Saakashvili era, it is necessary to point out several uprisings and public rallies. The Rose Revolution euphoria and enthusiasm for the rising economy and a pro-western course of the country fizzled out when the rise of corruption and authoritarian practices occurred, and many thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in 2007 demanding Saakashvili's resignation.¹⁸ Further social unrests occurred in 2009 and 2011 when thousands took to the streets again. In both cases, protesters demanded Saakashvili's resignation, blaming him for authoritarian practices, rising corruption and losing Georgian territorial integrity in the Russo-Georgian war.¹⁹ During both demonstrations, protesters were violently attacked by the policemen with many leaving wounded and several dead. Such behaviour shocked the international community and was described as a human rights violation by many organisations and western politicians (Economist 2009; Human Rights Watch 2011). Nevertheless, Saakashvili managed to suppress both uprisings and to stay in power until 2013.

To understand the socio-economic impact on the Georgian foreign policy making process, the author considers it as important to mention the public opinion as well – in

¹⁸ Demonstrators held the protest against the arrest of the former defence minister Okruashvili, who was accused of money laundering, after criticizing Saakashvili for corruption and plotting a murder (Antidze 2007a).

¹⁹ In both cases, Saakashvili's former political colleague Nino Burjanadze was one of the leading opposition figures (Economist 2009; Human Rights Watch 2011).

particular, how the Georgians perceive Russia. According to a survey of Caucasus Research Resource Centers, unresolved territorial conflicts and problematic relations with Russia were perceived to be the top two issues facing Georgia in 2008 (Caucasus Barometer 2021; Merabishvili & Kiss 2016: 166). 16 % of the respondents answered the relations with Russia is the most important issue facing Georgia in 2008. However, in 2012, the percentage of Georgian citizens considering the relations with Russia as the most important issue for Georgia dropped to 4 % (Caucasus Barometer 2021a).

As for the economic performance, some of Saakashvili's reforms made Georgia one of the fastest-growing economy in the world in 2006 (Müller 2011: 65). With the aim of fight corruption, Saakashvili increased tax revenues, abolished the old Soviet traffic police and created new Western-style patrol police. He also introduced measures to raise the country's hospitality to business activities (Papava 2006: 201). As a result, in 2006 Georgian national budget revenues grew four times since 2004 (McDonald 2007). Subsequently, the economic growth helped Georgia to become more independent of Russian imports (Kakachia et al. 2013: 208-209). The independence from Russia increased in the energy sector too. Between 2004 and 2012, three new pipelines leading from Azerbaijan to Turkey across Georgia were built²⁰ which, in terms of energy supplies, brought big profits to Georgia (De Waal 2018: 173). However, in 2009, the Georgian economy faced two crises at once – the global economic crisis and the economic decline after the Russo-Georgian war. Georgian GDP fell most dramatically by -3.8 % in 2009 (Otarashvili 2013). During the first years that followed the war, Georgia's economy was supported by international financial aid (Jackson 2013: 3), which was a great help in its post-war recovery (Otarashvili 2013).

If focusing on economic indicators of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia, we cannot overlook the trade between Russia and Georgia. In 2004, Russia was the third strongest Georgia's trading partner (WITS 2021a). The value of the Georgian export to Russia reached \$108 million (OEC 2021a). Georgian export to Russia declined to its half from the previous

²⁰ In October 2004, the Georgian government signed several treaties with the BTC Company (Kochladze, Gujaraidze, Gujaraidze & Titvinidze 2005: 10) to finally inaugurate BTC's final point in Ceyhan in 2006 (De Waal 2018: 173). The first oil tanker was shipped in June 2006, which officially opened the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (SOCAR 2021b). During the same year, the first lot of gas was shipped to the Turkish border through the South Caucasus Pipeline (SGC 2021). Last of the three pipelines, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Gas pipeline, was opened in 2007 (SOCAR 2021c).

year in 2006, after Russia imposed an embargo in 2006 (OEC 2021b). Georgian export to Russia reached its lowest value since the Rose Revolution in 2008 by reaching just \$42 million (OEC 2021c). Russia was one of the top three Georgian trading partners from 2004 until 2006 (WITS 2021b). After the embargo was imposed on the Georgian wine, fruit, mineral water and agricultural products (the main exported Georgian goods), Russia's position in the list of Georgia's trading partners dropped to the ninth position in 2007 (WITS 2021c) and even 24th position in 2010 (WITS 2021d). This negative development of economic relations of both countries reflects also the changes in their political and diplomatic relations. In this example, we can see the interconnection of the variables used in this work.

3.1.4 Georgian relations with the EU, NATO and the US

When focusing on interstate events that shaped the way Georgia acted in foreign policy towards Russia, it is necessary to point out Georgian aspirations for EU and NATO membership and its increasing ties with the US. While intensifying pro-western rhetoric, Saakashvili followed up on Shevardnadze's efforts in building ties with the West. Even in his inaugural speech, Saakashvili mentioned the Georgian historical belonging to Europe (Civil.ge 2004a).

Even if Russian President Putin made it clear he is strongly against the NATO membership of any of the post-Soviet countries (Putin 2007) and despite the content of the Russian military doctrine adopted in 2010, where the displeasure with the eastward expansion of NATO is evident (Medvedev 2010), Saakashvili did not hesitate to strengthen ties with both NATO and the EU. In 2008, at the Bucharest NATO summit, he hoped Georgia would receive the Membership Action Plan (MAP) (Deutsche Welle 2008).²¹ In the end, Georgia did not obtain the MAP²² (De Waal 2018: 208), but instead, a NATO-Georgia Commission was established in 2008, to provide a framework for political dialogue (NATO 2012).

²¹ On the occasion of the opening of a honorary Georgian consulate in Munich in late 2008, Saakashvili met with Bavarian Premier Horst Seehofer. During the meeting Saakashvili stated that the fact Georgia was not given the Membership Action Plan „will send the wrong signal to the wrong people“ (Deutsche Welle 2008).

²² Membership Action Plan is considered as the first official step towards NATO membership, granting many benefits. As the Saakashvili's popularity not only in Georgia but also in the Western European political leadership decreased (due to the rise of corruption, authoritarian practices and violent suppression of the public demonstrations in 2007), NATO leaders opposed the idea of Georgian NATO membership. They strongly criticized Saakashvili's domestic policy, besides that, they were aware of an increasing tensions between Georgia and Russia, and did not want to provoke Russia in such a way (De Waal 2018: 208).

Efforts to strengthen ties with the US during Saakashvili's mandate were evident on the Georgian and American side. When US President George W. Bush visited Tbilisi in 2005, he praised Saakashvili's "determination and leadership in the cause of freedom" and claimed support for Georgia's cooperation with NATO and its "desire to join the institutions of Europe" (Bush 2005, Salukvadze 2005). The US also officially supported the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia in 2006 (Senate of the United States 2005). Further, the US supported Georgia in its anti-Russian position and efforts in restoring its territorial integrity in the context of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 (Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate 2008).

During Saakashvili's mandate, ties with the EU also increased. In 2006, Georgia-EU Action Plan within the European Neighbourhood Policy was signed (Civil.ge 2006). In referring to the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, it is important to point out the EU's participation during the mediating process, when the six-point peace agreement between Georgia and Russia was issued thanks to EU mediation (Reliefweb 2008). Following the war, the newly established observing European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was deployed on the Abkhaz and South Ossetian border to prevent any further violent clashes (EUMM 2021), and in 2009, an Eastern Partnership program²³ was established as an initiative to strengthen dialogue between the EU and its six partner countries, including Georgia (EEAS 2016).

3.1.5 The question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

Relations between both of the separatist regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, with the central Georgian government played and still play a crucial role in the formation of relations between Georgia and Russia. Soon after Saakashvili took office, the Georgian government introduced custom control on its border with the South Ossetian autonomous region, which made Ossetians fear for their autonomy. As a result, brief fights broke out on Ossetian territory (König 2005: 246-247). Later, the defence minister Okruashvili (in office 2004-06) admitted that together with Saakashvili they were planning military operations into South Ossetia and Abkhazia intending to take control over them. He also stated that "Abkhazia was our strategic priority, but we drew up military plans in 2005 for taking both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as

²³ Eastern Partnership is a joint initiative of the European External action Service established to strengthen a dialogue between the EU and six partner countries (Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus) and to promote democracy, stability and prosperity in these countries (EEAS 2016).

well” (Rohan 2008). This statement reveals the essence of many other aspects of pre-war hostility between the government and both separatist regions.

But concerning both separatist regions, there were also diplomatic mistakes on the Georgian side. In 2006, Georgian negotiator Alasania received his Abkhazian counterpart Shamba for a friendly walk in Tbilisi. Saakashvili was invited to join them, but he travelled to the Abkhazian border to inspect a new military base instead (De Waal 2018: 205). Later that year, Georgian police troops entered Kodori Gorge, an Abkhazian region, to remove a local Georgian rebel. Later it was confirmed that the intention of that operation was in fact to regain control over the Kodori Gorge region. In summer 2006, the Georgian government announced they controlled most of the region, renamed it Upper Abkhazia, and established a pro-Georgian Abkhazian government there (Cheterian 2009: 158-159; Civil.ge 2007).

Similar diplomacy and security mistakes were made in 2006 concerning South Ossetia. Georgian Defense Minister Okruashvili publicly stated that if he fails to celebrate New Year in the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali in 2007, he would resign. By saying so, he gave a clear signal about his plan of regaining full control over the South Ossetian territory (Asmus 2010: 250). Further, Saakashvili’s increasing military budget did not give Abkhazia and South Ossetia any respite. They perceived it as an act of rearmament for war and sought assistance from Russia (De Waal 2018: 208).

