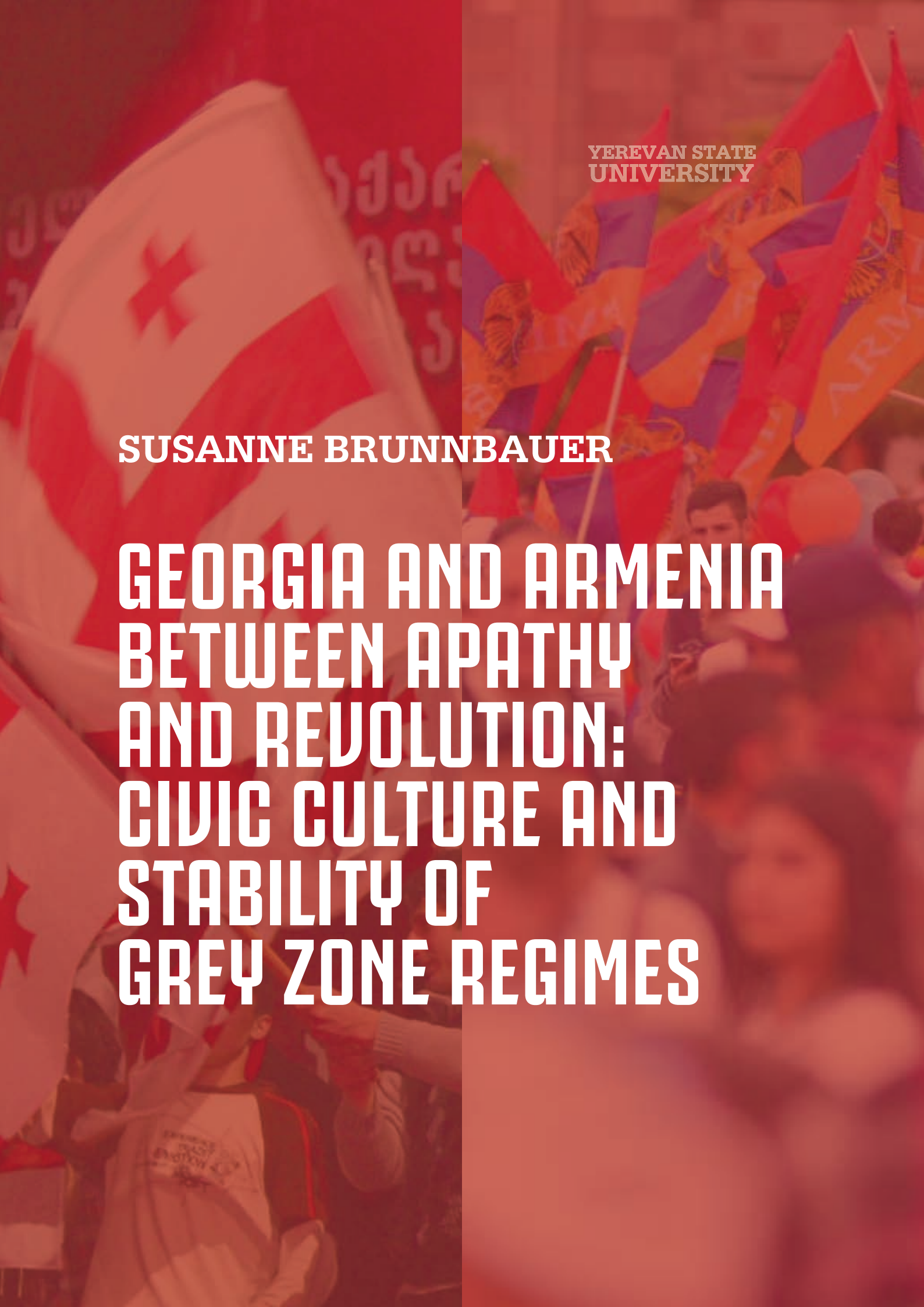

YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SUSANNE BRUNNBAUER

GEORGIA AND ARMENIA BETWEEN APATHY AND REVOLUTION: CIVIC CULTURE AND STABILITY OF GREY ZONE REGIMES

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The declaration of the 'end of the transition paradigm' at the dawn of the new millennium provoked a rethinking in transformation theory, as it challenged the dichotomy of democratic and authoritarian systems and the 'finality' of transformation. This study contributes to the debate on hybrid political systems, critically assessing established theoretical models of political cul-ture and stability with a view to their applicability in the post-Soviet environment. On the basis of comprehensive field research, the study compares Georgia and Armenia as most similar cases, which inherited similar legacies from their common Soviet past but showed different developments of regime persistence, instability and democratization processes since gaining independence and sovereignty. While Georgia experienced ups and downs of its democratization efforts, Armenia was considered a stable semi-consolidated authoritarian system until the Velvet Revolution, which can be regarded as an important 'reset' in Armenia's recent history. In a comparative approach this study analyses critical hues of stability in the political 'grey zone' while concentrating on the intermediary structure of both countries. Given its mediating function within the political system, the intermediary sphere of civil society actors and political elites instructively reflects the (dis)connect between citizens and the state. Focusing the analysis on the intermediary sphere provides valuable insights into the dynamics of political processes and decision-making, the articulation of interests independent from the state and the formation and recruitment of elites. By taking a critical look at the very constitution of the nexus of political elites and civil society as well as interlinkages and impacts, the major finding is that the mutual influence of political culture and political structure on stability can be confirmed in both countries' context. Thereby, the study identifies key differences in regime configurations that impact persistence in the political grey zone.

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Introduction

The title and idea of this book was written by Mrs. Susanne Brunnbauer in June 2019 as part of her master's thesis on "Georgia and Armenia between apathy and revolution: civic culture and stability of grey zone regimes" (supervisor: Prof. Dr. Susanne Pickel and Prof. Dr. Oliver Reisner) at the Institute of Political Science Chair of Political Science with Focus on Comparative Politics at the University Duisburg-Essen (UDE), Germany.

In a comparative study of the civic culture and stability of Georgia and Armenia, it is impossible not to take into account the history of the post-Soviet space. The disintegration, that is, the disintegration of complex politics and the economic system leads to the formation within its borders of several new independent formations, which were previously subsystem elements. Their independent functioning and development in the presence of certain conditions and necessary resources can lead to integration, the formation of an association with qualitatively new systemic features. Conversely, the slightest change in the conditions for the development of such actors can lead to their complete disintegration and even the so-called 'self-elimination'. The post-Soviet space as a whole and the former republics of the USSR, Georgia and Armenia, have become part of the global world system and the European community, and in the new format of post-Soviet relations, new actors who have not previously appeared in this South Caucasus region have acquired an active role.

The relevance of the topic of this comparative political study is due to the fact that the transformation processes of the new independent states have radically changed the social, economic and cultural life of peoples in the vast geopolitical space of Eurasia. The creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) could not eliminate the negative consequences of the so-called civilized divorce of the post-Soviet countries. Moreover, in recent years, in the activities of the CIS, the EAEU and the CSTO, an orientation towards discussions and exchange of views has been increasingly felt, and not towards solving practical issues in order to improve the quality of life and the level of safety of the peoples living in the participating countries. As a result, the CIS, the EAEU and the CSTO are losing the support of both political and economic elites and citizens. This, however, does not apply to the idea and projects of European and Eurasian integration in the post-Soviet space.

Evaluating the overall study of the integration processes of Armenia and Georgia, one should highlight those aspects that have so far been outside the main focus of specialists on this issue. First, there is no comprehensive assessment of the idea of integration and disintegration instruments and the main steps for their implementation in Armenia and Georgia. Secondly, the assessment of integration processes in the South Caucasus region by Western politicians and

scientists remains outside the field of vision of most researchers. Third, insufficient attention is paid to the interdependence between the internal political processes in the newly independent states and the changing attitude of their political elites towards integration. Fourth, the basic factors that determine the ratio of national and supranational interests, economic and political components in an integration association are not fully disclosed.

The integration processes taking place in the South Caucasus region are distinguished by a variety of models and institutional forms, which are not limited to hard integration. They, like the supranational model of the European Union, have interaction mechanisms characteristic of the model of open regionalism. The combination of the principles of soft and hard integration of the Armenian and Georgian societies, which is adequate for the inappropriate conditions of regional development, gives dynamism to regional integration processes and contributes to the stabilization and sustainable development of international relations in the South Caucasus. The emergence of open regionalism was a kind of reaction to the development of integration processes during the transition from a bipolar system to a multipolar one, to the modern stage of globalization. As the process of globalization deepens, integration models will shift towards open regionalism in the South Caucasus.

The transitional Armenian and Georgian societies are a phenomenon of the crisis of old management systems, economic structures, ideological attitudes and, at the same time, an environment for reforming and the emergence of new social relations. The period of transit and democratization can be characterized by the violation of the previous social contract, processes leading to an even greater property, political and cultural gap between the upper and lower strata. Markers of a transitional society in Armenia and Georgia can be such different, but in fact, internally related phenomena, such as frustration of certain social groups, imperfect legislation, and mistrust of most existing institutions. Revolutionary opposition and social protest are inherent in the societies of the South Caucasus with unsettled and constantly changing rules of the game and forms of political interaction. A factor contributing to the strengthening of the stability of the political regime is also the success of economic policy, in particular, a certain liberalization of economic relations, which resulted in the steady economic growth observed in recent years. Paradoxically, it is obvious that even in the proper situations in the political life of Georgia and Armenia, acting in the role of opposition for political parties or leaders means for the citizens of these countries to oppose their own country.

The author emphasizes that Armenia and Georgia have a certain set of factors that ensure their internal political stability, as shown by the political process of recent decades. At the same time, the inability of the ruling political party to solve acute social and economic problems leads to the disappointment of the population with their governments, and society begins to support opposition political parties to carry out gradual reforms. In this regard, a significant place in the

theory of democratic transition is occupied by the issue of “points of no return” of social protest, upon reaching which there is a qualitative leap: social discontent of citizen’s jumps from a latent form to a form of political mobilization. Implicitly, “points of no return” can be characterized as points of a qualitative transition, after which the policy of the authorities rather forms a protest than prevents it. It should be noted that the author, when choosing a methodological toolkit for researching civic culture and the stability of gray zone regimes, focuses on those elements that would make it possible to give a general assessment of the protest movement and individual forms of its manifestation, to show the political conditions for the manifestation of protest sentiments, as well as the process of evolution of social dissatisfaction in the protest movement, to adequately and comprehensively analyze the institutional features of its organization, that is, the mobilizing structures. The political experience of the post-Soviet region demonstrates not only democratic trajectories of development, but also cases of authoritarian regime consolidation. In this regard, an urgent scientific task is to measure the regime diversification of post-Soviet states not only within the framework of the authoritarianism-democracy dichotomy, but also on the basis of an analysis capable of recording the transitions from one non-democratic regime form to another type of authoritarianism. In other words, the author's study of the post-Soviet space using the example of Georgia and Armenia can be fruitful not only for enriching the theories of democratization, but also for comprehending the logic of the formation of authoritarian power, clarifying the causal and effectual relationships of the consolidation of undemocratic regimes and factors that determine the stability of authoritarian governance. In this regard, an equally urgent task is to analyze the post-Soviet states not only from the angle of measuring political dynamics, but also using a research perspective that can shed light on the causes of political statics, identify the main factors that determine the stability and stable functioning of authoritarian regimes. The institutional design of the Georgian and Armenian political systems, as well as the tasks of state building, economic reform, and the formation of national identity were similar conditions for the beginning of the post-Soviet development of the newly independent states. The proximity of political parameters at the start of regime transitions in Georgia and Armenia can be considered an advantage from the point of view of the possibilities of comparative analysis of political transformations. The South Caucasus region provided a unique opportunity not only to test and subject to empirical verification the previously put forward methodological concepts, but also, based on the generalization of modern data, to formulate new theoretical approaches and explanatory schemes that allow a deeper understanding of the mechanisms, patterns, causal and effectual relationships of political development.