In April 2008, the *Russian President’s Instructions to the Russian Federation Government with Regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia* was published. The instruction pledges support for both Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Putin 2008). From this moment, the author interprets the events related to South Ossetia and Abkhazia as events characterizing steps taken by Georgia against Russia and will rank them among the group of dependent variables.²⁴

3.1.6 Russian action towards Georgia

At the beginning of Saakashvili’s mandate in 2004, Russia helped to solve irregularities in one of the Georgian autonomous regions, Adjara. The leader of the Adjarian local government, Aslan Abashidze was scared the Rose Revolution might threaten his position and

²⁴ See page 17

the autonomous status of Adjara. As the Abashidze declared a state of emergency and sought help from Russia, Russian and Georgian diplomats agreed on Abashidze's removal (Kakachia et al. 2013: 80-90).

Another issue was the ongoing presence of the Russian military troops on the Georgian territory. Since Georgian independence, there were four Russian military bases on the Georgian territory, which Russia was officially allowed to retain according to an agreement signed in 1995 (Sokov 2005: 2). The Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov agreed on their withdrawal by January 2006 (Sokov 2005: 4; Freese 2005).

The turning point in the Russo-Georgian relations came in September 2006, as the Georgian police arrested several Russian spies operating in its territory. As a consequence, Russia closed the Verkhny Lars crossing – the only land crossing connecting Russia with Georgia besides Abkhazian or South Ossetian territories (Synovitz 2010), organized deportation of at least 1 500 Georgian migrants living in Russia²⁵ (European Court of Human Rights 2019: 1), banned the import of Georgian wine and mineral water²⁶ (De Waal 2018: 206), and stopped issuing entry visas for Georgians (Huseynov 2016: 124).

Seeing increasing Georgian efforts to strengthen ties with NATO, Russian President Putin made a statement expressing his displeasure with such a development. In his speech delivered at the Munich Security Conference held in 2007, he stated that “it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself” and that the NATO expansion “represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust” (Putin 2007). In 2010, Russia adopted a Military doctrine in which it was expressed that the main external threat of war comes from NATO's expansion to Russia's borders (Medvedev 2010, Sweeney 2010). The threat of war proved very relevant in this case in 2008 when Russia started openly arming the separatists and when a document stressing that Russia will protect

²⁵ The mass deportation of Georgian nationals from Russian territory was investigated by the European Court of Human Rights which ordered Russia to pay 10 000 000 EUR in respect of the damage done to the victims of a „coordinated policy of arresting, detaining and expelling Georgian nationals“ (European Court of Human Rights 2019: 1).

²⁶ The embargo harmed Georgian economy in a major way. Russia was Georgia's top trade partner, with exports accounting for almost 20% of total Georgian export at that time. It decreased from 18% in 2005 to 2% in 2012 when the negotiations about the embargo annulation started (Transparency International 2020b).

Abkhazian and South Ossetian citizens was published in April 2008 (Asmus 2010: 213). The document officially titled *The Russian President's Instructions to the Russian Federation Government with Regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia* launched open Russian support to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It de facto established relations with the South Ossetian and Abkhazian authorities by providing “practical assistance to the populations of the unrecognized republics” (Kirova 2012: 31; Putin 2008). Several violations of the Georgian airspace by Russian planes followed, together with the deployment of hundreds of Russian soldiers in Abkhazia in May the same year (German 2012: 1653, Asmus 2010: 215-216). At the same time, an official authorization of direct governmental relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia was announced by Russian authorities (De Waal 2018: 209).

When the actual war was about to break out in summer 2008, Russian hackers attacked Saakashvili's website and other websites of the Georgian financial sector and the government (Asmus 2010: 242). Shortly after the cyberattack, fights between Georgia and the separatists broke out in South Ossetia. The Russo-Georgian war began, with Georgia standing on one side and Russia on the other, while officially backing South Ossetia.²⁷

On August 8, Russian tanks entered South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali, then crossed into the territory controlled by the Georgian government and started bombing a Georgian town, Gori (De Waal 2018: 213). Subsequently, Russia set up military positions in several strategic Georgian towns – Zugdidi, Senaki, Poti and Gori, which were then occupied by Russia for another few weeks (Tagliavini 2009: 21; Cheterian 2009: 159-160). In this context, Russia did not spare Georgia sharp rhetoric, accusing Saakashvili of a “genocide” (Golovnina 2008).

After five days of fighting, a ceasefire was signed on August 12.²⁸ Subsequently, Russia officially recognized the sovereignty of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and closed its embassy in Georgia (Cheterian 2009: 156; Civil.ge 2008c). Since then, Russia continuously supports both regions politically, economically and militarily (Kakachia 2010: 88).

²⁷ The Russian official explanation of the attack and the provocative escalation of the conflict was a consolidation of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence (and eventually its annexation to Russia) and the destruction of Georgian chances to join NATO (Asmus 2010: 244).

²⁸ The ceasefire agreement was negotiated by Medvedev, Saakashvili and French president Nicolas Sarkozy who acted as a mediator on behalf of the EU (Tagliavini 2009: 11).

From late 2008 until 2011, the two countries interacted mainly based on Geneva talks launched in late 2008²⁹ (Civil.ge 2015a). The very first step towards normalisation of the Russo-Georgian relations came in 2011 when both countries signed an agreement about the implementation of a system that would track and audit cargos passing through Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Civil.ge 2015a).

3.1.7 Political relations

Georgia's attitude towards Russia at the beginning of Saakashvili's mandate did not show any signs of hostility, quite the opposite. In his inaugural speech, Saakashvili stated that Georgia "needs Russia as an ally, as a powerful partner" and that he "wishes to see the formation and progress of this friendship" (Saakashvili 2004). Saakashvili visited Moscow in 2004, assuring Russia that after pulling Russia's peacekeeping troops out,³⁰ Georgia will not permit rights to any third country or take other steps aimed against the interests of Russia (Peuch 2004). During his visit to Moscow, Saakashvili also stated that he came "to make friend" with Putin (Civil.ge 2004b). Together with the fact that this was the first Saakashvili's official state visit, it gives a picture of the initial Saakashvili's efforts to keep the relations with Russia on a friendly basis (senior Georgian diplomat, personal interview, 13. 5. 2021). The friendly basis of the relations can be proved by a successful diplomatic cooperation between Saakashvili and the Russian President Putin that helped to solve a political crisis in a Georgian autonomous region of Adjara in 2004³¹ (Kakachia et al., 2013: 80-90).

However, in 2006, the conflict between Georgia and Russia occurred in relation to visa policy. A group of Russian peacekeeping soldiers was captured in South Ossetia by the Georgian police. These soldiers were blamed for not having been issued the required visa to enter Georgian territory. Subsequently, they were arrested for a violation of the Georgian visa regulations and later released to Russia (Peuch 2006). Later in 2006, a real turning point in the Russo-Georgian relations came when several Russian spies were arrested by the Georgian

²⁹ Geneva talks were launched as a negotiation platform to address the issue of South Ossetian and Abkhazian status. The negotiating parties involve the EU, UN, OSCE, Georgia, Russia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Civil.ge 2015a).

³⁰ Russian troops were deployed to Georgian territory after wars with the South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the 1990s (Kakachia et al. 2013: 81-82).

³¹ See page 46

police (Kakachia et al. 2013: 90). This incident was a real turning point in Georgian-Russian relations, reflected for example by the Russian embargo on several Georgian products.

The deterioration of the two countries' relations especially after the 2006 incident and in the context of the worsening situation in both separatist and Russia-backed regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia finally made Saakashvili negotiate with Russia (Asmus 2010: 158–160). When the violent conflict over the separatist regions already seemed inevitable, Saakashvili's negotiating efforts strengthened. He even suggested to Russia to split Abkhazia into two parts – one ruled by a Georgian central government, the other open to Russian influence (Asmus 2010: 160). Georgia also announced to the UN Security Council that it will no longer conduct unmanned aerial vehicle flights over Abkhazia (Asmus 2010: 147). None of these initiations was successful. On the other hand, Saakashvili decided to withdraw from the Joint Control Commission on South Ossetian conflict resolution and to replace it with a new negotiation body, while stating that the Commission operated on the “three against one principle” and therefore “is not fair”³² (Civil.ge 2008d).

At the same time, he sharpened his rhetoric against Russia, accused it of airspace violations and characterized the Russian peacekeepers in the breakaway regions as threatening rather than neutral (Tsygankov & Tarver-Wahlguist 2009: 311). The accusatory rhetoric gradually intensified from then on until 2008 when it reached probably its highest point. Following the final escalation of the conflict, the actual war in 2008 and the Russian recognition of both separatist regions as independent states, Tbilisi severed its diplomatic ties with Moscow (Mikautadze & Basayev 2010). Soon after that, Saakashvili stated that Georgia “responded to Russians...” (Human Rights Watch 2009: 9) and called the military actions taken by Russians “aggression” (Tagliavini 2009: 22). Later on, he used even more radical rhetoric when talking about the Russians as “throwing people out of the houses and pushing them into concentration camps” (Golovnina 2008).

When signing the Ceasefire Agreement on 12 August 2008, Georgia committed to participate in the Geneva International Discussions, formed as a negotiation body to address

³² The Joint Control Commission (JCC) was a negotiation body established in 1992 by the Sochi agreement between Russia and Georgia, after the violent conflict in South Ossetia in the 1990s. The Commission consisted of four entities – Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia and Russia (Civil.ge 2008d).

the consequences and to try to solve the dispute over the breakaway regions. Since 2008, Georgia, together with Russia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), UN, EU and the US, participates in four negotiation rounds each year on this platform (Office of the state minister of Georgia for reconciliation and civic equality 2019). Under such circumstances, in 2009, Georgia decided to withdraw from the Commonwealth of Independent States³³ (Radio Free Europe 2009).

After 2008 the inflammatory language went hand in hand with several hostile anti-Russian incidents. From 2008 until 2012, more than a dozen persons accused of spying have been arrested in Georgia. In 2010, nine persons were arrested; in 2011, four photographers were detained. All were accused of working for Russian spy agencies (International Crisis Group 2011: 5). On the other hand, when visiting the European Parliament in 2010, Saakashvili declared that Georgia would “never use force to restore its territorial integrity” and that Georgia would “only resort to peaceful means in its quest for de-occupation and reunification” (International Crisis Group 2011: 5). According to such statements, any further violent clashes with Russia were unacceptable for Georgia.

3.1.8 Economic relations

One of the unpopular steps which Saakashvili took right after becoming president in 2004 was the decision to close down Ergneti market – a centre of black economy – a trading area located in South Ossetia which served as the main entry point for Russian products to Georgia (Kakachia et al. 2013: 208-209). The market was a trading centre for smuggled goods and, therefore, the new government decided to close it in order to help increase customs’ revenues³⁴ (Kupatadze 2005: 70-71). The decision upset South Ossetians and Russian smugglers, but in the end, the market closure helped the Georgian economy, which was at that time about to start growing considerably (Kakachia et al. 2013: 18-19).

³³ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional intergovernmental grouping consisting of several post-Soviet countries. It was formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Sunny 1994: 327-328).

³⁴ After closing the Ergneti market in summer 2004, the total customs revenue doubled when comparing the situation with that of the summer 2003 earnings (Kupatadze 2005: 70–71).

Georgian economic growth after Saakashvili took office helped to make the country more independent from Russian imports. However, even if the Georgian economy grew constantly since 2004, in 2006, Georgia faced an unexpected problem. As a consequence of the capture of Russian spies, Russia imposed an embargo on Georgian wine and mineral water.³⁵

While the Russian ban on Georgian products continued in 2010, Georgia made a step towards better Russo-Georgian trade cooperation and opened Verkhny Lars pass – the only land crossing between Russia and Georgia-controlled territories. The decision was based solely on economic motives. Together with visa requirements lifting, it enabled many Russian inhabitants to come to Georgia and conduct business there (Mikautadze & Basayev 2010).

During the Saakashvili era, there was another issue hindering the Russo-Georgian economic ties after 2006 – Russia's effort to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO). Georgia, a WTO member since 2000, was blocking Russia's entry. While dealing with problems like the Russian embargo from 2006 and closed access to Russia-controlled South Ossetia and Abkhazia since 2008, Georgia insisted on setting its own customs checkpoints on the Abkhazian and South Ossetian demarcation line with the Georgian-controlled territory (Civil.ge 2010a). In the end, thanks to Swiss mediation, Georgia finally agreed on the solution of setting international customs checkpoints in 2011. By signing a customs agreement with Russia in 2011, Georgia gave its consent to the Russian WTO membership³⁶ (Warner 2014: 99).

3.1.9 Military and strategic relations

One of the most important security issues for Saakashvili at the beginning of his mandate, was the presence of Russian bases and troops in Georgian territory.³⁷ In 2005,

³⁵ Prior to the embargo, Russia was Georgia's top trade partner. Georgian exports decreased from 18% in 2005 to 2% in 2012, which was a year before the embargo annulation (Transparency International 2020b).

³⁶ The 2011 agreement established three trade corridors between Georgia and Russia through Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The agreement also appointed a Swiss company SGS as a guarantor of neutrality to monitor the customs procedures and cargo entering the corridors (International Crisis Group 2018: 12-13).

³⁷ Russian troops were deployed in Georgia as peacekeeping forces after its two wars with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in early 1990s. (Shashenkov 1994: 46-47)

Saakashvili negotiated the departure of Russian troops from Georgia and the abolition of Russian military bases by January 2006³⁸ (Freese 2005).

From that time until 2008, Georgia took no further military or security measures against Russia in particular. It was in 2008 when Russia officially pledged its support for South Ossetia and Abkhazia that triggered Georgian military action against it. In July that year, Georgia deployed its forces close to both separatist regions. The actual war began with open hostilities launched by the Georgian military operation in Tskhinvali during the night of the 7th to 8th August 2008. The attack was preceded by several hours of shelling and bombing as well as sustained attacks on Georgian villages in South Ossetia, called Prisi and Tamarasheni, by Ossetian military forces^{39 40}(Human Rights Watch 2009: 24).

After two days of damaging fights, the Georgian government declared a unilateral ceasefire and began withdrawing its forces from South Ossetia. Yet the fighting continued for another five days until the parties agreed on a ceasefire. The official ceasefire agreement was signed on August 12 (Tagliavini 2009: 11).

3.1.10 Resolutions and legislative norms

During the Saakashvili era, one of the most important documents for a foreign policy making process, Georgia's National Security Concept (NSC), was published. This document outlines Georgian foreign policy direction and was published for the first time in 2005 and

³⁸ Each of the four last Russian military bases on the Georgian territory was located in a completely different part of the Georgian territory – Vaziani base was close to the Azerbaijani border, another base was located in the Abkhazian town Gudauta, the third was in Batumi, the Adjarian capital. The last of the Russian military bases, Akhalkalaki, was located in Samtskhe-Jakakheti – a region characterized by a large Armenian minority (Overland 2009; Antidze 2007b).

³⁹ Official justification provided by Georgia was a “protection of the Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia as well as the security of Georgia's citizens” (Tagliavini 2009: 19). Another explanation of the attack might be seen in the objectives that Saakashvili issued – most importantly the neutralisation of the firing positions from which fire against civilians, Georgian peacekeeping units and police originated; and halting of the movement of regular units of the Russian Federation through the Roki tunnel inside the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia” (Tagliavini 2009: 19-20).

⁴⁰ The literature covering the August war mostly differs in the question of a real initiator of the conflict. Some scholars say the war started with a Russian invasion into Georgian territory and thus leaning to the Georgian side (Asmus 2010: 215). On the other hand, some researchers maintain the crucial attack was caused by the Georgian side by moving its military forces to Tskhinvali on the 7th August (Cheterian 2009: 158). Therefore, it is important to see the conflict as a complex issue that did not arise just within a few years, but that its roots reach deep into the history of the Georgian statehood.

revised in 2012. As MacFarlane stresses, national security concepts are usually based on the analysis of values and interests and of internal and external security threats, therefore they define policy priorities (MacFarlane 2012: 3). There is an evident difference between the two concepts, as they were adopted at different times and under different circumstances. The NSC 2005 ranked the presence of Russian military bases on Georgian territory as a lower security risk than international relations and did not perceive Russia as a serious military threat (Merabishvili & Kiss 2016: 164). On the contrary, the NSC 2011 lists Russia as the biggest Georgian threat. In the chapter focusing solely on the threats, risks and challenges, the “occupation of Georgian territories by the Russian Federation and terrorist acts organized by the Russian Federation from the occupied territories” and “the risk of renewed military aggression from Russia” are perceived as the two most alarming issues (National Security Concept of Georgia 2011: 1–2; MacFarlane 2012: 16).

If looking back on the pre-war period and the resolutions made by the Georgian authorities, one particular proved to be very important for the Russo-Georgian relations. In February 2006, the Georgian parliament adopted a resolution saying that Russian peacekeepers are no longer welcomed in the breakaway regions (Tsygankov & Tarver-Wahlguist 2009: 311).

Anyway, after the Russo-Georgian war, a new Law on Occupied Territories of Georgia was introduced by the government. The Law introduces the term “occupied territories and territorial water”, which stands for territories of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, Tskhinvali Region – South Ossetia and waters in the Black Sea located in the aquatic territory of the Black Sea along Georgia's state border with the Russian Federation (The Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories 2008).

3.1.11 Role of the media

There were a few decisions of the Georgian government related to media that helped to keep the Russo-Georgian relations on a very poor level after the 2008 war. Firstly, it was the blockade of Russian broadcasters and websites on the Georgian territory in 2008, as the Russo-Georgian war broke out. (Mchedlishvili 2008) Further, Georgian government decided to establish a Russian-language television channel by the Georgian government at the beginning of 2010. The aim was to provide Russian-speaking people living in the Caucasus with broadcasting with zero influence from the Russian authorities (Zakareishvili 2011: 9). On the

occasion of the broadcasting launch in 2011, the channel's director, Robert Parsons, assured the public that the channel did not intend to spread any kind of propaganda and that he was aware of the Russian aversion to this project (Antidze 2011). This step was perceived in a hostile way by the Kremlin, mainly due to its follow-up to Saakashvili's decision to stop broadcasting all Russian stations in the Georgian territory in 2008 (Menabde 2012).

3.2 Ivanishvili era

Although Saakashvili was still active in Georgian politics until the termination of his presidential mandate in October 2013, the author considers the formation of Ivanishvili's government in 2012 to be the beginning of the Ivanishvili era. The author explains her decision by the fact that while remaining president after the 2012 parliamentary elections, neither Saakashvili nor his party, the United National Movement, was the main entity responsible for decisions about further legislative changes and the course of Georgian policy, including foreign policy. Also, Saakashvili's term expired in November 2013 – a year after the formation of Ivanishvili's government. Both of the succeeding presidents – Giorgi Margvelashvili and Salome Zourabishvili – were Georgian Dream candidates. Until the end of the researched era – November 2020 – there were only Georgian Dream-led governments in Georgia. Taking these facts into account, the author decided to mark the beginning of the period examined in this paper with the 2012 elections and by Ivanishvili becoming the Prime Minister.

At the beginning of the Ivanishvili era, the process of normalisation of the Georgian-Russian relations was launched. Although the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia brought tangible success in the economic area, hostility over territorial and security issues remained. Russia's close ties with both Georgian breakaway regions South Ossetia and Abkhazia were getting even stronger as Georgia was increasing relations with the EU and NATO. In late 2020, at the end of the Ivanishvili era, the dispute over the Georgian territorial integrity remains unresolved, which hinders further positive development in the Russo-Georgian relations. Nevertheless, Georgian foreign policy towards Russia during the Ivanishvili era remained very cautious and pragmatic.