The political events of the last decade in Georgia and Armenia related to the confrontation between the authorities and the opposition have clearly shown that the consolidation of the regime in these states is far from over. At the same time, other countries of the post-Soviet region

demonstrate substantial stability and stability of political functioning. Thus, the most important urgent task at the present stage is the continuation of scientific analysis and study of the post-Soviet countries in a comparative perspective, in order to identify and clarify the factors that determine the diversification of regime dynamics and political outcomes in different cases. The study of the transit regimes that have formed in Georgia and Armenia, the study of the basic principles of their functioning, as well as the logic of their development, can shed light on many aspects of the theory of civiliarchic democracy, as well as clarify our understanding of the universal and specific reasons for the collapse of democratization. The analysis of post-Soviet political regimes, with an emphasis on the cases of the South Caucasus countries, presented in this book, partly solves this urgent problem of modern political science. One of the most important determinants that determined the further long-term development of the political regimes of Georgia and Armenia, as well as their civiliarchic diversification, is the configuration of political elites that took shape at the beginning of the post-Soviet transformations, which set certain opportunities and limitations for the implementation of the ideal strategy of the ruler. Favorable for the establishment of the dominance of an authoritarian ruler is the fragmented structure of the elites, which to a greater extent allows the ruler to balance on the contradictions of elite factions and maintain his positions of power. In turn, the structure of the elites of Georgia and Armenia at the start of the regime transformations was determined by the legacy of the past and was determined by the presence or absence of three factors: 1) the degree of national consolidation of the population; 2) the factor of the experience of regional dominance; 3) the nature of the rotation of the elites during the period of European integration of actors determines the stability of the regimes for Georgia and Armenia at the present stage. The bipolarity of the elites and the lack of economic resources do not allow the political leader to form a broad power coalition. Attempts to destroy this regime while maintaining these factors can have only short-term success.

This book comparatively analyzes ideas about the development of integration processes in the South Caucasus, identifies internal contradictions and reasons for the failure of post-Soviet integration, and formulates a scheme for the most effective development of integration using the provisions of the concept of sustainable development and methods for assessing the state of integration processes through the factor of human development.

This book expands the knowledge about the causal and effect relationships of apathy and the revolution of Georgia and Armenia, as well as to identify the factors that determine the further regime dynamics. It seems advisable to further study this issue, especially in terms of issues related to the reasons for different responses of regimes to changes in the internal and external environment, a comparative analysis of the evolution of the practices of legitimizing authoritarian rulers in the context of new endogenous and exogenous challenges associated with the influ-

ence of globalization and the intensification of interstate and international relations in modern politics.

The main provisions of this book can be used in further scientific research and educational programs of universities. They can be useful for the development of training courses on integration problems in the South Caucasus. The conclusions of the author of this book can be used as analytical material in the activities of various intergovernmental integration associations in the South Caucasus. The research results can also be used in the practical activities of civil society organizations, government organizations, the European Commission and the Eurasian Economic Commission.

Ashot Aleksanyan
Yerevan, September 2020

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List of Abbreviations

ANM	Armenian National Movement
AUA	American University of Armenia
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CIPDD	Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
GD	Georgian Dream
GONGO	A government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGO)
GYLA	Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
ISFED	International Society for Free Elections and Democracy
ISU	Ilia State University
LGBT	Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
OGP	Open Government Partnership
RP	Republican Party
RSC	Regional Studies Center
TCPA	Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis
TSU	Tbilisi State University
UNM	United National Movement
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
YSU	Yerevan State University

Table of Contents

Introduction 3
Acknowledgements 8
List of Abbreviations 9
1. Post-transition: the genesis of political grey zone regimes 12
2. Civic culture and stability: theoretical approaches in the context of democratization and transformation 17
2.1. Back to the roots: fundamentals of political culture theory 18
2.2. Allegiance, apathy and alienation: notions of stability 20
2.2.1. Lipset and Easton revisited – a matter of support 23
2.2.1.1. Effectivity 24
2.2.1.2. Legitimacy and trust 25
2.2.2. Political socialization and its agents in the political process 26
2.3. Civic culture in post-Soviet countries: add-ons and specification by transformation theory 29
2.3.1. 'Democracy-bias' of political culture theory 33
2.3.2. Theory of value change and persistence 33
2.3.3. Relevance of the intermediary structure between state and citizen: civil society and political elites 34
2.4. Last stop, political grey zone – assumptions on (in)stability 37
2.4.1. Established determinants: dominant power politics and feckless pluralism 37
2.4.2. Further assumptions on common characteristics 39
2.4.2.1. Long-term effects of Soviet legacy 39
2.4.2.2. Socio-economic development 39
2.4.2.3. Reinforcing effect of external factors 40
2.4.2.4. (Im)balance, change and continuity of the intermediary structure 41
3. Research design: methodological framework and case selection 42
3.1. Most similar cases: Georgia and Armenia 42
3.1.1. Georgia 43
3.1.2. Armenia 46
3.2. Qualitative research design 48
3.2.1. Expert interviews 50
3.2.1.1. Political elites 52
3.2.1.2. Civil society 53
3.2.1.3. Research community 54
3.2.2. Time frame: long-term tendencies and dynamics between 1991 and 2018 54

4. Analysis: critical hues of regimes in the political grey zone 55
4.1. Georgia and Armenia – common characteristics in the political grey zone 55
4.2. Design of the respective intermediary structure at different times 58
4.2.1. Civil society 58
4.2.1.1. Georgia: recurring fluctuations of the NGO-community 58
4.2.1.2. Armenia: NGO-ization and the rise of informal civic activism 66
4.2.2. Political elites 74
4.2.2.1. Georgia: constant rotation and loops of return 74
4.2.2.2. Armenia: effective reproduction and horizontal elite integration 79
4.2.3. Interrelations in the intermediary sphere 84
4.2.3.1. Georgia: blended boundaries through cooperation and recruitment 84
4.2.3.2. Armenia: consultation under Chatham House rules 89
4.3. Tracing back (absent) deviations of stability 92
4.3.1. Georgia: destabilizing factors triggering fluctuations and changes in direction 92
4.3.1.1. Encounter of internal and external dynamics 93
4.3.1.2. Subject-attitude of citizenry: control instead of participation 94
4.3.1.3. Structural change and political culture: transformation at different paces 96
4.3.1.4. Generational change thwarted by inherited uncertainty 100
4.3.2. Armenia: stabilizing factors strengthening regime persistence 101
4.3.2.1. Unstable stability by definition: the apple-worm dilemma 101
4.3.2.2. Paralysis through political apathy and nihilism 103
4.3.2.3. Accepted structural stagnation of an informal non-democratic system 106
4.3.2.4. Concealed maturity of citizenry? The independence generation 107
5. Conclusion: implications and outlook for research on the political grey zone 110
References 118
Annex: List of Interviews 129

1. Post-transition: the genesis of political grey zone regimes

> What is often thought of as an uneasy, precarious middle ground between full-fledged democracy and outright dictatorship is actually the most common political condition today of countries in the developing world and the post-communist world. (Carothers 2002)

Contrary to what Fukuyama had prophesized, the third wave of democratization, culminating in the collapse of the Soviet regime and the foundation of a large number of post-communist states in the early 1990s, did not lead to the assumed "end of history" (1992: xi). The assumption had been that sooner or later the model of success, the Western type of liberal democracy, would be adopted around the globe – following the optimistic motto that "anyone can do it" (Carothers 2002: 8; see also Albrecht/Frankenberger/Frech 2011: 7-8; O'Donnell 1996; Pickel/Pickel 2006a: 7). The political reality of post-Soviet countries, however, did not meet the expectation of incipient democratization, as state- and nation-building, economic as well as social transformation multiplied the challenges of newly independent countries. Instead, in their need to "[rebuild] the ship at sea" (Aprasidze/Siroky 2010: 124) many of these new regimes slipped into a hybrid intermediate status in the midst of the classic dichotomy of autocracy and democracy and, until today, show a remarkable endurance. By no means can any finality of system transformation be assumed; on the contrary, one can observe a surprising durability and "new normal" of a political "grey zone" (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 296, 467; Carothers 2002: 18; Levitsky/Way 2010: 20; Timm 2010: 95, 99). While Huntington claimed in 1991 that "liberalized authoritarianism is not a stable equilibrium; the halfway house does not stand" (137), in the early 2000s, scholars became increasingly aware of the transformation dilemma which questioned the predicted path dependencies of newly created regimes towards established categories of political systems as either democratic or authoritarian (Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 42; Levitsky/Way 2010: 3-5; Timm 2010: 95-97).[1] The applicability of the model of democratic transition or of sequences of democratization has given way to the recognition of the non-transition longevity of regimes in the political grey zone, which share some democratic features while lacking other essential democratic qualities like political participation, an independent judiciary or solidified institutional political settings (Carothers 2002: 6-7, 9; Stefes 2010: 97).[2] The infinite variety of subtypes and combinations developed to designate those regimes unfolds creativity but also "conceptual confusion", and sometimes, categories only represent a distinct

[1] Timm traces back a first turning in political science to O'Donnells's article on "Illusions about Consolidation" in 1996 (2010: 96).

[2] In the study's context, the notion of "regime" is used based on Fishman's definition as "the formal and informal organization of the center of political power, and of its relations with the broader society. A regime determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those who are not" (1990: 428).

part of the wider intermediate zone (Levitsky/Way 2010: 13-14; see also Albecht/Frankenberger 2010: 41; Carothers 2002: 10).[3] Some scholars, however, have recognized a continuum of political regimes between the poles of totalitarian or democratic systems (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 159). The adherence of this study to the term "grey zone" is linked to the aspiration to better understand a hardly determinable regime type with its "sui generis functional logic" and complexity (Timm 2010: 98). By zooming into the outlined distinct political sphere, it becomes clear that the respective regimes show diverging trends of political stability: in their own categorization Levitsky and Way distinguish between unstable and stable authoritarian regimes (2010: 21). While the former cases have experienced one or more transitions and changes in leadership but no deep democratization, in the latter cases incumbents remained in power for three or more terms and were followed by self-chosen successors (2010: 20-22). Georgia, for instance, has experienced an unstable regime history which fluctuated somewhere between semi-democratic and semi-authoritarian configurations. During the last years – as it has happened before – support for the ruling government has dramatically deteriorated which culminated in the very recent wave of protests when thousands of people took to the streets in June 2019 (Stöber 2016). Armenia, on the other hand, was considered stable semi-authoritarian for many years as incumbents handed over power to their desired successors and effectively inhibited the emergence of any opposition (Levistky/Way 2010: 21-22; Stefes 2010: 98). The mass protests in April 2018, however, signified a 'reset' in the Armenian political history.

Interestingly, the dynamics of regimes in the intermediate zone are discussed among scholars as "cyclic adaptation and reproduction processes"[4], and *Color Revolutions* like the Rose Revolution in Georgia are considered a "part of a cycle that takes place when rulers are no longer able to defuse moments of potential instability by drawing on their available formal and informal means"[5] (Timm 2010: 99-100). However, the very recent Velvet Revolution in Armenia, which abruptly ended the apparently stable persistence, is claimed to differ from those previous movements in the post-Soviet space in being consciously domestic and explicitly apart from foreign policy agendas (Delcour/Hoffmann 2018; Ohanyan 2018; see also Kubiak 2018: 127). The study takes this identified disparity in regime developments, which appears despite many commonalities, as a starting point for further analysis into the characteristics of grey zone regimes.

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[3] Scholars have tried to systematically compile and rearrange the mass of subtypes, see Bank 2010: 29-30; Collier/Levitsky 1997; Diamond 2002 on "hybrid regimes" and Levitsky and Way's (2010) "competitive authoritarianism". However, Timm argues that regime typologies still follow the delimitation of authoritarianism and democracy (2010: 98; for a comprehensive critique see also Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 40-42).

[4] Original citation: „zyklische Anpassungs- und Reproduktionsprozesse" (Timm 2010: 99).

[5] Original citation: „als Teil eines Zyklus, der einsetzt, wenn Machthaber nicht mehr in der Lage sind, im Rückgriff auf die ihnen zur Verfügung stehenden formellen und informellen Mittel, Momente potentieller Instabilität zu entschärfen" (Timm 2010: 100).