3.2.1 Personality of the leader

Born in 1956, Ivanishvili was raised in a poor family and spent his childhood in a small village in northern Georgia. He studied at Tbilisi State University and later did his PhD in

economics at the Moscow State University of Railway Engineering (Gente 2013: 3). Soon after graduation, Ivanishvili began with his business activities. He made his first profits by computers selling computers to one of the biggest educational institutions in Georgia. He moved to Russia soon after and, together with his friend Vitaly Malkin founded a company for building greenhouses and selling electronics, later he established a Russian bank Rossiyskiy Kredit (Gente 2013: 3). Ivanishvili then built his business on metallurgy and banking in Russia. His long-term business partner Malkin served as a member of Russia's Federation Council from 2004 until 2013 which enabled Ivanishvili to keep in touch with Russian authorities (Socor 2012) although he declared that he had never met Putin (Gente 2013: 2). Ivanishvili also acquired minority stakes in Russian energy corporations, such as one per cent of Gazprom's, one per cent of Unified Energy Systems and another one per cent of Lukoil's shares (Socor 2012). Nowadays, his fortune reaches \$4.8 billion (Forbes 2021) while, according to Transparency International, he is associated with at least nine offshore companies and 70 organizations registered in Georgia (Transparency International 2018).

His connections affected Georgian media as well. In 2016, the Supervisory Board of the Georgian Public Broadcasting⁴¹ elected Vasil Maghlaperidze – a person close to Ivanishvili – to the post of the director (Transparency International 2020a). Earlier, Maghlaperidze had a leading position in Channel 9 – a media company owned by Ivanishvili's wife (Transparency International 2020a).⁴²

3.2.2 Political performance

The October elections in 2012 were a clear victory for the Georgian Dream, a newly established party by Bidzina Ivanishvili who established the party in spring 2012 after facing several difficulties such as removal of his citizenship⁴³ or verbal attacks and accusations by the

⁴¹ Georgian Public Broadcasting is the national public broadcaster of Georgia. It was established by the Law on Broadcasting adopted by the Georgian Parliament in 2004 and combines two TV channels, two Radio channels and one online TV platform (Georgian Public Broadcasting 2021).

⁴² At the time of Ivanishvili's enter into politics, his wife Ekaterine Khvedelidze owned 80% of the Aktsepti company - an official owner of the Georgian TV program "Channel 9" (Democracy & Freedoms Watch 2013).

⁴³ According to the Georgian legislature, only Georgian citizens can establish a political party. Ivanishvili was deprived of his citizenship in October 2011 after it emerged he had also a French citizenship. After giving up his French citizenship, he was given a consent to establish the political party in Georgia. (Radio Free Europe 2012).

Georgian authorities in 2011⁴⁴ (Economist 2012; BBC News 2011). In the parliamentary elections held in October 2012, Georgian Dream received 55% of the vote. Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM) gained 40% of the vote, forming the second-largest party in the parliament. While Ivanishvili was forming the new government, Saakashvili, who himself served as the president at that time, commented on the results by saying that "in accordance with the constitution, I will do everything to make their work comfortable, so that the parliament can choose a chairman of the parliament as well as set up a new government" (Antizde & Gutterman 2012).

In the 2013 presidential elections Georgian Dream was successful again – its candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili, a close friend of Ivanishvili, gained over 60% of the vote, winning the elections in the first electoral round (BBC News 2013). Thus, after 2013, the Georgian Dream party was ruling the country – both the prime minister and the president were the party's representatives.

After a year of serving as prime minister, Ivanishvili stepped down from both of his political functions – the prime minister and party chairman. His successor, Irakly Garibashvili, took over both of these positions (Socor 2013; Antizde 2015). However, Garibashvili did not stay long in office. After the election preferences declined for the Georgian Dream, Garibashvili announced his resignation, without giving any detailed clarification (Antidze 2015). Further development of Georgian politics until November 2020 can be described as a rotation of several Georgian Dream representatives on the position of prime minister. After Garibashvili, Giorgi Kvirikashvili took office in 2015. Although he maintained the leadership of the party in the parliamentary elections in 2016 and thus defended his prime ministership – he resigned in 2018. At that time, Ivanishvili returned to politics taking office as the Georgian Dream (GD) chairman. The two did not find an agreement on the future course of Georgian policy mainly in economic issues which became a reason for Kvirikashvili's resignation (Reuters 2018). His successor, Mamuka Bakhtadze, stayed in the position for nearly a year. During his mandate, he faced public demonstrations caused by the visit of the Kremlin representative Gavrilov who gave a speech in the Georgian parliament. Although the demonstrators demanded his

⁴⁴ Pavle Kublashvili, at that time member of the Georgian Parliament stated that Ivanishvili served the interests of Russia (BBC News 2011).

resignation, Bakhtadze remained in the post until September 2019. When explaining his resignation, he said he “fulfilled his mission” (Radio Free Europe 2019a). His successor, Giorgi Gakharia, faced further public unrest. In November 2019, the parliament did not adopt the long-promised constitutional amendments envisaging a transition to a fully proportional electoral system from 2020 (Civil.ge 2019a). The decision prompted several parliament members to leave the Georgian Dream (GD) parliamentary majority and caused a wave of demonstrations. In the end, the political crisis forced the GD parliamentary majority to adopt the electoral reform (BBC News 2019; Gogia 2019).

Several prime ministers took turns in this period – Ivanishvili, Garibashvili, Kvirikashvili, Bakhtadze and Gakharia. As for the presidential office, there were three persons taking turns in the office during the Ivanishvili era. After Saakashvili’s presidential term expired, GD candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili succeeded him and stayed in the office for its full term, until 2018. His successor, also a GD candidate, Salome Zourabishvili, is in a presidential position currently.

As for constitutional changes during the Ivanishvili era, the GD governments implemented several new amendments, which made Georgia a fully parliamentary system. After the presidential elections in 2013, amendments increasing the prime minister's authority at the expense of presidential powers, which were proposed by the previous government, came in force (Civil.ge 2013). In 2017, the government adopted further amendments related to both presidential elections. These abolished the direct vote of the president and introduced a special electoral college (Civil.ge 2017a; Civil.ge 2017b).

3.2.3 Socio-economic performance

As for issues related to civil society, it is important to point out several tensions in Georgian society during the Saakashvili era. Georgians were pushed to express their frustration several times for different reasons. One of the unforgettable protests during the Ivanishvili era hit the capital in 2018 after an insufficient investigation of the murder of two teenagers. The action later spread around the country as the Nationwide Protest Action. The main demand of the protestors was the resignation of Prime Minister Kvirikashvili, who was suspected of covering up the impunity of the perpetrators. As a result of the protests, General Prosecutor

Irakli Shotadze resigned (Menabde 2018). Kvirikashvili resigned a few months later, but supposedly for different reasons (Reuters 2018).

Another wave of protests occurred in June 2019 – this time with a strong anti-Russian subtext. A member of the Russian Duma, Sergei Gavrilov, visited Tbilisi to chair the general assembly of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy. While occupying the parliament's speaker's seat, Gavrilov gave a public speech. Regardless of the intent of the whole act, it had a great symbolism for the Georgian people. For many, this was a reminder of the Russian rule and influence over Georgia – this trigger point brought thousands of Georgians to the streets. They were waving Georgian and EU flags, holding placards with signs that would read “Russia is an occupier”, saying that they cannot let the Russian “desecrate state institutions” (Radio Free Europe 2019) and demanding the parliament's speaker Irakli Kobakhidze's resignation. The protests had great consequences touching the Russo-Georgian relations, and in the end, Irakli Kobakhidze also resigned from the speaker's post (Radio Free Europe 2019).

A few months later, other tensions occurred in reaction to the parliament's failure to adopt long-promised constitutional changes related to electoral reform. These amendments envisaged the Georgian move into a fully proportional electoral system. However, GD representatives in the parliament decided not to support these changes, which was seen as a power grab by the ruling party. In trying to suppress the demonstrations, police used excessive force, leaving more than 240 people injured. In the end, the electoral changes were adopted by the parliament, thus, the protesters reached their goal (Gogia 2019).

The public opinion and the perception of Russia within the Georgian society during the Ivanishvili era is captured in a survey published by the Caucasus Barometer. In opinion polls conducted between 2013 and 2019, focusing on Georgian relations with other countries, the majority of the respondents considered Russia as the main Georgia's enemy (Caucasus Barometer 2021b). In 2013, Russia was considered the main enemy by 44% of the respondents. In 2015 and 2017, the percentage dropped by 5-10%, but in 2019, the rate increased again to 49% (Caucasus Barometer 2021b).

As for the economic development, at the beginning of the Ivanishvili era, Georgian economic performance slightly stagnated. The GDP growth fell to 1.8 % in the first half of 2013

compared to the year before (Jackson 2013: 3). Georgian economic growth in the years 2012–2014 was slow but constant. (Jackson 2013: 3). However, in 2015, the GDP fell by \$2.3 billion and it took the Georgian economy another three years to recover and to return the GDP to its previous value from 2015 (The World Bank 2021b). As for Russo-Georgian trade relations, a big shift came in 2013, when Russia lifted the embargo imposed in 2006.⁴⁵ Georgian export to Russia doubled in 2013 in comparison with its value in 2012 (OEC 2021d). The value of Georgian export to Russia grew constantly from 2015 until 2019 when it reached the value of \$496 million (Geostat 2021: 5) which is more than four times its value in 2012 (OEC 2021d). Under such circumstances, Russia became the top trading partner for Georgia in 2016 and 2017 (WITS 2021e; WITS 2021f). From 2017 until the end of the Ivanishvili era, Russia is remained to be one of the three main Georgia's trade partners (The World Bank 2021b).

3.2.4 Georgian relations with the EU, NATO and the US

Regarding the integration with the EU, the newly formed Georgian Dream government continued the work of its predecessors. In 2013, a visa liberalization action plan with the EU was presented,⁴⁶ which then resulted in agreements of visa-free travel for both Georgian and EU citizens in 2016 and 2017. Association agreement and a treaty on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area were signed in 2014 and came into force in 2017. These steps are considered the most important for EU-Georgian relations so far⁴⁷ (Council of the EU & European Council 2021a). An appreciation of Georgia's relations with the EU was also expressed in 2018 by the then Prime Minister Kvirikashvili who stated that “Georgia is closer to EU and NATO than ever” (Georgia Today 2018). Besides that, annual meetings between the EU and Georgian representatives based in the EU-Georgia Association Council have been held since 2014 to address the accession process (Council of the EU & European Council, 2021b).

⁴⁵ See page 43

⁴⁶ Visa dialogue between EU and Georgia was launched in June 2012 (Council of the EU & European Council 2021a).

⁴⁷ Association agreement is an agreement between the EU and a third country and is considered as the first step in the EU accession process. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) stands for the mutually open markets for goods and services between the EU and the third country (European Commission, 2021).

As for Georgian relations with NATO, Georgia continued participating in NATO military exercises even without being its member.⁴⁸ Soon after taking office, Ivanishvili expressed his willingness to work towards NATO membership, when stressing that Georgia should be awarded at least by the MAP at the next NATO summit in 2014 (Kucera 2013). However, even if the MAP was not offered to Georgia in 2014, Georgia was offered by a cooperation package that included the building of military capabilities, training of armed forces and sending more defence reform experts instead (Croft 2014). In September 2020, at the end of the Ivanishvili era, a meeting of NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia took place in NATO headquarters. In the press conference after the meeting, Stoltenberg encouraged Georgia to take further steps to prepare for NATO membership and called on Russia to end its recognition of both breakaway regions (NATO 2020).

When mentioning the US-Georgian relations, it is important to note that several visits by US representatives were held during the Ivanishvili era. For example, in 2014, a congressional delegation led by Ben Cardin expressed support for Georgian territorial integrity and its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations (Radio Free Europe 2014). In 2017, US Vice President Mike Pence expressed his support for Georgia's efforts in joining the North Atlantic Alliance during his visit in Tbilisi (Antidze 2017). Similar statements of support for the Georgian pro-western politics were shown by the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. During his visit in 2019, he supported Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty in several statements, saying that "on the part of NATO membership, you will always have US support" and "America will continue to provide military support to Georgia in the preparation of manpower and equipment, which will help Georgia in defending its territory." (JAM news 2019; Kavadze 2021: 37).

3.2.5 The question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

In 2008, Russia recognized both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries and established diplomatic relations with them while at the same time cancelling diplomatic

⁴⁸ For instance, since 2013, Georgia has participated in the NATO Connected Forces Initiative – a programme increasing NATO interoperability. Further, Georgia joined the NATO multinational Smart Defence Initiative in 2012. Georgia also participates in five multinational Smart Defence projects (Embassy of Georgia to the United States 2014: 3-4).

relations with Georgia (International Crisis Group 2020: 4). Since 2008, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been granted financial and military support from Russia. Further, several economic treaties integrating Abkhazia and South Ossetia into the sphere of Russian influence were signed between both regions and Russia. The economic partnership between the regions and Russia is also secured by the fact that both regions use the Russian rouble as their official currency (Gerrits & Bader 2016: 5–6).

Due to such strong linkages with and political influence of Russia in both regions, the author decides to consider the Georgian relations with both regions as relations with Russia itself. For that reason, all the steps taken by the Georgian government regarding Abkhazia or South Ossetia during the Ivanishvili era are classified in the category of events related to Russian action towards Georgia or within some of the category of the dependent variables.⁴⁹

3.2.6 Russian action towards Georgia

In late 2012, Russia appointed a special representative to be responsible for bilateral consultations with Georgia on economic and humanitarian issues. Grigory Karasin, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, was appointed to this position. Soon after the consultations between Karasin and his Georgian counterpart, Zurab Abashidze, were launched, Russia decided to re-open its market to Georgian wine, mineral water and fruit. This decision increased Georgian exports to Russia by 487% compared to those in 2012 (Huseynov 2015: 128; Transparency International 2020b).

Since there were evident Georgian efforts to normalize the Russo-Georgian relations in the first years after the Georgian Dream took office, Putin invited President Margvelashvili for a visit to Moscow in 2014. The meeting did not take place due to Putin's refusal to talk about the breakaway regions issue on which Margvelashvili strongly insisted (International Crisis Group 2020: 4). Despite Georgian tries, Russia had consistently avoided talking about the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia with Georgia. The only platform where this issue is being discussed is in the Geneva format. In 2015, Russia also signed treaties with both South Ossetia

⁴⁹ See page 17

and Abkhazia strengthening their strategic partnership (Saari 2015: 1).⁵⁰ Apart from the Geneva format, the issue was never discussed between Russia and Georgia directly, despite Georgian efforts. For instance, in 2018, Putin rejected a Georgian proposal of a personal discussion about this issue (International Crisis Group 2020: 4).

Russia's action towards Georgia regarding both breakaway regions worsened in spring 2013 when the process of the so-called borderization was launched on the demarcation line dividing Georgia from the South Ossetia region. Together with the South Ossetian militia, Russian soldiers began installing barbed wire fences on the demarcation line. In some places, they moved the demarcation line a few meters deeper into the Georgian controlled territory (Kakachia 2018: 2). The borderization process poses not only security threats to Georgia but also raises attention to its humanitarian and human rights context. By installing fences, Russian and Ossetian militia is denying access to medical care, agricultural possessions, family members, trade or other issues for people living close to the demarcation line – locals are denied freedom of movement. In late 2018, it was estimated that more than 34 villages have been divided by these fences and over 800 families lost access to their agricultural lands (Amnesty International 2019). When trying to cross the demarcation line, the locals face detention by Russian soldiers for allegedly crossing the “state border” (Amnesty International 2018: 6). In this context, more than 2600 persons were detained and four killed near the demarcation line (International Crisis Group 2020: 7). In 2019 the case of the Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili became well known. Gaprindashvili crossed the demarcation line to visit a patient and was detained. He then stayed in detention for several months until released in late 2019⁵¹ (Civil.ge 2019b).

In the context of borderization, several crossing points connecting South Ossetia and Abkhazia with the Georgian-controlled territory were closed. For instance, in 2017, two crossing points on the Enguri River, separating the Georgian-controlled territory from

⁵⁰ In January 2015, the Alliance and Strategic Partnership Treaty was signed between Russia and Abkhazia. In March the same year, a Treaty of Alliance and Integration was signed between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Leonid Tibilov, the de facto leader of the South Ossetia (Saari 2015: 1).

⁵¹ When detained, Gaprindashvili was sentenced to nine months in prison for illegally crossing the border under the Criminal Code of Russia. In pursuit of his release, a public demonstration was held close to the demarcation line. Also, both EU and US embassies made official statements calling Russian and South Ossetian authorities to release him (Civil.ge 2019c; Civil.ge 2019d)

Abkhazia, were closed. For years, the crossings served as trade hubs, but the closure resulted in an economic and social catastrophe for the locals, as they lost an opportunity for their trade activities (Amnesty International 2019). By maintaining its military presence within Abkhazia and South Ossetia – territories officially belonging to the Georgian territory,⁵² Georgia perceives Russia as an occupying power. Also, Russia keeps conducting its frequent military exercises on both occupied territories (Civil.ge 2020).

Another issue is the air traffic embargo, which Russia announced in 2019 and the decision to put extra controls over Georgian wine import (Antizde & Kiselyova 2019: International Crisis Group 2020: 3). Russia decided for such action after an outbreak of anti-Russia protests in Tbilisi which were triggered by a public speech given by a Russian politician in the Georgian parliament (Deutsche Welle 2019).

3.2.7 Political relations

Even though there were no diplomatic relations between Georgia and Russia after 2008, representatives of the two countries were regularly meeting for periodic discussions taking place in Geneva since October 2008 (International Crisis Group 2020: 2). These so-called Geneva International Discussions constitute a platform for a discussion on the issue of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia status.⁵³ In terms of returning Georgia's territorial integrity, the Geneva Discussions have not brought any tangible results yet. Nevertheless, according to two Georgian senior diplomats serving at the Permanent Mission of Georgia at the United Nations in Geneva, the format has very high importance even without any tangible results, because it keeps the issue visible (senior Georgian diplomat, personal interview, 13. 5. 2021).

Soon after the October elections in 2012, the new Georgian government appointed a special representative for relations with Russia and proposed Moscow hold regular meetings to discuss bilateral relations and maintain communication on economic and several other issues. The mandate was given to former Georgian ambassador to Russia, Zurab Abashidze. Russia soon appointed his counterpart, Deputy foreign minister Grigory Karasin. These two diplomats have been holding regular personal meetings since December 2012, when Karasin and

⁵² The independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been so far recognized by the Russian Federation, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru and Syria (TASS 2018).

⁵³ See page 50

Abashidze met in Geneva and agreed to continue with direct dialogue (Civil.ge 2012). The format of direct consultations between Abashidze and Karasin endured until 2020. The two representatives were regularly talking in person or by the telephone three or even more times each year⁵⁴ (Huseynov 2015: 128).