Since most countries in the post-Soviet space have said goodbye to decades of dictatorship, a combination of "feckless pluralism" and authoritarian tendencies in terms of "dominant power politics" became important characteristics for their subsequent development and are likely to be found in countries like Armenia and Georgia even today. While the former implies an unfair level playing field despite the existence of formal-democratic institutions, the latter refers to the domination of the entire political landscape by one powerful group (Carothers 2002: 5; see also Albrecht/Frankenberger/Frech 2011: 10; Berglund 2014; Levitsky/Way 2010; Stykow 2011: 47, 51, 70-71). Based on their common Soviet background and accompanying legacies, the geographical proximity and equal exposure to external influences as well as a similarly low socio-economic development, the two political grey zone regimes qualify as most similar cases for the comparative analysis.

While state-building processes of post-Soviet countries have been a "search across a terrain of which there is no map" (Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 7) this study aims to contribute to retracing the journey of two exemplary cases throughout the period since independence by drawing attention to the (in)congruence of political structure and culture, which might explain the different outcomes of stability. This approach is based on the assumption that only if structural realities of a political system match the given political cultural setting, the system will persist. Rather than a mere reproduction of historical facts and events, the study aims to obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding of continuities and change that enables to detect decisive landmarks of variance. Importantly, it is not the purpose of this study to identify causalities for regimes' durability, or why they are staying within the political grey zone as a category distinct from democracy or autocracy; rather, the goal is to provide explanations for their inherent political (in)stability as being part of this specific zone. In particular, a closer look is taken at the intermediary sphere as the connecting space between society and the state, and an arena for political socialization and communication processes, which are expected to be reflected in both political cultural as well as structural changes and continuities.

This study therefore asks: how is it possible that the political grey zone regimes Georgia and Armenia differ visibly in their "balance sheet" of democratization and stability, even though both countries were confronted with similar starting conditions at the outset of independence? Two closely linked and refining questions include the following considerations: how does the intermediary structure of political elites and civil society constitute itself in a historical perspective and what connections can be identified with regard to regime persistence and instability in both cases? The intermediary structure as institutionalized connecting link between society and the state is expected to display manifestations of cultural as well as structural aspects and to provide key insights in regard to the dynamics of political and social processes. Thereby, it is

argued that there has been a structurally and culturally shaped "map" in both countries that can be detected and that has led them along two different tracks of political stability.

Aside from already explored and established characteristics, the theoretical-analytical framework for any investigation of the respective regime types, of their unexpected durability and diverse hues still lacks tangible instruments besides the common terminology and concepts along the said dichotomy of democracy and autocracy (Carothers 2002: 10, 20; Timm 2010: 95, 118). Timm takes the step of applying the neo-patrimonial logic of governance in order to gain a new set of instruments for investigating the political grey zone. While he identifies "institutionalized uncertainties" as key characteristic of those regimes, he also points to existing research gaps, in particular regarding mechanisms which determine stability and cyclical reproduction processes of power (2010: 118): "Rather than proceeding from informal and formal institutions as a zero-sum game, research should rebuild those mechanisms that perpetuate the core of neo-patrimonialism, namely institutionalized insecurity"[6] (2010: 118).

In order to take a deeper look at those mechanisms, the role of intermediary structures and agents needs further consideration. Therefore, in scrutinizing the relation of culture and structure as well as the role of rulers and the ruled, this study derives its key assumptions from the very fundaments of political culture theory in order to fully understand variances of stability of the respective political systems. While political culture as the "particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation" (Almond/Verba 1963: 14-15) itself is heavily influenced by different forms of political socialization and structural changes, it has an effect on both the latter as well as the output of the political system (Almond 1990: 144). Structural-functionalist considerations, which assume the need of a certain degree of political legitimacy and effectivity – in terms of output or repressive measures – in order to ensure any regime's long-term stability are also considered in the analysis (Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 47-48, 51; 2011: 36; Easton 1965a: 17-19, see also Easton 1965b; Lipset 1959; 1981). The recourse to the early beginnings of sociological system theory as well as different derivations in the field of value change and political socialization allows for a comprehensive analysis of framework of actions, overall structures and functions as well as dynamics in terms of interaction (Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 48). In addition, contextual factors like historical legacies of the Soviet period, economic and social hardship, external influences as well as available integration formats like the European Union or the Eurasian Economic Union, which all impact both countries' developments, will be taken into account and scrutinized.

[6] Original citation: "Statt weiter von informellen und formalen Institutionen als Nullsummenspiel auszugehen sollte Forschung die Rekonstruktion derjenigen Mechanismen betreiben, die den Kern des Neopatrimonialismus, die institutionalisierte Unsicherheit, perpetuieren" (2010: 118).

In contrast to the predominant orientation of systems research towards quantitative methods and the solidified reliance of political culture research on survey methods (Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 43; Geißel/Freise 2016: 532; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 41-45), this in-depth qualitative research explicitly relies on interviews with experts, (formerly) active or specialized in the intermediary structures – the meso-level of the respective political systems. Field work conducted in both countries during the summer months (July-October) of 2018 including 37 interviews with a wide range of civil society actors, political elites and the local research community constitutes the core data set used in this study, which is complemented by available literature on both cases. Existing research mostly targets Georgia and Armenia individually and solely focuses on either structural or political cultural dynamics or a narrower set of actors (civil society or political elites) (see for instance: Academic Swiss Caucasus Net 2014; Bazantová 2011; De Waal 2011; Ghaplanyan 2017; Howard 2003; Ishkanian 2008; Iskandaryan/Mikaelian/Minasyan 2016; Kubiak 2018; Lebanidze 2014; Muskhelishvili/Jorjoliani 2009; Nodia 2005; Paturyan/Gevoryan 2014; Reisner 2018; Simao 2013).[7]

With its in-depth, qualitative, comparative approach, the study has the advantage of, first, applying non-uniformity in the operationalization in empirical terms and second, of being able to take into account the broad set of intermediary actors needed to ensure reliability (Geißel/Freise 2016: 532). Instead of a rigid hypothesis test, this study targets the reconstruction, differentiation and illustration of connections and deviations in the constitution of the considered regimes, along prior assumptions derived from theory. To this end, the basic theoretical arguments and their differentiation in the post-Soviet context are outlined in chapter 2, followed by a presentation of the applied qualitative methodology as well as the reasons for case selection in chapter 3. The analysis itself, in chapter 4, first gives an overview on the assumed commonalities in the political grey zone, followed by the in-depth investigation of specific actors, dynamics and interrelations in the intermediary sphere. From this it deduces assertions regarding stability and instability, which constitute the core of this research. Thereby, the key contribution of the study lies in its in-depth comparative analysis of the two neighboring countries, which share more similarities than one might expect in view of their history of political transformation. Apart from summarizing the main findings, the final outlook in chapter 5 intends to raise future perspectives and potential further research topics and is enriched by interviewees' own assessments on the very recent dynamics in the region.

[7] A first comparative study on (in) stability of the two South Caucasian states (considering them as competitive-authoritarian regimes in presented by Sehring and Stefes who highlight mass protests of oppositional forces and elite division as important explanatory factors for instability. However, they emphasize that a lot of research still needs to be done with respect to stability of regimes in the political grey zone (2010: 275; 292-294).

2. Civic culture and stability: theoretical approaches in the context of democratization and transformation

> If institutions are the 'hardware' of democracy then what people think about these institutions constitutes the 'software' of democracy and software is just as important as hardware in making the system work. (Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 8)

The major idea that shaped the early beginnings of political culture theory anticipated the importance of cultural pre-conditions, thus, the historically shaped roles, mindsets and attitudes of individuals, aside of socio-economic parameters and functioning institutions for enabling the persistence of a political system (Fuchs 2002: 27; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 58-59).[8] The inclusion of the "socio-cultural foundation"[9] widened the structural-functionalist molded analytical spectrum for the explanation of social phenomena on the macro-level as it incorporates the individual convictions (micro-level) and draws attention to the relation of the individual towards the state (Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 50, 56, 58; see also Almond/Verba 1963: 33).

In order to comprehend the "mental maps" (Martín 2003: 72)[10] – in terms of society's cognitive, evaluative and affective orientations towards the political system that can be found in grey zone regimes[11] as well as the historical developments and changes that might have had an impact on its very constitution as it had on stability, it is critical to trace back the roots and theoretical foundations of political culture research – the lenses through which the selected cases will be looked at and that will outline first explanatory approaches. In addition, and based on this, the (inter)linkage with elements of political socialization theory is vital in order to elaborate the key assumptions with respect to the role of the intermediary structure as institutionalized sphere bridging society and the state as well as related actors in the considered regimes.[12] The embedding of the object of research into the existing theoretical framework, which precedes the case-based analysis, allows for an initial orientation within the existing field of research and introduces the established tool box along scientific quality criteria (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 25-33).

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8 The political system as such represents the complexity of political order including government, regime and state which dynamically varies in its relationship with society, similarly determining the latter' environment and is mutable in terms of legitimacy and stability (Merkel 2016: 105-106).

9 Original citation: "soziokulturelle[r] Unterbau" (Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 50).

10 Martín further delineates these "mental maps" as "intimately related to the historical context in which attitudes are formed and to the collective processes that take place in that context" (2003: 72).

11 The detailed consideration of established assumptions on the political grey zone succeeds the theoretical outline but can be found at chapter 2.4.

12 In the context of this study and based on Rucht's notion, the political-administrative system, interest groups, social movements and mass media are considered the most relevant core of intermediaries (2007: 20). For more information on the intermediary structure please view chapter 2.3.3.

2.1. Back to the roots: fundamentals of political culture theory

The concept of political culture in its very origins entails "the frequency of different kinds of cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations toward the political system in general, its input and output aspects, and the self as political actor"[13] (Almond/Verba 1963: 17), which in its individual nature is displayed by a distinctive pattern on the meso- and macro level of a political system (Gabriel 1996: 25). This does not necessarily imply the assumption of either homogeneity or heterogeneity, but it exposes ideal types of enduring forms of political culture (Almond/Verba 1963: 20; Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 205).

Those assumptions have been portrayed for the first time in 1963 by the groundbreaking work of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba on "The Civic Culture" which laid the foundation for the following decades of political culture research and further theory development. Following their key argument, until then, "*the importance of specific learning of orientations to politics and of experience with the political system* has been seriously underemphasized" (1963: 34; italics in the original). Their initial appeal has gained particular impetus since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of newly independent post-communist states when political culture theory experienced an "remarkable resurrection"[14] combined with ideas of transformation theory (Fuchs 2002: 27). While later approaches focused more on democratic political systems, the initial concept displayed a more general and non-normatively loaded view: the very value of the classical concept is based on its explanatory attempt of the evolution and configuration, or put simply, the persistence of a political system, arguing that long-term stability needs congruence between culture and structure, while both factors are mutually interrelated and dependent (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 118-121; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 49-51). "A congruent political structure would be one appropriate for the culture: in other words, where political cognition in the population would tend to be accurate and where affect and evaluation would tend to be favorable" (Almond/Verba 1963: 21). Derived from structural-functional thinking, structure in this sense represents the fabric of internally and externally shaped institutions, socio-economic determinants but also power relations while culture encloses attitudes, norms and values which potentially trigger actions (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 99; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 50). The interlinkage gets clearer when looking at the political system as a specific structural setting: it complies different functions like political socialization, political communication, aggregation and articulation of interests or recruiting of political actors which impinge on its longevity but are mutually interrelated with the normative convictions of citizens and their support

[13] While input aspects entail "the flow of demands from the society into the polity and the conversion of these demands into authoritative policies" – in particular carried out by political parties, interest groups and the media – output aspects reflect the enforcement and application of those policies (Almond/Verba 1963: 15-16).

[14] Original citation: "bemerkenswerte Wiederauferstehung" (Fuchs 2002: 27).

(Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 108-110). Structural arrangements, thereby, reflect governing rules of the political game, while the political playing field can be found within the intermediary sphere of the political system which incorporates different culturally shaped and socialized (political) players (Almond/Verba 1963: 34; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 56). Therefore, any comprehensive picture for a better understanding of the political systems' constitution and continuity needs to bear in mind the given political cultural boundaries (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 115; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 49-51). Stability, in this regard, does not necessarily entail peace but it equals the durability and survivability of a political system, which over time might be frequently challenged or even at stake in moments of crisis triggered by external or internal disturbances (Easton 1968: 132; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 51-52). Hence, legitimacy becomes crucial as it reflects the embeddedness of the political system within the broader dominant political convictions and the state "allocates important legitimacy resources if its authority is not embedded, supported and relieved in civil society" (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 362; see also Pickel 2006: 184; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 52).[15] Although this supportive attitude does not have to apply for each and every citizen, Almond and Verba differentiate particular modes of orientations.[16]

While their conception of the ideal type of "civic culture" as a mixture of different types of political orientations – *parochial*, *subject* as well as *participatory* – is associated with a democratic system, the two scholars classified each set of orientations as potentially congruent and thereby stable with different, also non-democratic regime types. Moreover, they identified diverging configurations or a "mix" of citizens' political culture that better reflect empirical realities (Almond/Verba 1963: 20-21, 31-32; Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 207-208). As the balanced ideal type of civic culture portrays, allegiant participatory attitudes need to be combined with attenuating subject and parochial forms of culture in order to guarantee the effectiveness and governability of a political system (Almond/Verba 1963: 31-32; Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 208; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 65; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 96). Yet, for the purpose of identifying variations and developments, or what Pickel and Pickel call "dynamic equilibrium"[17] of political culture and stability within the still largely obscure political grey zone, it is fundamental to depart from the ideal type of civic culture, but to consider the established set of cultural categories – parochial, subject and participant culture – and their combinations as frame of reference (2006b: 66). This is essential in the way that these prototypes of political culture can be found in various combinations while each has its own implications on the attitudinal framework of citizens. Taking this one step further, the reflected involvement or detachment of society from the

[15] Original citation: "vergibt wichtige Legitimitätsressourcen, wenn seine Autorität nicht in Zivilgesellschaft eingebettet, unterstützt und entlastet wird" (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 362).

[16] In this sense, "orientations" are considered as "general dispositions of actors to act in certain ways in sets of situations" and therefore, more *general* than specific attitudes (Eckstein 1988: 790-791).

[17] Original citation: "Fließgleichgewicht" (Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 66).

political sphere is informative about the inherent stability of the considered political system, as soon as one takes the existing structural setting into account.

2.2. Allegiance, apathy and alienation: notions of stability

According to the outlined fundamentals of political culture theory, stability or instability, thus, persistence or change are not an a priori given state of any political system. Instead, different patterns of positive or negative orientations determine the (in) congruence of structure and political culture which shall be considered more closely in the following. Therefore, the outlined settings of political culture are intertwined with different deviations in the orientation of citizens – namely allegiance, apathy and alienation – and their respective impact on stability.

The complete detachment of citizens from the political sphere is the defining element of *parochial* culture. The roles of the ruled and those of the rulers are mutually decoupled from each other in terms of expectations, which is discernible by non-affection and indifference (Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 63). Roles themselves are vague in their nature and not distinct from non-political social areas, like religious orientation or business relations. In parochial systems, stability based on the congruence of structure and culture is expected in more traditional political structural settings, like tribal societies (Almond/Verba 1963: 17-19, 21). A more awaiting and sophisticated cultural category is assumed by *subject* citizens who – though distanced and politically inactive – observe and evaluate the political performance of the ruling system. Their attitude towards political activities is shaped by passivity, while they still keep their eyes open for changes and developments on the structural level (Almond/Verba 1963: 19; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 63). For this cultural type, authoritarian systems with a clear centralized political structure are the congruent equivalent that ensures stability (Almond/Verba 1963: 21). The most vivid form of political culture that refers primarily to democratic political structures as stabilizing match is represented by actively *participating* citizens who voice demands, engage in the political processes and may frequently challenge the political system in its given constitution (Almond/Verba 1963: 19, 21; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 63-64).

All three types are nonetheless both overlapping and not mutually exclusive as well as explicitly non-homogenous (Almond/Verba 1963: 19-20, 27). This means, for instance, that "[t]he parochial orientations must adapt when new and more specialized orientations enter into the picture, just as both parochial and subject orientations change when participant orientations are acquired" (Almond/Verba 1963: 20, 22).

Beside the clear cut prototypes of political culture, intermingled variations like *parochial-subject culture* (allegiance towards initial forms of complex but centralized government structures develops in one part of society), *subject-participant culture* (more pro-active citizens adopt input-orientations, while a significant part of society still shares a more authoritarian regime

oriented, passive attitude)*, parochial-participant culture* (the combination of mainly prevalent parochials and partly existing participatory structure), which may freely shift on a continuum, are more likely to be found in reality. Almond and Verba point to the significance of diverging processes of change from one type to the other which leads to specific mixed sets of political culture (1963: 23-26). Thus, for the purpose of this study it is necessary to understand both the processes of change and persistence as well as the respective cultural setting at different times.

Change in this regard or any restriction of the survivability of a political system are based on incongruence between the outlined configurations of culture and structure. As long as "attitudes and institutions match" and, hence, culture and structure are congruent, allegiance stabilizes the system. Alienation, however, which has a destabilizing effect is triggered by the rejection of the overall political system including the existing structural setting, input and output mechanisms and even disaffection with the individual role of the citizen. This incongruence does not instantly imply change and instability, but on the long term the political system is seriously challenged (Almond/Verba 1963: 21-23). Against those two extreme opposite poles, apathy reflects the intermediary stage between a congruent/stable or incongruent/instable situation, while the notion of "fragile stability" might be most appropriate for its implication of citizens' perceived powerlessness. In this case, disbalance between the demands from society and actual performance of the political sphere triggers disillusionment and lowered expectations or even – what Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer refer to as "incivisme" (1998: 16) – the rejection of participation and cooperation combined with the preference of a government detached from the ordinary citizen. Stability in this case, implies the acceptance of the present political system as the lesser evil and a societal arrangement of "live and let live" (1998: 38).

Alienation in *subject-participant* culture, for instance, is triggered by both frequent structural instabilities as well as the split between a small actively engaged part of society against the more detached and passive group of citizens (Almond/Verba 1963: 25-26). The establishment of a "defensive political infrastructure"[18] might enable authoritarian actors to contain "democratic interludes" or meet the aspirations of involvement while another way of adaption is seen in rising populism or the installment of allegedly democratic institutions (Almond/Verba 1963: 26; see also Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 53, 56). However, the longevity of this artificial responsiveness remains uncertain. "A successful shift from a subject to a participant culture involves the diffusion of positive orientations toward a democratic infrastructure, the acceptance of norms of civic obligation, and the development of a sense of civic competence among a substan-

[18] This form of infrastructure is not further substantiated by Almond and Verba, however, any controlling mechanism that represses unwelcomed protest or demand from society is conceivable – like the interference in media, for instance – in order to better control society and political opposition. Albrecht and Frankenberger also speak of "chameleonism" that it needed for authoritarian elites to continuously adapt their institutional setting (2010: 53).

tial proportion of the population" (Almond/Verba 1963: 27). This entails that beside the subject-participant cleavage (*horizontal fragmentation)*, fluctuations and instability within the political grey zone can be linked to the spread of either positive or negative orientations towards the structural realities of the political system (*vertical fragmentation*) (Almond/Verba 1963: 27-28).

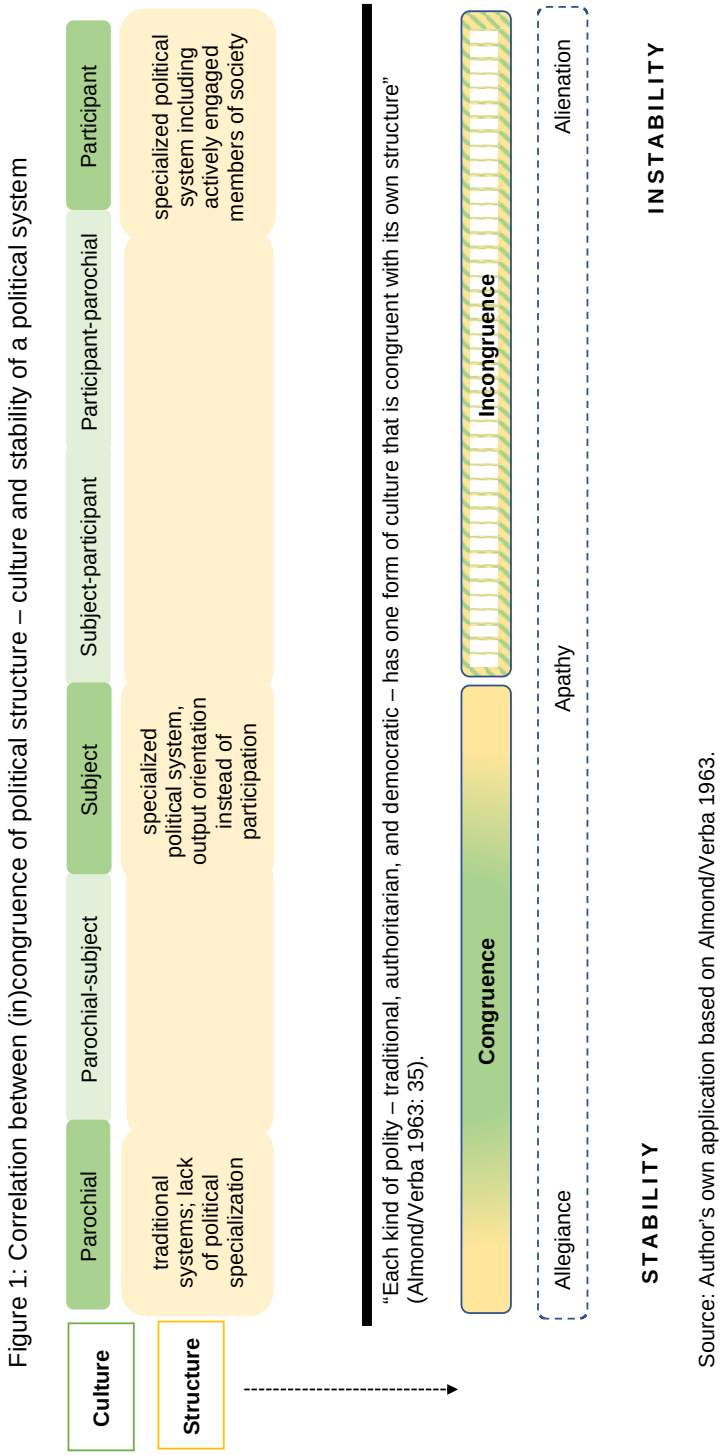

Figure 1: Correlation between (in)congruence of political structure – culture and stability of a political system

Source: Author's own application based on Almond/Verba 1963.

While Almond and Verba remain vague on the concrete targeted destination of these orientations, their thoughts have been further theoretically substantiated by David Easton (1965a, 1965b, 1975) and Seymour Martin Lipset (1959, 1981) who turned their special attention to political support and its lack or withdrawal towards different objects of the political system. Thereby, they distinguish between a broader (political community and present set of values), a more narrow (political regime and its institutional structure) and an even specific individualized sense (political authorities and their individual performance) (Pickel 2006: 269-272; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 78; Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 213). In the following, their thoughts are disentangled but still remain very interlinked and complementary.[19]

2.2.1. Lipset and Easton revisited – a matter of support

Easton – from the more structural-functionalist perspective and with a focus on the micro-level[20] – and Lipset – from the angle of modernization theory and with reference to the macro-level – both took the idea of stability and the survivability of political systems in order to further differentiate it within political culture research (Easton 1965a/b, 1975; Lipset 1959; 1962: 31-94; 1981). Following their reasoning, the stability – or rather the non-static and more progressive notion of "persistence" – of a political system is mainly dependent on the popular support towards specific objects (in decreasing reach): the *political community*, the *political regime* or the *political authorities* (Easton 1965a: 172, 171-219; 1965b: 77-90;). Any missing backing of the latter, at least on the short-term, is more bearable as it specifically relates to regime performance, its effectiveness and outputs (*specific support)* rather than regime legitimating *diffuse support* which is developed and inherited by long-term experiences and attitudes of citizens (Fuchs 2002: 31; Pickel 2006: 270). As soon as legitimating support is missing, the relationship between citizen and the state can be seen as destabilizing momentum, which is likely to result in a blockade of state politics and elite actions or alienation in the long-term (Klein 2001: 89; Pickel 2010: 199).[21] Therefore, political actions are always embedded in the given societal set of convictions. Nonetheless, while the fundamental preference of the existing system "for its own sake"[22] (*diffuse*) produces a higher and longer-term stabilizing effect on the regime, the present

[19] For clearness: the distinction between legitimacy and effectivity goes back to Lipset, while Easton, a student of Talcott Parson, was the first to introduce political support and to differentiate between legitimacy and trust (Pickel 2006: 184).