The reduction or even removal of hostile rhetoric was evident since the Georgian Dream coalition took office. Ivanishvili's rhetoric about Russia became more friendly than hostile. For instance, on his visit to Armenia in 2013, he stated that the Armenian foreign policy of balancing between Russia and the West serves as a good example for Georgia⁵⁵ (Batiashvili, 2020: 24). To de-escalate the tensions with Russia, in its foreign policy vision, the governing Georgian Dream party stated that "it is in Georgia's interests for it to no longer exist in the list of controversial issues between the West and Russia" (Batiashvili, 2020:24). In 2012, Ivanishvili also made a controversial statement about the August war, stating that the war began with an attack by Georgian troops and thus blamed Georgia for initiating military operations (Batiashvili 2020: 24). Before the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Ivanishvili also stated that Tbilisi will participate in the Winter Olympic Games despite the fact it will be held a few kilometres from Abkhazia (Gente 2013: 8). Further in 2015, then Prime Minister Garibashvili praised the bilateral consultations between special representatives Karasin and Abashidze by saying that the Georgian government is doing everything to de-escalate and normalize the relations with Russia (Tass 2015). The government was also very cautious about Russia when it came to some specific anti-Russian activities in Georgian media – for example after a personal verbal allusion to Putin was heard on Georgian television in 2019, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a special statement saying that the incident has nothing to do with the freedom of speech (Batiashvili 2020: 25).

Another good example of Georgia's attempts to improve relations with Russia is the fact that shortly after GD came to power, several Russian convicts who were accused of espionage, were released (Batashvili 2020: 23). Also, since 2012, no case of arrest or detention has been

⁵⁴ Due to the pandemic situation, direct consultations were limited to telephone consultations since spring 2020 (International Crisis Group 2020: 4-5).

⁵⁵ Armenia is a member of the Russian-led CSTO military alliance and the Russia's Custom Union (Batahsvili 2020: 24).

known about individuals participating in the Russian spy network in Georgia (Batashvili 2020: 23).

The Ivanishvili era is an example of the Georgian authorities' continuous efforts to resolve the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia through direct bilateral consultations between both regions and the central government. In 2018, Prime Minister Kvirikashvili proposed a personal meeting with Putin to discuss the topic but was soon rejected. In the following year, President Zourabishvili proposed launching a Georgian version of the Normandy process⁵⁶ which would be conducted in order to solve the territorial dispute between Russia and Ukraine. Her initiative was met with another rejection from the Russian side and has never taken place (International Crisis Group 2020: 4-5; Galbert 2015).

3.2.8 Economic relations

Probably the most tangible result of Georgian efforts to normalize economic relations with Russia came in 2013, a year after the Abahsidze-Karasin discussions when trade between Russia and Georgia was reopened for wine, mineral water and fruit and resulted in a massive increase of the Georgian wine and mineral water export to Russia. This success is attributed mainly to the personal consultations between the two special representatives initiated by Georgia (Transparency International 2020b).

To open up South Ossetia and Abkhazia routes as trade corridors to Russia, the Georgian government has taken further steps in this regard in 2017, when signing an agreement with the multinational company Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS) to monitor the South Ossetia trade corridor.⁵⁷ This step followed the agreement on Cargo Monitoring Movement, signed in 2011 under Swiss mediation and became another step in facilitating better trade relations between Georgia and Russia (Abuseridze 2020: 149). Nevertheless, until the end of the

⁵⁶ Normandy process is a platform for political consultations between representatives of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France with the aim to resolve the war in Eastern Ukraine. The process was launched in summer 2014, when the politicians from France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia met on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the landing of the Allies in Normandy (Galbert 2015).

⁵⁷ Russia signed the same contract with SGS in 2018 (Abuseridze 2020: 149).

Ivanishvili era, the corridors remain closed and the agreement signed on this issue remained unimplemented (Kemoklidze & Wolff 2020: 316–317).

Another issue that has taken place during the Ivanishvili era and that had a positive effect on Russo-Georgian economic relations was the suspension of the Anaklia project, which posed a threat to Russian interests in the Black Sea region. The project was an ambitious plan to construct an Anaklia Deep-Sea Port⁵⁸ on a Black Sea coast to serve as a key hub for West-East trade. With the Anaklia Deep Sea Port, Georgia would be able to develop better trade relations with the EU and Turkey, and with the United States. At the same time, Anaklia port could be used eventually by NATO. According to Hess and Otarashvili, it could also diminish Georgian dependence on Russian port infrastructure (Hess & Otarashvili 2020: 2-3). According to Daly, the deep-sea port project poses a threat to Russian business interests (Daly 2020). Despite the project's potential, the Georgian government cancelled the contract with the construction company because of several contractual delays and stated it would seek new investors (Daly 2020). However, the situation seems to be even more complex. Georgian political analyst Gia Khukhashvili claims that the reason for the contract cancellation is a personal rivalry between Ivanishvili and Mamuka Khazaradze, who is the founder of the Anaklia Development Consortium, the group that was supposed to build the port (Lomsadze 2020).⁵⁹ Still, the government remains committed to the project implementation and will look for new investors and construction companies, in any case, the projects current decline is, to say at least, good news for Russia (Dumbadze 2020).

3.2.9 Military and strategic relations

During the Ivanishvili era, the Georgian government took no significant military measures against Russia. Due to the escalation of the conflict in 2008, which the author approached in the chapter focusing on the Saakashvili era,⁶⁰ efforts of the Georgian government

⁵⁸ The very roots of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port project reach in 1960s Soviet Georgia. Later, both Eduard Shevardnadze and Mikheil Saakashvili renewed the idea of the project implementation. Backed by US support, Saakashvili promoted the ambitious project, but with his loss of power in 2012, the initiative was taken over by the Georgian Dream coalition (Hess & Otarashvili 2020: 2-3).

⁵⁹ Mamuka Khazaradze also formed a new political movement called Lelo, to challenge GD in 2020 parliamentary elections (Lomsadze 2020).

⁶⁰ See pages 52–53

since late 2012 were being made to secure peace rather than showing signs of military provocation.

3.2.10 Resolutions and legislative norms

In March 2013, the Parliament of Georgia published a Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy, in which it states its commitment to the rapprochement to Russia (besides the United States, the EU and other South Caucasus countries) and confirms the ongoing Georgian dialogue with Russia based on the Geneva International Discussions format (Parliament of Georgia 2013). Further, in 2013, the Georgian Dream government introduced a tension-easing doctrine called "strategic patience" (International Crisis Group 2020: 3), meaning that Georgia will take no action without considering how Russia might respond. In this regard, Georgia did not join the EU sanctions against Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and it did not even consider boycotting the Sochi Olympics in 2014 (International Crisis Group 2020: 3).

Even if this arrangement brought some tangible results for Georgia (such as lifting a ban on some Georgian products), Georgia's two main demands from Russia remain unresolved. First, Tbilisi wants Russia to commit not to use any force against Georgia, and second to allow access of the European Union Monitoring Mission⁶¹ to both breakaway regions. Both of these demands are constantly being rejected by Moscow⁶² (International Crisis Group 2020: 4). In 2018, the Foreign Relations Committee of the Parliament of Georgia published a Strategy and Action Plan, where it commits to pragmatic policy towards Russia. Besides that, it lists the restoration of territorial integrity and the de-occupation process as its most important objective (Parliament of Georgia 2018: 9). Further in 2019, the Georgian government adopted a new foreign policy strategy for 2019-2022. According to this document, the Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remains the main challenge (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2019; Caucasus Watch 2019).

⁶¹ See page 44

⁶² Russia's explanation of why it does not want to pledge the non-use of force against Georgia in regard to the breakaway regions, is that it sees itself as a mediating power between Georgia and the breakaway regions. For that reason, in Russia's view, there is no reason to pledge not to use force. Russia also does not want to grant the access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia to EUMM, because it recognises both regions as independent countries and thus cannot decide for any of them (International Crisis Group 2020: 4).

3.2.11 Role of the media

The media environment is another important aspect of the classification of events when trying to analyse a foreign policy of a particular country. Since the events related to media cannot be classified into any of the previous categories, the author decides to incorporate them into the last of the categories. During the Ivanishvili era, the efforts to normalise relations with Russia touched the media environment as well. There was at least one important step taken soon after the Georgian Dream government took power which had an impact on Russo-Georgian relations.

In order to ease the tensions in relations with Russia, the Georgian government decided to resume the operation of Russian television channels in its territory. These channels were suspended right after the August war in 2008 by the Saakashvili administration (Menabde 2012). Such a step was not a predictable one and gives evidence of a clear commitment of the Georgian Dream government to enhance its relations with Russia at least for pragmatic reasons.

4 Comparison and evaluation

In the following chapter, the author makes a comparative evaluation of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia in both Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era. When evaluating the events that influenced or resulted from Georgian foreign policy, the author goes through each variable and describe in what specific aspects did the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia change. By doing so, the author presents an explanation of the answers to the research questions of this work.

4.1 Personality of the leader

When comparing the personality of Saakashvili and Ivanishvili, several evident differences might serve as a partial explanation of the difference in the foreign policy towards Russia during their eras. Saakashvili came from the city and got his education at some of the best-ranked world universities. He spent part of his life in the United States. Ivanishvili, on the contrary, came from the countryside and a low-income environment, studied in Tbilisi and spend a significant part of his life in Russia. Their carrier paths took divergent directions – Saakashvili started his career in Georgian state institutions and politics, whereas Ivanishvili was running business activities in Russia and got to politics later, after succeeding in a business career.

When analysing Georgian leaders since the independence and the difference in their behaviour towards Russia, Kakachia and his colleagues differentiate between the crusaders and pragmatists. According to them, Saakashvili is a typical crusader in his politics towards Russia, due to his often sharp rhetoric and exaggerated steps taken towards South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which were under Russian patronage since 2008 (Kakachia et al. 2013: 36–38). On the contrary, Ivanishvili is perceived as a pragmatist, who called for dialogue in an attempt to restore economic relations, transport connections and arrange relations with Russia in general (Kakachia et al. 2013: 38–39).

4.2 Political performance

As for political performance, the main change between the two compared eras were probably the constitutional amendments. During the Saakashvili era, the legislative power was concentrated mainly in the president's office, which changed after the GD government came to

power in late 2012. The change from the semi-presidential to a parliamentary system was an important turning point in the foreign policymaking process since the main decision-maker responsible for the foreign policy decisions and outcomes was no longer a president, but the prime minister and the government (Kakachia et al. 2013: 35).