[20] For a comprehensive overview on Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism – in particular his AGIL-scheme, which served as point of reference for Easton as well, see Pickel/Stark 2010: 201-204 and Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 49-50.

[21] There have been different efforts by scholars to quantify the required amount of support against the share of system-rejecting people in order to sustain a political system – for instance, Diamond elaborated a share of 70 percent support needed for a young democracy to persist. However, any quantification remains vulnerable to sufficient justification (Jacobs 2006: 302).

[22] Original citation: "um [seiner] selbst willen" (Pickel/Stark 2010: 206).

immediate performance assessment of the current political system (*specific*) also serves as a "prognostic tool"[23] for the future viability of a regime (Jacobs 2006: 301; Pickel 2006: 267-270; Pickel/Stark 2010: 204-206). This needs further differentiation.

2.2.1.1. Effectivity

Far more short-term and adaptive, the evaluation of the prevalent political regime in its economic as well as political output and effectiveness is reflected in the *specific* (positive or negative) orientations of citizens (Braun/Schmitt 2009: 58; Easton 1975: 437-438; Pickel 2006: 271; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 11). In terms of stability, this implies that "political systems are risking their survival if they expect their citizens to face longer-term deficits in effectiveness"[24] (Pickel 2016: 335).

This particular focus on differences in timely variations of support, their interlinkages and consequences have been emphasized by Lipset, who considered the fractions of legitimacy mainly as a result of continuing dissatisfaction and disapproval towards the effectivity of a system in the course of changing social structures (Lipset 1959: 71; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 78, 88). Along the derivations of modernization theory, the improvement of social conditions through economic development as well as the efficiency of the political institutions are seen as important stabilizing factors as they are able to fulfil basic needs of citizens, respond to popular demands, positively revaluate individual liberties and thereby, promote satisfaction; of course, these effects are mutually reinforcing (Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 2-3; Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 211; Lipset 1959: 86; Pickel 2006: 185-186; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 13-14). Economic and political performance, therefore, shapes the immediate attitude and evaluation of society towards the political sphere, or – as expressed pointedly by de Tocqueville – "only those who have nothing to lose ever revolt" (1863: 317). This observation is particularly interesting in post-Soviet countries, which experienced a profound transformation in all spheres of life, while largely struggling in their socio-economic as well as state-building progress (Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 91).

Still, effectivity alone will not guarantee the long-term persistence of a system as the existence of a "value system allowing the peaceful 'play' of power" is essential for stability (Lipset 1959: 71; Pickel/Stark 2006: 207).

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[23] Original citation: "prognostisches Hilfsmittel" (Pickel 2006: 268).

[24] Original citation: "politische Systeme [geraten] in Überlebensnöte, wenn sie ihren Bürgern längerfristige Effektivitätsdefizite zumuten" (Pickel 2016: 335).

2.2.1.2. Legitimacy and trust

Weber already emphasized the decisive role of legitimacy for any regime to sustaining power and the latter inherent strive "to create and to maintain the belief in its legitimacy"[25] (1972: 122; see also Pickel 2006: 185).[26] An indispensable factor for the long-term survivability of a political system and its resilience to weather short-term crises is considered to relate to the broader loyalty of its citizenry[27] and the latter's evaluation of the prevalent political structures as the most appropriate and concordant to their own values; thus, in both legal, normative and empirical terms this goes beyond pure socio-economic effectivity (Easton 1965a: 278, 1975: 451; Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 210; Lipset 1959: 86; Merkel 2016: 106-107; Pickel 2006: 86-88, 271).[28] By examining citizen's orientations in hybrid regime types, Pickel and Stark conclude that positive attitudes towards democracy exist, yet there is also one or even more authoritarian alternatives that are evaluated positively (2010: 209).

Easton further discriminates two different forms of diffusive support: *trust* as the uniting momentum of the popular belief in a higher common good and *legitimacy*, which represents the individually perceived accordance of personal values with the shape and functioning of the present political system and its structures (Easton 1965a: 278; 311-312; 1975: 447-453; Pickel 2006: 270-271). Irrespective of the potential disapproval of the ruling government and its policies, in case of warranted legitimacy, the system itself remains uncontested (Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 11). Trust, both in its vertical as well as horizontal sense is considered a crucial social resource due to its concomitant mechanisms of dissolving complexity and thus, reducing uncertainty and facilitating collective social interaction although, this refers primarily to modern differentiated societies (Kaina 2004: 524).

Kaina further disentangles the vertical and horizontal directions of trust in terms of the valuation of political actors, while horizontal trust ensures the overall operability of the political system and vertical trust enhances legitimacy through guaranteed and expectable action patterns of authority structures (2004: 527-528). Those "expectations are shaped by the political-cultural foundations of a society with respect to certain normative criteria, formed in political

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[25] Original citation: "den Glauben an ihre Legitimität zu erwecken und zu pflegen" (Weber 1972: 122).

[26] For a comprehensive overview and discussion on different notions of legitimacy and related approaches or frameworks, see Braun/Schmitt 2009: 53-64.

[27] In the context of this study 'society' and 'citizenry' are used as synonymously.

[28] In their study on authoritarian regimes, Albrecht and Frankenberger point to both nationalist rhetoric which is often used in order to create a common political identity against alleged external threats as well as "legitimacy by performance" when extensive reform processes are meant to win society over (2011: 36-37).

structures and influenced by feedback effects of the political process"[29] (Kaina 2004: 533). Accordingly, generalized confidence in institutions and structures of a regime is strongly interrelated with the more vectored trust in individual political figures and actors, which for their part reflect the normative setting through their actions (Kaina 2004: 530-533). Even though Kaina emphasizes the applicability of those ideas to transforming societies or regimes in the political grey zone, however, in their initial conception they explicitly refer to a democratic political order and the premise of elite pluralism – which itself is contested in literature (Kaina 2004: 520-522, 534). Therefore, the assumptions on the crucial relationship of trust in political elites need to be thoroughly reflected in the context of the post-communist environment.

Here, the linkage to the diverging notions of orientations comes in, as "anomy" or revolution can be seen as a result of decreasing or even lacking legitimacy. This might be also reflected in the decoupling or alienation of citizens and the state, which make the political sphere exclusive to a narrow circle of people (Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 87). As Lipset notes: "a crisis of legitimacy is a crisis of change", when citizens feel no longer or not yet attached to the current political setting and the changing set values (1959: 87). Legitimacy, in this regard, becomes the connecting link between stability and socio-economic, ideological processes in any kind of political regime and society; in a positive outlook it anchors the existing system or, alternatively, subverts it (Merkel 2016: 108-109; Pickel 2006: 198-200).

Taking this into account, it raises the question about the inherent constitution and embeddedness of regimes in the political grey zone and potential "predetermined breaking points"[30] (Pickel 2006: 199). As seen earlier, both legitimacy and trust as the primary source of stability of a political system are influenced by and resulting from socialization processes, hence, it is essential to consider not only the role of major actors involved on the political playing field but also to bridge the fundamentals of political culture theory with assumptions of political socialization theory in order to fully understand the political game processes.

2.2.2. Political socialization and its agents in the political process

> [C]ulture is learned and that learning is linked at some level to experience. (Mishler/Pollack 2003: 246)

Almond and Verba already emphasize the impact of historically shaped learning processes on the individual, while they focus more on the immediate experience with the prevalent political system, social environment and forms of social interaction rather than referring to childhood socialization (1963: 34-25; Fuchs 2002: 29). Vice versa, the constitution and persistence of polit-

[29] Original citation: "Erwartungen werden mit Bezug auf bestimmte normative Kriterien durch die politisch-kulturellen Grundlagen einer Gesellschaft geprägt, in politischen Strukturen geformt und von Rückkopplungseffekten des politischen Prozesses beeinflusst" (Kaina 2004: 533).

[30] Original citation: "Sollbruchstellen" (Pickel 2006: 199).

ical systems viewed from the anthropological and sociological angle enables the identification of explanatory variables for diverging roles and relations between rulers and the ruled. Against the argument of rational-choice theory, it is assumed that the human being as *homo sociologicus* is shaped by the given structure as well as surrounding norms and values and acts accordingly in a taring manner rather than being utility-motivated – a *homo oeconomicus* (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 99). Thereby, the variability of orientations is determined by learning processes (Eckstein 1988).

"Political culture affects political and governmental structure and performance – constrains it, but surely does not determine it. The causal arrows between culture and structure and performance go both ways" (Almond 1990: 144). Taking up the example of a functioning democratic political system, socialization processes through the long-term experience of democratic institutions might in this way also enhance the integration of positive attitudes towards the democratic setting and incorporate the accompanied values in political culture (Ajagbe 2016: 92; Brown 2003: 19; Kaina 2004: 531). This goes hand in hand with the understanding that experiences and socialization processes do not immunize against contradictions between formerly acquired sets of values and later-life attitudes and orientations, in particular in times of transformation (Mishler/Pollack 2003: 247). Pye, therefore, further discriminates thin and thick levels of political culture: he describes deeply rooted processes of socialization reflected in identity and trust – exogenous to politics – as thick, while thin as more fungible, less stringent and cognitively influenced forms of culture remain endogenous to political processes (2003: 7-8).[31]

Rooted in concepts of political sociology, the idea of political socialization identifies procedures on the political sphere as "developmental processes through which persons acquire political orientations and patterns of behaviour" and align themselves to dominant social patterns (Easton 1968: 125, 133). This adaptation by socialization works as important stabilizing factor as it reduces uncertainty and enhances predictability and reliability of a political system (Easton 1968: 134-135; Eckstein 1988: 791-792). This commonly agreed and assumed codex of attitudes and orientations in a society is further transmitted to subsequent generations, even though socialization in its aligning function does not completely shield against intra-generational frictions and instability through major cleavages (Easton 1968: 137). In essence, socialization represents the tool to assign a place for each and every one in a society – and in a political sense, a role to act politically – which does not mean that it automatically leads to as-

[31] This idea of thick and thin culture is outlined in more detail by Mishler and Pollack (2003: 237-253), while the present study focuses on the more individualistic and heterogenic and less pervasive conception by Almond and Verba who "thinned (...) the assumption of cultural durability" (Mishler/Pollack 2003: 242). This rejection is also owed to the post-Soviet context; thus, the radical and sudden historical system change after the totalitarian experience, which made any return or reference to it in terms of identity or orientation impossible (thick culture accordingly). This explanatory advantage and better analytical fit are also claimed in conclusion by Mishler and Pollack (2003: 252).

similation, unanimity or harmony nor replica. However, in the context of socialization the way how pluralism, diversity and cleavages are organized and treated within a political system and how political socialization patterns show their impact are decisive for stability (Easton 1968: 144). As Eckstein argues, cultural change is not precluded and instead, can occur both as situational change and cultural discontinuity (1988: 793-797). Political culture in this sense is profoundly shaped by the socializing outcome and alteration of processes of the political game and involved "socialization agents"[32] (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 241; see also Eckstein 1988: 791).[33] In that respect de Tocqueville – in the democratic context – emphasized the role of associations as 'schools of democracy' embedding civil virtues and participatory attitudes. However, his positive assessment of civil society has to face the critique of "self-selection effects" which results in an elitist or an overall diminished circle of actively engaged citizens (Merkel 2010: 125; see also Ackermann/Freitag 2016: 279; De Tocqueville 1985 [1835]). Authoritarian regimes, therefore, try to fully control mechanisms of political socialization through centralization and penetration, while those regimes get seriously challenged in terms of stability when a commonly shared system of values is not consolidated and internalized (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 239).

Hence, first and foremost, in order to avoid long-term destabilizing alienation of the citizenry, the coupling between state and society necessitates the effective mediation of political and social interests on the intermediary level. Referring to "role culture", Almond and Verba emphasize that elites themselves may represent a specific subculture as well as a mental map due to political socialization mechanisms which in turn exerts influence on the state and evolution of the political system due to their power (1963: 29-30; Ajagbe 2016: 90). Furthermore, differences of policy orientation "combine with differences in structural orientation and may result in cultural fragmentation at the elite level" (Almond/Verba 1963: 30).

This underlines the importance of the institutionalized as well as informal structures of decision-making and political influence: a sphere where societal change is mirrored, and the political game and its dynamics substantiate according to its very specific rules and on a distinct playing field (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 199-200; Stykow 2007). Intermediary institutions and organizations are also highlighted by Lipset as "source of countervailing power inhibiting the state or any single major source of private power from dominating all political resources" and thereby decrease the potential of instability and revolutionary powers (1959: 84). This brings up the question, whether and how this nexus and linking momentum works in different political system settings.

[32] Original citation: "Sozialisationsagenten" (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 241).

[33] Already in 1969, Hahn published his comprehensive analysis of the Soviet youth program "Komsomol" – also known as the "Youth Communist League" – as an important agent of political socialization (1969).

The more recent attempt to address the structure-culture impact on societal configurations is represented by the approach on social capital: with reference to a democratic political system, Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti substantiated this concept as the value-oriented manifestation of social relations which ascribes an important role to intermediary formal and informal structures and actors functioning as shoring up and thereby, stabilizing societal 'glue' (1993: 167-171; see also Ackermann/Freitag 2016: 272; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 140-141)[34]. Trust and reliability based on successful "repeated interactions" were already detected by de Tocqueville as significant gains from (organized) networks for the inherent cohesiveness of a political community, even though especially the real trust-enhancing and socializing impact in the political sense of those networks which are decoupled from the political sphere has been questioned (Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 141-142). Thereby, social capital encompasses structural – social networks and organizations – as well as cultural aspects – social trust both in particularistic and generalized terms as well as norms of commitment and reciprocity (Ackermann/Freitag 2016: 272-274); in this way it again draws attention to the intermediary sphere of a political system.

In order to avoid the well-known concern of Kaase that political culture research is like the "attempt to nail a jelly on the wall"[35] (1983) and to ensure cultural adaptation, the major theoretical ideas that have been discussed before need to be further specified and substantiated within the given post-communist context of the selected case studies. Furthermore, this study tries to underpin the theoretical derivations with the clear exertion of methodology. While the application of the concept of political culture, in particular in its further developed differentiations, has mainly been referred to democratic regimes, political grey zone regimes do not indicate equivalent irreconcilable methodological challenges like effects of social desirability that can be assumed for authoritarian regimes (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 120). Still, the following considerations underline the awareness of regional and cultural particularities.

2.3. Civic culture in post-Soviet countries: add-ons and specification by transformation theory

> Regimes depend on the conditions under which these regimes were born and on the conditions they encountered and produced as time passed. (Almond/Verba 1963: 136)

Theoretically and methodologically, the comparative study of political processes and dynamics of grey zone regime and, more specifically, the selected cases, Georgia and Armenia, needs to be reflected in the potentially divergent cultural and historical context in order to avoid

[34] Earlier approaches on social capital go back to Coleman (1990) and Bourdieu (1983), while the clear asset of Putnam's perspective relates to the introduction of more tangible definitions and clarifications (Ackermann/Freitag 2016: 272).

[35] Original citation: "Versuch, einen Pudding an die Wand zu nageln" (Kaase 1983).

"conceptual stretching" (Merkel/Puhle/Croissant/Thiery 2006: 9). The very distinct setting in the post-Soviet space has to be taken into account as it created a particular backdrop at the onset of independence, triggered by the abrupt and profound change in regime, the arising uncertainty of the blackbox "future" and the universally shared conviction about the communist totalitarian past: "Never again!" (O'Donnell 1996: 46; see also Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 39, 45).[36]

Due to the extensive durability of the Soviet system, Wasner emphasizes that the existence of pre-communist political cultures and structures can be considered negligible with respect to any revitalization potential after the collapse of the Soviet Union (2004: 205). Even though the post-Soviet space is by no means "monolithic" (Kabachnik/Kirvalidze/Gugushvili 2016: 9), the term best outlines the commonalities and continuities in the region that are based on many years of common communist history, legacies relating thereto in all spheres of life and are accompanied by distinct political, social as well as economic trajectories (Howard 2003: 5-6). Or, as Alexievich put it in the perspective of post-Soviet countries: "We share a communist collective memory. We're neighbors in memory" (2016: 5). Even though, in many ways, ideologically the communist system was more rejected as a normative framework of thought than widely truly believed, inherited patterns of attitudes and values survived: societal divides on the one hand, but also collaborative societal fragments and merger like church, civil society etc. had been successfully eliminated in their formal existence, while the call for state interventionism and regulation in social terms remained high and unquestioned (Howard 2003: 21-24; Meyer 2003: 176; Wasner 2004: 205).[37]

The birth pains of independence were felt equally in all affected countries as the collapse of the Communist bloc entailed the formal establishment of self-dependent entities and the installment of institutions from scratch without any profound traditions of nation state and neither discourse on nor availability of a distinct national identity (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 336; 341; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 66-67).[38] A harsh and challenging socio-economic situation with rising inequality and poverty as well as inefficiency of political institutions has shaken the 1990s (Pollack/Jacobs/Müller/Pickel 2003: xiv). In addition, the totalitarian communist past left behind more or less classless but equally disarmed societies – in terms of banned and finally eliminated institutions of civil society (Pye 2003: 13; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 39-40). While the acquisition of loyalty and silent acceptance by the one-party power until then had been based on

[36] Glasnost and perestroika – both reform and opening strategies applied for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing the Soviet system – enabled its final momentous collapse and rather made the return to the totalitarian past a matter of impossibility (Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 57).

[37] Relating thereto, Howard underlines the "charismatic" monopoly of the one-party rule of the Communist party as exclusive, pervasive and transcendent authority (2003: 21-23).

[38] As Reisner observes: "nationality replaced citizenship" which brought nationalism to surface (2018: 14).

welfare, social concessions and the simple but reassuring predictability of the repressive political regime, uncertainty and a moral void due to "profoundly damaged norms for collective behavior" came along with the sudden autonomy (Pye 2003: 11; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 40-43). During the communist rule, participation was assertively enforced and compulsory while the newly gained liberties and freedoms through independence suddenly allowed for the independent choice of non-participation (Howard 2003: 26-27).

While *informal* institutional settings are by far more reform-resistant, functional disorders due to threefold challenges in institutional transformation and creation were inevitable (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 341). The "transition" of post-communist regimes into the unknown was further influenced by the lack of specific demand from society of a concrete type of political system as well as the blank space of trusted, experienced and established political elites; instead, frequently beginners applied a trial and error strategy (Howard 2003: 29-30; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 6, 21).[39] As a result, these informal practices inevitably became an element of the socialization processes, reforms and institutional reset did not result in immediate change.

Informality in this context appears as a double-edged sword: according to Putnam (1993), social capital or trust and cooperative attitudes arise from the engagement in non-institutionalized hence informal social groups but then again, informality in the post-Soviet context took also another, disastrous shape of distrustful social dynamic. Corruption inherited from the former command economy had penetrated the political system to its foundations, inhibiting the establishment of the rule of law (Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 66-67). Political clientelism, the "dark side of social capital" had a power-securing effect in this context, which latently stabilized an authoritarian political environment while it coincidently triggered political apathy (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 293-294).[40] In this regard, Howard further emphasizes the lack of socio-economic welfare as an important "pre-requisite" for a potent civil society which clearly lacked in the post-Soviet environment (2003: 17-18; 159).[41]

In the context of transformation theory, consolidation and the successful overcoming of shortcomings on the rocky road of transformation necessitates both the establishment and continuance of a sound and active civil society as well as the solidification of a democratic system-

[39] Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer claim that the very notion of "transition" in itself misleads "as it implies that we know a society's starting-point, we know where it is today and we know where it is heading" (1988: 7); they give priority to "transformation" which is similarly applied and prioritized in the present study.

[40] It strengthens a relationship of rulers and the ruled which is primarily shaped by reciprocal dependence (driven by warranted material benefits in favor of political loyalty) (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 293).

[41] Howard (2003) extensively outlined the particularities of non-participation in post-communist Europe in his study which will be taken into account for the case-based analysis.

supportive political culture (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 355; Merkel 2010: 121-126; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 8). A major obstacle for the development of the former, identified by Beichelt and Eicher with reference to the Russian Federation, is the lack of general interpersonal trust and high mistrust towards organized civil society as well as the absence of higher degree of societal self-organization apart from strong informal networks and clientelist structures in private; instead "extralegal forms of interaction"[42] dominate the social and political sphere and sustain uncertainty of actions (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 360-361; see also Howard 2003: 5, 25).

The fundamental advantage of the newly independent regimes has been the ultimately warranted legitimacy bonus due to decreased suppression. Social capital might, thereby, be drawn from the "experience of the power of the powerless" (Meyer 2003: 175; Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 44). Furthermore, Pollack, Jacobs, Müller and Pickel contrast in their volume two different ways of relating political culture and democratization prospects to the post-Soviet space: the *hypothesis of socialization* emphasizes the necessity of a generational change in order to substitute communist values which inhibit any competitive political system. The *hypothesis of situation of life*, in contrast, rejects the idea of focusing on long-term culture change but underlines cultural continuity and the day-to-day experience of transformation: as the individual evaluates the regime in accordance to his or her situation, dynamics of democratization are more linked to short term changes in orientation (2003: xv-xvi).

Still, the overall postulated Soviet heritage of passivity and depoliticization runs explicitly against the notions of vertical and horizontal trust as crucial elements of legitimizing and stabilizing any political system in a long-term perspective (Kaina 2004: 532-533), which implies that the maintenance of legitimacy for its part needs other resources in the post-Soviet environment. One suggestion made by Jacobs, Müller and Pickel is the role of charismatic leadership and populism which counterbalances the lack of popular support towards the established system and triggers deconsolidating tendencies (2003: 108). Another important idea on the post-transition environment which nourishes instability in a more authoritarian ruled system and stresses the positive side of privatism: it strengthens the "courage to use small rooms of maneuvering or even to show civic courage and resistance" (Meyer 2003: 174-175). These observations will also be reflected in the analysis of the respective case studies.

After having revealed many contradictions in the post-Soviet environment, it becomes clear that for the purpose of this study those particularities have to be taken into account and the theoretical framework of political culture theory has to be scrutinized attentively.

[42] Original citation: "extralegale Interaktionsformen" (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 361).

2.3.1. 'Democracy-bias' of political culture theory

Most of the further developments of political culture theory as well as the starting point of transformation theory focus on the ultimate goal of a textbook concept of democracy and draw their major arguments from developments of either established democratic systems or those which are on their way towards democracy (Bank 2010: 21; Merkel 2010: 124; O'Donnell 1996; Timm 2010: 96).[43] Basic thoughts of structural-functionalism, political culture and stability have mostly been circulating around a democratic setting, even though the attached fundamental ideas – like on legitimacy, effectivity or socialization – are nonetheless traceable and applicable in other regime types as well (Pickel 2006: 179-181). The adoption of democratic values, beliefs and attitudes is an essential condition for successful democratization, however, can it be assumed that democracy and its preferability means the same for everyone? How about societies which favor alternative regime types as well?

In his study on the weaknesses of civil society in post-communist Europe, Howard stresses this need of scientific prudence in the non-Western context, as, although he acknowledges their value for analysis, the particular historical and societal realities have seriously affected the established Western concepts (2003: 48-49). So far, the major difficulty for research on political culture in non-democratic context in this regard has been the reliance on survey methods and the challenge of lacking alternatives; only for the political grey zone the adaptability of these methods is considered as more or less feasible (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 220). This study tries to avoid the conceptual split by applying a qualitative, in-depth analysis of the two selected cases (see also Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 43-45). Correspondingly, one last theoretical step needs to be taken: based on the thoughts of socialization and more distanced from political system-specific lenses, the theory of value change as a special concept of political culture theory provides additional notions on stability and culture that are considered as, indeed, 'valuable' for the analysis in the post-Soviet context.