Another important fact having an impact on the changes in the decision-making process in the foreign policy of Georgia was the increased fluctuation of the decision-makers during the Ivanishvili era in comparison with the Saakashvili era. Five politicians took their turns on the prime minister's post during the Ivanishvili era, and all of them were responsible for the Georgian foreign policy. During the Saakashvili era the situation was different since the power was concentrated in the hands of the president – thus Saakashvili himself – for most of the time of the Saakashvili era. While during the Saakashvili era, there was one stable decision-maker responsible for the foreign policy decisions, during the Ivanishvili era, there were multiple decision-makers taking turns (Kakachia et al. 2013: 35) on the positions of the prime minister or the minister of the foreign affairs.

When considering the changes related to the involvement of Saakashvili and Ivanishvili in the decision-making process, there is another significant change. While Saakashvili was in power throughout the whole Saakashvili era, Ivanishvili performed a public political function only for a certain part of the Ivanishvili era. Although this fact most likely did not have an impact on the foreign policy of Georgia, it is still a remarkable fact if comparing the two eras.

4.3 Socio-economic performance

Several public unrests took place during both eras. While during the Saakashvili era, in all three cases – in 2007, 2009 and 2011, unrests were directed against Saakashvili himself (as being considered the main person responsible for the loss of 20% of the Georgian territory, hostile relations with Russia, a decline of the economic performance and responsible for the authoritarian practices) (Antidze 2007a; Human Rights Watch 2011), whereas during the Ivanishvili era, the protests had various essences and were targeted against the complex governing apparatus. What is even most important, during the Ivanishvili era, the one particular protest, taking place in summer 2019, was provoked in the context of public opposition to Russia (Radio Free Europe 2019).

As for public opinion in Georgia, the perception of Russia during both eras was variable according to current events at that time. Most Georgians perceived relations with Russia as the top priority in 2008, whereas in 2012, the percentage dropped significantly (because the problem of the high unemployment rate was more important for Georgians) (Merabishvili & Kiss 2016: 166; Caucasus Barometer 2021a). Russia was perceived as the biggest Georgian enemy from 2013 until 2019. Notably, in 2019, the percentage of respondents who perceived Russian as the Georgian biggest threat grew significantly again (Caucasus Barometer 2021b).

There was a significant economic growth at the beginning of the Saakashvili era, followed by a decline in 2008 and further efforts to recovery (Otarashvili 2013). The economic ties with Russia were strong until 2006 when it declined rapidly due to the Russian embargo (WITS 2021c). The economic ties between the two countries strengthened during the Ivanishvili era again when Russia became its top trading partner in 2016 and 2017 (WITS 2021e; WITS 2021f). To sum up, there is evident deterioration in trade relations between Russia and Georgia during the Saakashvili era, whereas a gradual improvement in the trade relations is visible during the Ivanishvili era.

4.4 Georgian relations with the EU, NATO and the US

There can be seen consistent efforts in strengthening ties with the West in both eras. Therefore it might be stated that the decision-makers in the Ivanishvili era continued in Saakashvili's efforts in gaining membership in both EU and NATO and in strengthening ties with the US. According to the senior Georgian diplomat, even if the most significant steps in the process of the integration with the EU, such as signing the Association Agreement or a launch of visa-free travel, took place during the Ivanishvili era, these can be perceived as a result of a continuous effort by both Saakashvili and Ivanishvili and also their predecessor Eduard Shevardnadze (senior Georgian diplomat, personal interview, 13. 5. 2021). Therefore, there are no significant changes in the nature, purpose and course of events related to Georgian relations with the EU, NATO and the United States between the two eras. However, the influence of the Georgian relations with the West had on the Georgian policy towards Russia, in both eras remains comparably significant (senior Georgian diplomat, personal interview, 13. 5. 2021).

4.5 Question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia

This variable is specified by its decline of events during the Ivanishvili era, due to the redirecting of the categorization of the events related to South Ossetia and Abkhazia to the group of dependent variables.⁶³ There is the main change between the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era in this variable. Namely, at the beginning of the Saakashvili era, both South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions were considered Georgian territories by Russia. Whereas, during the whole Ivanishvili era, the regions were officially recognized as independent by Russia. Moreover, in the Ivanishvili era, ties between Russia and both breakaway regions got even more intense, since Russia provides financial, military and even political support to them and since the process of borderization has been going on (Kakachia 2018: 2).⁶⁴ Taking note of these events, the impact of the question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on Georgian foreign policy towards Russia remains significant and comparably similar in both eras.

4.6 Russian action towards Georgia

Even if the initial Russian activities towards Georgia at the beginning of the Saakashvili era were not hostile, the arrest of several Russian spies in 2006 caused a wave of aggressive Russian action (including the ban on Georgian products, deportation of ethnic Georgians out of Russia, or closure of Verkhny Lars crossing) which gradually deteriorated and finally resulted into a war and a brief occupation of several Georgian towns (Tagliavini 2009: 21; Cheterian 2009: 159–160).⁶⁵ Russian action towards Georgia during the Saakashvili escalated into a violent military conflict and suspension of diplomatic relations. Even if these were not restored, slow progress, at least in the economic issues can be seen during the Ivanishvili era, when Russia appointed an envoy Grigory Karasin to participate in the Russo-Georgian bilateral talks (Civil.ge 2012; Huseynov 2015: 128) and reopened its market for banned Georgian products (Huseynov 2015: 128; Transparency International 2020b). Even if any Georgian attempts for discussions concerning the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions are still being rejected by the Russian side, the discussion between the two countries is being held at least on the economic issues. These ongoing discussions, even if avoiding the topic of the breakaway regions

⁶³ See page 17

⁶⁴ See page 62

⁶⁵ See pages 47–48

(International Crisis Group 2020: 4–5), can be seen as one of the main differences between the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era, as they reduce the hostilities between the two countries.

If, however, looking at the Russian action towards Georgia in the context of the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, there can be seen a gradual deterioration during the Ivanishvili era, as Russia started and has been continuing the process of borderization. Thus, if we compare the Russian action towards Georgia in the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era, we might stress that the situation was worse in the Saakashvili era due to the violent conflict, recognition of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence and subsequent termination of the diplomatic relations. Whereas the Russian action towards Georgia during the Ivanishvili era got less hostile at least in the economic aspect. Nevertheless, the hostilities remain, as Russia maintains its military, financial and political support in both regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Gerrits & Bader 2016: 5-6). Moreover, following a demonstration against the speech of Russian representative Sergei Gavrillov in the Georgian parliament in July 2019, Russia banned Russian airlines from flying to Georgia and put extra controls over Georgian wine import (Antizde & Kiselyova 2019; International Crisis Group 2020: 3).⁶⁶ This step is considered as another proof of deterioration of the Russian activities taken towards Georgia at the end of the Ivanishvili era. All such action has had a significant impact on Georgian foreign policy because it served as a trigger in Georgian action towards Russia in both eras.

4.7 Political relations

When comparing the Georgian action towards Russia in terms of political relations, that means, in terms of diplomatic meetings or bilateral discussions, visits, expressions of friendship or rhetoric, there can be seen a significant difference between the two eras. Even if Saakashvili's rule began with friendly statements made towards Russia (Saakashvili 2004), it gradually – and in particular after 2006 – worsened and escalated into very unfriendly proportions (it is worth mentioning, for example, Saakashvili's accusations of Russia of setting up concentration camps⁶⁷) (Golovkina 2008). On the contrary, during the Ivanishvili era, the rhetoric became very moderate, especially at the beginning of Ivanishvili's premiership. In this context, the

⁶⁶ See page 58

⁶⁷ See page 50

efforts of leading a pragmatic policy towards Russia during the Ivanishvili era are very visible – for example, a Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ critical comment on the personal verbal assault of Putin made by a Georgian journalist in 2019 during a TV broadcasting (Economist 2012; BBC News 2011)⁶⁸ can be mentioned.

There can be seen a further effort to mitigate the hostility between Georgia and Russia during the Ivanishvili era in comparison with the Saakashvili era. To give a few crucial examples, during the Saakashvili era, the diplomatic relations with Moscow were severed in 2008 in the context of the Russo-Georgian war (Mikautadze & Basayev 2010). Further, Georgia withdrew from CIS (Radio Free Europe 2009) Further, Georgia refused to join the EU sanctions towards Russia in the context of the Crimea annexation in 2014 (International Crisis Group 2020: 3).⁶⁹ Such events create a clear picture of the difference of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia between the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era – even although during the Ivanishvili era Georgia did not restore its diplomatic relations with Russia (International Crisis Group 2020: 2).

4.8 Economic relations

Georgian action towards Russia in terms of economic relations also differed in many aspects when comparing the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era. Saakashvili’s initial economic measures which harmed trade with Russians on the border between Russia and Georgian autonomous region South Ossetia were motivated by purely economic reasons, not political ones. When, however, Russia imposed an embargo on Georgian products in 2006, Georgia’s effort to avert Russia’s decision was minimal. In this context, there can be seen a difference in the attitude the Ivanishvili’s government took since it came to office. Whereas one of the first actions the first government of the Ivanishvili era took, was the creation of the format of the bilateral discussion to address economic, and other issues, (which proved to be successful in the economic matter⁷⁰), no sign of such or a similar attitude was registered during the Saakashvili (Transparency International 2020b). Another indicator of difference of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia in the economic issues can be on one hand obstructions

⁶⁸ See page 65

⁶⁹ See page 67

⁷⁰ See page 61

of Russia's accession to the WTO during the Saakashvili era (Warner 2014: 97–99), while on the other hand, Georgian progress in cooperation with Russia on the launch of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian trade corridors during the Ivanishvili era (even if the corridors are still closed) (Kemoklidze & Wolff 2020: 316–317).⁷¹

4.9 Military and strategic events

Concerning this military and strategic relations variable, it is apparent, that the Georgian action towards Russia in this matter was very much intense during the Saakashvili era since the war with Russia broke out in August 2008. In this context, it is worth mentioning other actions that took place immediately before the war (such as the deployment of its forces close to Abkhazia and South Ossetia), or actions that took place immediately after it (such as signing a ceasefire and withdrawing its troops from South Ossetia) (Tagliavini 2009: 10–11).⁷² It is apparent, that due to such experience that Georgia gained during the Saakashvili era, the Georgian government took a very cautious attitude during the Ivanishvili era, to avoid any further military confrontation with Russia.