2.3.2. Theory of value change and persistence

The very unique attribute of values is their internalization by any human which likewise determines the individual's actions. In a broader sense, culture, *per se*, is shaped by "collectively prevailing value profiles"[44] (Welzel 2009b: 109-110). When overall living conditions change – as, for instance, they significantly do in times of transformation or crisis – values are equally exposed to potential alignment (Welzel 2009b: 110-111; Welzel/Inglehart 2009: 134). In those

[43] With reference to the similar tendency in comparative political science to overridingly focus on democracies, Albrecht and Frankenberger criticize this "democracy-bias" (2011: 17; 2010: 37; see also Timm 2010: 97).

[44] Original citation: "kollektiv vorherrschende Werteprofile" (Welzel 2009b: 109-110).

times of macro-social conversion, generational shifts and discrepancy become plausible due to divergent socialization contexts and the "contradiction between pressure on conversion and persistence tendency"[45] (Welzel 2009b: 110). However, the theory of value change argues, as long as material challenges and questions on the overall livelihood dominate the everyday individual perspective, materialistic orientations predominate and the individual sense of autonomy is obstructed (Welzel 2009b: 111-112, 125; Welzel/Inglehart 2009: 131-134). Furthermore, individualization and the lived experience of liberties and freedoms trigger value change and nurture "emancipative"[46] (post-materialist) values which constitutes an important consideration in the post-Soviet environment regarding the independence generation and the prevailing socio-economic limitations (Welzel 2009b: 125-127; Welzel/Inglehart 2009: 140-141). By conceiving the cultural factor as prepending to structure, the non-reactivity of institutional arrangements to value change might work as explanatory factor for instability (Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 134-136). The second important assumption derives from the emphasis of value persistence and slow internalization of changes which make generational change momentous – the "silent revolution" as Ronald Inglehart framed it (1977; see also Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 220; Pickel/Pickel 2006b: 135-136).

2.3.3. Relevance of the intermediary structure between state and citizen: civil society and political elites

The intermediary structural setting in its imparting position within a political system enables key insights in regard to the dynamics of political processes, the provision of choice, the articulation of interests independent from the state and political parties' formation and recruitment (referring to a democratic environment: Rose/Mishler/Haerpfer 1998: 34). As a distinct sphere with its own functional logic, it both reflects the connection between citizens and the state, and displays manifestations of cultural as well as structural aspects (Rucht 2007: 20). While there is no conclusive consensus about the constituent parts, Rucht convincingly identifies the political-administrative system, interest groups, social movements and mass media as the most relevant, which are equally considered as reference point in this study. In addition, in this study representatives of the respective national research community are included as crucial controlling and value adding element (2007: 20).

On the other hand, there is agreement in literature that political elites – including their inner constitution and fragmentation – have an impact on the outcome of political change, while they themselves are constrained by the political corridor of action and established "rules of the

[45] Original citation: "Widerspruch zwischen Wandlungsdruck und Beharrungstendenz" (Welzel 2009b: 110).

[46] Emancipative values are considered the "cultural component in the human empowerment process" (Welzel/Inglehart 2009: 140).

game" (Ajagbe 2016: 90-91; Geißel/Freise 2016: 527-528; Merkel 2010: 84-88, 90). In the framework of this study, political elites are attributed to the political-administrative system, comprising members of political parties in governmental as well as oppositional positions (Rucht 2007: 22).[47] Schmitter, by examining the role of political elites in democratization processes, also highlights the "abnormality" of their status in times of transformation due to uncertainty and risk in both power resources and future durability of positions (n.d.: 11-12).

Beside political elites, civil society actors represent an integral part of the intermediary sphere in any political system as "transmission belt"[48] between the individual citizen and the state, especially during transformation processes (Freise/Geißel 2016: 528). As both conceptions – civil society and political elites – are contested due to their fuzzily defined boundaries, in the first instance, it is necessary to clearly outline the applied characteristics and theoretical classifications. Here, civil society is by no means meant to represent a homogenous group of actors, but rather a

> pre-state [.] or non-state [.] sphere of action and consists of a large number of pluralistic (including competing), voluntarily founded organizations and associations (in individual cases individual 'citizens') articulating their specific material and normative interests and organizing themselves autonomously. It is located in the intermediate area of privacy and the state. Its articulated objectives always relate to the *res publica*. Civil society actors are thus involved in politics, but without seeking public office. Accordingly, groups that pursue only private goals (families, businesses, etc.) are no more part of civil society than political parties, parliaments, or state administrations.[49] (Lauth/Merkel 1997: 16; italics in the original)

However, the unifying element remains as the normative minimum consensus: "the recognition of the other (tolerance), the principle of fairness and the exclusion of physical violence"[50] (Klein 2001: 91). This definition includes two different strands of contemplation: the more action-oriented approach which emphasizes the uniting affiliation towards a common good (civil consensus) and the interest-oriented conception which focuses more on the intermediary and public matters-oriented position within the political system (Geißel/Freise 2016: 528; Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 286).

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47 For more details, please see chapter 3.2.1.1.

48 Original citation: "Transmissionsriemen" (Freise/Geißel 2016: 528).

49 Original citation: "vorstaatliche[.] oder nicht-staatliche[.] Handlungssphäre und besteht aus einer Vielzahl pluraler (auch konkurrierender), auf freiwilliger Basis gegründeter Organisationen und Assoziationen (im Einzelfall auch einzelne 'Bürger'), die ihre spezifischen materiellen und normativen Interessen artikulieren und autonom organisieren. Sie ist im Zwischenbereich von Privatsphäre und Staat angesiedelt. In ihr artikulierte Zielsetzungen betreffen immer auch die *res publica.* Akteure der Zivilgesellschaft sind damit in die Politik involviert, ohne jedoch nach staatlichen Ämtern zu streben. Entsprechend sind Gruppen, die ausschließlich private Ziele verfolgen (Familien, Unternehmen etc.) ebensowenig Teil der Zivilgesellschaft wie politische Parteien, Parlamente oder staatliche Verwaltungen." (Lauth/Merkel 1997: 16; Hervorhebung im Original).

50 Original citation: "die Anerkennung des Anderen (Toleranz), das Prinzip der Fairness sowie den Ausschluss physischer Gewalt" (Klein 2001: 91).

Accordingly, to disentangle the "chameleon-like qualities" of civil society (Edwards 2009: 3), it is necessary to have a look at its functional variety. In the tradition of leading theoreticians such as John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, Harry Truman, Seymour Martin Lipset, Alexis de Tocqueville and Jürgen Habermas, the democracy-inherent basic functions of civil society are commonly acknowledged as the following[51]: the protection against state arbitrariness and unjustified invasion of privacy, the balanced mediation of interests between the political and non-political sphere, the creation and promotion of public interest by providing a platform for critical discourse, socialization in a democratic-participatory manner – which enables the accumulation of social capital (keyword à la de Tocqueville: 'schools of democracy' (1985 [1835]) and works as important recruiting channel for political elite – and last but not least, service provision for disburdening the state (see also Geißel/Freise 2016: 529-530; Klein 2001: 86-96, 161-185; Merkel 2004: 36, 45-47,125; 2010: 121-126). With reference to the latter function, it is argued in literature that civil society in authoritarian environments in particular, tends to assume more regulated, publicly controllable and regime uncritical functions of service delivery (Geißel/Freise 2016: 528-529). However, since most of those functions are based on the understanding of a liberal democracy or a liberal political culture, they are only used as a reference framework in the present research project in order to draw conclusions about a potentially divergent understanding of roles of civil society in grey zone regimes.[52]

Furthermore, in this broader sense, social movements are equally thought of as part of the civil society sphere and expression of civic action, even though they mostly lack formal institutionalization (Geißel/Freise 2016: 528, 534; Kriesi 2007: 145).[53] However, particularly in less or nondemocratic societies which display limited room to maneuver for civil society activities and necessitate the recourse to alternative forms of articulation of interests, the consideration of informal ways of engagement becomes more relevant (Geißel/Freise 2016: 533, 534). Depending on the overall approved and established framework of action – the political opportunity structure – social movements may take up the function of an early warning mechanism of public discontent and grievances (Deutsch 2016: 576, 578; Geißel/Freise 2016: 534). Their operational capability provides insights into the closeness of state structures, the attitudes of citizens towards the established institutional framework and can have an effect on the overall stability of a political system (Deutsch 2016: 581).

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51 Merkel (2010) provides a helpful overview of the different theoretical roots.

52 Reisner points to the rootedness of the civil society concept in the European enlightment, which implied Western connotations like the premise of the rule of law which are not necessarily applicable in countries like Georgia (2018: 2).

53 While both approaches consider political protest as their main empirical phenomenon in need of explanation, this study focuses on the research of social movements apart from the survey-based research tradition on political participation (Deutsch 2016: 578-580).

As important actors in the field of political socialization and political communication in particular, (mass) media is considered another relevant element of the intermediary sphere in this study. Its basic functions as platform and mediator correlate with the defined functions of civil society while the latter, mediation-role, often faces serious restrictions in more authoritarian settings (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 257-258, 260). Apart from the major field of actors that will at the core of the analysis, it is necessary to consider initial assumptions on regime persistence and instability in the political grey zone.

2.4. Last stop, political grey zone – assumptions on (in)stability

Despite the tendencies in literature during several decades to assume democracy as the ultimate destination of transformation, and against the idea that "anyone can do it" (Carothers 2002: 8), recent in-depth research has set an eye on the more common hybrid or authoritarian stadiums of political systems on the system-continuum (Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010; Levitsky/Way 2010; Pickel 2010). By rejecting the determinacy of the transition paradigm, Carothers first elaborated on what he called "political syndromes" of grey zone regimes that can be found in precisely those political systems which seem to be stuck in the established dichotomy of regime categories (2002: 10, 14-20). Thereby, he clearly distances himself from notions of "democracy-with-adjectives"[54] that are applied for the purpose of classifying those regimes in-between or the idea of an intermediate zone as temporary waypoint (Carothers 2002: 10, 14-15). Instead, he detects two main characteristics – dominant power politics and feckless pluralism – that are commonly shared by this alternative and distinctive type of regime. Building on his ideas, the following section elaborates more on those distinct characteristics and to derive basic assumptions with a view to regime persistence or instability.

2.4.1. Established determinants: dominant power politics and feckless pluralism

Supported by the overall atmosphere of rapid change during the early 1990s, the large number of countries which experienced liberalization processes made it reasonable to imagine a limited timeframe of their transition towards a democratic future with several consecutive – though backward and forward – steps along a given pathway (Carothers 2002: 6-7). What actually happened, however, is reflected in the formal but cursory development of democratic political institutions that remain decisively defective in terms of representation, low levels of participation and popular trust in institutions as well as exploitation of democratic freedoms for personal benefits by ruling powers. While diversity prevails among those regimes in terms of varying democratic defects and functionality, two mutually exclusive features are widespread (Carothers 2002: 10-12):

[54] See Collier/Levitsky (1997).

The predominance of one political group – dominant power politics – beside the allegedly guaranteed political participation, the open space for voicing criticism and an accepted opposition makes it challenging to expect real shifts in power; the ruling political forces have basically become the state or like the latter's autonomous steering wheel (Berglund 2014: 446; Carothers 2002: 11-12). As long as elections sufficiently weather international scrutiny, the veiled meddling by the dominant power for the purpose of ensuring its own beneficial and rather unchallenged playing field remains unfettered (Carothers 2002: 12). Hence, citizens disconnect with the political sphere and apart from elections, they restrain from actively participating. Conversely, the civil society sector tends to assume oppositional roles voicing the public disenchantment with the political state of affairs (Carothers 2002: 12).