4.10 Resolutions and legislative norms

Several differences are evident in the content of resolutions and legislative norms adopted by the Georgian authorities in the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era. The texts adopted during the Saakashvili era were more anti-Russian (with the exception of the NSC published in 2005) than the texts adopted in the Ivanishvili era. To give an example, during the Saakashvili era, the Law on Occupied Territories of Georgia, calling Russia an occupying country, was adopted (The Law on Occupied Territories of Georgia 2008). Further, the NSC perceiving Russia as the biggest military threat was introduced (National Security Concept of Georgia 2011: 1–2). Even if the NSC from 2011 and the Law on Occupied territories are still valid, several new texts were adopted during the Ivanishvili era – such as the parliamentary Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy or a Strategy and Action Plan from 2018. In

⁷¹ See page 66

⁷² See page 50

both these texts, an aim to ease the hostility between Russia and Georgia is evident (Parliament of Georgia 2018: 9; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2019; Caucasus Watch 2019).

4.11 Role of the media

As for the role of the media, the Georgian action towards Russia was generally more accommodating in the Ivanishvili era than in the Saakashvili era. One example for all can be the cancellation of the state Russian television on the Georgian territory during the Saakashvili era. This decision was however amended at the beginning of the Ivanishvili era when the operations of Russian television channels in Georgia were resumed (Menabde 2012).⁷³

⁷³ See page 68

Conclusion

This work followed up the changes in the foreign policy of Georgia towards Russia in a period from 2004 until 2020. It aimed to compare two specific eras characterized by two statesmen – Saakashvili era (2004–2012) and the Ivanishvili era (2012–2020). The structure of this work, research design and specific variables used in this study were chosen by the author in order to find answers to two research questions, focusing on the changes in the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia.

The first research question, *“How did the factors influencing the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia differ in the Saakashvili and Ivanishvili era?”* focused on the causes of individual steps in Georgian foreign policy and aimed to find out the differences in the factors that influenced the Georgian foreign policy between the two eras. Such differences can be seen in socio-economic performance, the question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and Russian action towards Georgia. On the contrary, minimal differences in these factors were seen in political performance or in Georgian relations with the EU, NATO and the US. As for the variable of the personality of the leader, the difference in the influence of the Georgian foreign policy was very difficult to recognize, due to the mostly psychological nature of the facts categorized in this particular variable.

When answering the second research question, *“How has Georgia’s foreign policy towards Russia in the Ivanishvili era changed from Georgia’s foreign policy towards Russia in the Saakashvili era?”* the set of dependent variables is used. The dependent variables refer to political relations, economic relations, military and strategic relations, resolutions and legislative norms and the role of the media. Considering the political relations, Georgia’s foreign policy towards Russia during the Ivanishvili era changed significantly in comparison to the Saakashvili era. This was most visible in the context of the political relations – in this regard, mostly the rhetoric of the Georgian authorities towards Russia changed. As for the economic relations, the Ivanishvili era also brought a lot of changes to the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia. The biggest differences in this field can be seen for instance in bilateral talks which caused the lifting of the Russian embargo on Georgian products.⁷⁴ When comparing the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia in terms of military and strategic relations between the two eras, the change is also significant – due to the Russo-Georgian war that broke out during

⁷⁴ See page 59

the Saakashvili era and due to the attenuation of any military activities during the Ivanishvili era. Another area in which the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia changed during the Ivanishvili era, is the area of resolutions and legislative norms. The adoption of the so-called “strategic patience” tension-easing doctrine during the Ivanishvili era⁷⁵ is the most appropriate example for this statement. The change in the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia during the Ivanishvili era can be seen also in the variable of the role of the media. During the Ivanishvili era, Georgian political representation has taken several neighbourly steps towards Russia that were contradictory to the action taken by Georgia in this matter during the Saakashvili era – such as the resumption of Russian television broadcasting on the Georgian territory.⁷⁶

When comparing the Ivanishvili and Saakashvili eras, the outcomes of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia changed in all the analysed fields – political relations, economic relations, military and strategic events, resolutions and legislative norms and the role of the media. To understand the answers to both research questions better, the author explained and developed the evaluation of the research of this work in the previous chapter titled *Comparison and evaluation*.⁷⁷ Anyway, when observing the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia since the Rose revolution, it is needed to state that Georgia has been undergoing continuous development under many different external and internal factors. As for the development of the Russo-Georgian relations, a normalisation process could be seen after GD came to power in 2012. However, recent events such as the Russian traffic embargo or ongoing borderisation process on the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia and Abkhazia made the situation more difficult. Two senior Georgian diplomats serving at the Georgian permanent mission to the UN in Geneva stated that in general, the foreign policy of the GD administration is – in comparison with Saakashvili’s administration – more predictable. For Georgia, this is a positive fact, because it makes the country a more reliable partner for its allies (senior Georgian diplomats, personal interview, 13. 5. 2021).

In this work, the author penetrated several details and pitfalls of the Georgian foreign policy. This work also managed to place the findings in the context of the Georgian foreign policy in the years preceding the two surveyed eras. The author considered a method of a diachronic comparative study as a useful way of research of the Georgian foreign policy, in

⁷⁵ See page 67

⁷⁶ See page 68

⁷⁷ See page 69

particular, when analysing its outcomes and factors and trying to understand the development of a specific process in a longer period of time. In addition, this work reflected the very current events of the Georgian foreign policy in a period characterized by the rule of two of the most influential figures in the Georgian politics of this century.

If getting back to the theoretical anchoring of this work, the author considers the FPA and CFP approaches as useful groundings for this work. The FPA approach emphasizes the importance of the decision-making process of policy actors, domestic issues in a particular country and social predispositions of the decision-makers. The CFP approach complements the FPA in a way which serves for the purposes of the comparative study. The CFP approach focuses on the empirical testing of specific happenings that come out of the foreign policy making process.⁷⁸ Such characteristics of these both approaches serve well for the presented work, and are reflected in its third and fourth part, where the author works with concrete variables. The variables were also set according to the FPA approach with the aim to include all the adequate variables - policy actors, domestic issues, social predispositions, international environment, etc.

The opportunities for further research on this topic are very wide. The nature of any further research in this field, reflecting the current issues will depend on the further development of the Georgian foreign policy, Georgian policy as such, and the further development of the Russian policy towards Georgia. The Georgian parliamentary elections held in November 2020 were a victory for the Georgian Dream party, which formed the government (Antidze 2020). Thus, the maintenance of the same foreign policy course can be expected for the next couple of years in Georgia.⁷⁹ Further observation and research of the development of the situation related to regions South Ossetia and Abkhazia will be also appropriate since the security issues in this context are still an actual topic, examined not only by researchers but also by political actors or non-governmental organizations.

The author considers the literature and all the sources for the work suitable for the research aims she set. In the theoretical part, texts written by two crucial authors Christian Reus-

⁷⁸ See page 23

⁷⁹ However, the political crisis in Georgia that occurred in February 2021 – when a boycott against the parliament by the opposition and the subsequent arrest of the opposition leader Nika Melia happened (North 2021) – might have an impact on the future development of the Georgian foreign policy outcomes.

Smit and Valerie M. Hudson were used. Reus-Smit's texts provided a basis for the theoretical anchoring of this work in the constructivist approach. Studies made by Valerie M. Hudson further developed the concept of the Foreign Policy Analysis and Comparative Foreign Policy which served as the essential concepts for this work. For the contextual part, the author used literature focused on Georgian and Caucasian history, including the history of Russo-Georgian relations. In this regard, works of authors like Thomas de Waal, Stephen Jones, Ronald Suny or Ronald Asmus were used. In the analytical part, the author used mostly texts provided on online websites, thus, the beneficial sources proved to be online services such as Civil.ge, Reuters or Radio Free Europe. Further, analytical reports made by non-governmental organisations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International or International Crisis Group were used. All the sources were chosen according to their relevance, scientific or informational added value regarding the selected topic and the aim of this work.

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List of Appendices

Figure 1: Factors influencing the foreign policy of Georgia

Figure 2: Set of variable components created by Andriole, Wilkenfield and Hopple

Abstract

The thesis deals with the foreign policy of Georgia towards Russia. It is a diachronic qualitative comparison of two specific consecutive eras – Saakashvili era (2004–2012) and Ivanishvili era (2012–2020) characterized by the rule of two influential decision-making actors – Mikheil Saakashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili who both served on one of the highest political posts in Georgia in the past two decades. The aim of the work is, firstly, to analyse the differences between both eras in the factors that influenced the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia and, secondly, to analyse the differences in the outcomes of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia in both eras. The comparison is based on the list of variables reflecting political, socio-economic, military, legislative, international and other factors and shows the sequence of events and decisions that were taken in the foreign policy making processes in Georgia in relation to Russia. This work seeks to understand the foreign policy decision-making process in Georgia by pointing out particular events, historical facts and consequences and thus to understand the changes not only in the Georgian foreign policy but also in the development of the relations between Georgia and Russia. The work points out particular areas in which the differences between the two eras are evident – as for both the impacts and the outcomes of the Georgian foreign policy towards Russia.