On the other hand, warranty of political freedoms, apparent democratic political procedures as well as repeated changes in power do not outweigh the powerlessness of putative pluralism – it is feckless, as the electorate refuses to engage in politics apart from elections and dissociates from the sphere of political elites (Berglund 2014: 446; Carothers 2002: 10; Timm 2010: 114). This broad public rejection is based on the mistrustful perception of citizens towards mismanagement and defectiveness of the political system which provokes discontentment. "The whole class of political elites, though plural and competitive, are profoundly cut off from the citizenry, rendering political life an ultimately hollow, unproductive exercise" (Carothers 2002: 11). The gap between disillusioned citizenry and the overall weak state is frequently further exacerbated by the poor economic performance and burdensome socio-economic shortcomings. Power among different groups of political elites is abused for either mutually obstructing the activities of the opposing other or – in case of aligning with one another – for expanding and consolidating exclusive power even further. Therefore, charisma and patronage are pivotal for successfully operating in the political competition among exclusive parties and alliances (Carothers 2002: 11; Gherasimov 2019: 9).

While both outlined features of grey zone regimes inhibit great leaps of development and, therefore, imply a certain degree of stability, the particular causes for the "dysfunctional equilibrium" vary (Carothers 2002: 13): dominant power politics are more severely limited in pluralism and change as regards the political field whereas feckless pluralism entails continuous ups and downs in the struggle between political powers (Carothers 2002: 13-14). However, the disconnect from citizens is a key and uniting characteristic in all cases: "The wide gulf between political elites and citizens in many of these countries turns out to be rooted in structural conditions" (Carothers 2002: 15). The presented arguments made by Carothers on the commonly shared characteristics and divergences of political grey zone regimes are considered in the later in-depth analysis of the selected cases, Georgia and Armenia as they enable a first pre-structuring and review along the established categories.

2.4.2. Further assumptions on common characteristics

On the basis of the outlined theoretical arguments, the specification regarding the post-communist historical context as well as the introduction of first findings on the political grey zone, several preliminary assumptions can be made with a view to the following analysis on Georgia and Armenia. This implies the possibility to embed additional contextual factors that are expected to influence the research focus like the historical legacy of the Soviet past, informality or the impact of external actors in the region. Furthermore, first reflections on expected interdependencies based on the theoretical considerations help to keep the red line of investigation.

2.4.2.1. Long-term effects of Soviet legacy

First and foremost, the inherited legacies and traits of the Soviet political past and the predecessor regime under communist rule are estimated to have an impact on the examined political regimes. The sudden breakdown of the rigidly authoritarian regime that had lasted over seven decades exposed a devastating effect on the political, social and economic institutions. Overnight, this collapse left behind several independent countries, abruptly confronted with the construction of an entirely new state from scratch while coincidently struggling for survival: a process of "rebuilding the ship at sea" (Elster/Offe/Preuss 1998; see also Aprasidze/Siroky 2010: 124; Freie/Simao 2007: 2-3; Gegeshidze 2012: 25-26). These threefold challenges of simultaneous political, economic and social institutional transformation turned out to be more burdensome and complicated than initially perceived (Aprasidze/Siroky 2010: 124; Carothers 2002: 16). As Pickel and Stark argue, congruence between culture and structure in those countries is estimated as very fragile due to first liberalization processes coupled with lack of effectivity and loyalty of citizens, low trust in society which has been limited to executive powers like army, police and courts (2010: 215-217). Accordingly, along the political socialization argument, these long-term effects are also expected to be reflected in the analysis on stability in terms of decoupling effects that lead to apathy or alienation rather than allegiance within the general public, low trust towards the political as well as the intermediary structures in general.

2.4.2.2. Socio-economic development

The factor of economic prosperity and weakness is widely acknowledged in political science as important variable for change and continuity in any political system. The "shock therapy" in post-Soviet countries of moving from command to market economy, was followed by severe social polarization in terms of distribution of wealth and – based on the lack of institutionalized checks and balances – corruption pervaded the newly established systems (Freire/Simao 2007: 3, 6). This implied not only the massive exodus of people, in particular in the Armenian case, but also the disastrous increase in poverty (Zolyan 2012: 48). As Almond and Verba note, "poverty appears to leave no room for politics […] [it] can trap societies in its grip" (1963: 178,

270), it is expected that the factor of socio-economic limitations is reflected in continuities of political culture leaving the population less room to adapt to changing structural dynamics. Furthermore, this aspect is also based on the theoretical derivations on the effectivity of the system (see chapter 2.2.1.1). Therefore, economic and social hardship needs to be considered as an important contextual factor for stability as well.

2.4.2.3. Reinforcing effect of external factors

As many outside actors – in particular the EU, Russia, the US, Iran and Turkey – are actively engaged in the South Caucasus and are affecting both intrastate developments as well as the foreign policy options and strategies of the respective countries, these external factors are also expected to influence political culture and stability. In particular, the availability of two opposing and competitive integration models, the European Union with its Eastern Neighborhood Policy (ENP) since 2003 and the Eurasian Economic Union since 2014, offers alternative concepts of norms and values as well as diverging requirements of structural adjustments in terms of membership or association. Armenia and Georgia have opted for different ways of engagement, the former trying to balance between Eastern and Western vectors and the latter to deliberately apply all efforts for the Western integration, including its endeavor to someday join the NATO alliance (De Waal 2011: 31-34; Freire/Simao 2007: 2-3, 10, 12; Nodia 2018a: 15; Pickel 2006: 196).

Even though any detailed analysis of foreign policy developments is not the ambition of this study, it is expected that the overall geopolitical situation in the region as well as the interaction of the selected cases with international actors impact the political systems themselves. As both countries are economically weak and dependent on foreign financial support, reputation matters and voluntary alignment to donors' requirements can be assumed as corollary. However, while Armenia has more reservations and, thereby, scope in its foreign-policy orientation by balancing Western and Eastern policies, momentous leverage of external actors on change is expectedly more limited in Armenia than in Georgia, where a unidirectional approach is purposefully followed that demands continuous efforts in convergence to Western standards. This entails potential structural components, such as the establishment of democratic institutions due to direct democracy promotion or applied conditionality as well as conceivable cultural change through normative diffusion by the "transformative power of Europe", or the strengthening of the opposition by changes in resource distribution (Börzel/Lebanidze 2017; see also Freire/Simao 2007: 14; Levitsky/Way 2010: 39, 44-50; Sasse 2014: 554-555). The structural as well as cultural implications of the higher or lower level of external embeddedness on countries are indisputable and have been discussed in-depth by Levitsky and Way (2010) in terms of leverage and linkage (see also Tolstrup 2013). Thereby, it is argued that leverage and linkage by

foreign actors reinforces the state of (in)stability as it strengthens existing networks and cleavages but also authoritarian as well as democratizing pathways.

2.4.2.4. (Im)balance, change and continuity of the intermediary structure

Since post-Soviet societies like Georgia and Armenia still display a tendency for desiring forms of strong leadership, the role of political elites and their assessment on the retention of power and accompanied risks remains crucial for regime change and persistence (Pickel 2006: 193, 196). As the intermediary sphere is not limited to those political elites, variations within the civil society sector might likewise experience similar dynamics. Thus, alterations within and disequilibrium between intermediary actors are considered to destabilize the political system while consistency and immutable role concepts act solidifying. Taking this one step further, it is conceivable that modes of interrelations between intermediary actors might differ both in shape and intensity. While cooperation as the most advanced and substantial form of interaction enables a dynamic equilibrium between civil society and political elites within the intermediary sphere including feedback mechanisms and counterbalancing moves, the mere one-sided and controlled consultation of civil society actors by political elite solidifies the powerful position of the latter and makes any development or progress elite-driven. Balanced as well as elite-controlled and elite-driven linkages are expected to act stabilizing, while imbalance or stronger civil society challenge regime persistence. Another aspect is the exchange of personnel between the political elites and civil society, thus, blurred boundaries of roles and functions. Fluctuations in the effectivity and strength of civil society as well as variance in the cohesion of political elites are expected to have destabilizing effects on regime persistence, as it alters the linkage between society and the political sphere. Therefore, for any assessment of stability, the constitution, variance and evolution of the intermediary structure in terms of strength and balance needs to be taken into account.

3. Research design: methodological framework and case selection

The primary aim of this study is the gain in understanding and knowledge production on stability of regimes in the political grey zone. More concretely the analysis addresses the following research questions: how is it possible that the political grey zone regimes Georgia and Armenia differ visibly in their "balance sheet" of democratization and stability, even though both countries were confronted with similar starting conditions at the outset of independence? How does the intermediary structure of political elites and civil society constitute itself in a historical perspective and what connections can be identified with regard to regime persistence and instability in both respective cases?

Therefore, the close examination and comparison of the selected case studies allows for gathering holistic, complex and yet in-depth explanatory considerations, the retracing of processes and decisive points of inflection (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 54; Muno 2009: 121). What makes the chosen countries appropriate and representative cases allowing for subsequent conclusions on particularities of the political grey zone and ensuring "comparative merit" (Pickel 2016: 32)? Certainly, generalization is confined due to the limited number of cases and the intraregional comparison with the same underlying contextual conditions, in particular the Soviet experience (Mehler 2016: 97-98). However, the sensitivity and openness towards particularities in the considered region as well as the systematic and transparent procedure of empirical analysis and evaluation of results try to address this challenge and enable contingent conclusions and the inductive identification of mechanisms and hypothesis (Muno 2016: 83; Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2019: 116-117).

Keeping the restriction of this "disciplined-configurational" (Muno 2009: 119)[55] case-study design in mind, Georgia and Armenia, as most similar cases due to equivalent starting conditions at the onset of independence in particular as well as analogical context factors ever since (Pickel 2016: 37), will be introduced and further substantiated in the following chapters and connected with the overall methodological framework used for their analysis.

3.1. Most similar cases: Georgia and Armenia

The South Caucasus offers an exciting field of research in many respects: As a bottleneck between Europe and Asia, the region is characterized by highly fragmented societies due to changing power relations in its history. Azerbaijan, as a rigidly authoritarian state since its inde-

[55] Original citation: "diszipliniert-konfigurative" (Muno 2009: 119).

pendence, differs significantly from the more Europe-facing, grey zone regimes of Georgia and Armenia (Carothers 2002). Equipped with rich resources, the Azerbaijani leadership in Baku has never been forced to change its regime or to face instability and has never had a similar dependency on other states as its neighboring countries, Georgia and Armenia. From a historical, geographical, geopolitical and developmental point of view, the two latter point to many structural and systemic similarities, nonetheless, they have varied considerably in their transformation pathways since 1990. Another important common factor has to be considered when comparing the two countries: the inheritance of unresolved frozen conflicts – Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh – as it implies a mortgage for "reform-minded decision-makers" (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 478)[56] who aspire to achieve consensus on the goals, objectives and strategies of system transformation in a segmented pluralistic society. Closely linked, both states are limited in their political decisions due to external actors exercising leverage in the region: first and foremost, they have undisputedly been the central sphere of influence of the Russian Federation in its self-proclaimed *Near Abroad* (Adomeit 2013: 129), while the European Union stretched out its wings of normative soft power in its Eastern Neighborhood since 2003, taking up speed in 2009 with the Eastern Partnership.[57]

Today, Georgia is classified by Freedom House as a "transitional government / hybrid regime" or as "defective democracy" in the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), while its neighbor, Armenia, has remained graded as a "semi-consolidated authoritarian regime" or "moderate autocracy" for many years (BTI 2018; Freedom House 2018a/2018b). Taking a closer look on their stability, Levitsky and Way assign the two post-transitional countries the label of unstable (Georgia) and stable authoritarianism (Armenia) (2010).

3.1.1. Georgia

In both countries, a sophisticated protest culture had established itself already during the time of the Soviet regime. However, until very recently – 2018 – only in Georgia have public protests had the power to initiate a change of its ruling government and elites and effectively assert themselves against the existing regime (Stefes 2010; Stykow 2011: 65).

The short but violent transition towards independence was followed by a short period of apparent stability dominated by a narrow circle of political elites under President Eduard Shevardnadze (Gegeshidze 2012: 30). In parallel with the reviving spirit of active pluralism within civil society, the painful decrease of economic growth, clientelist networks, increasing corrup-

[56] Original citation: "reformbereite Entscheidungsträger" (Beichelt/Eicher 2006: 478).

[57] The idea of "normative power Europe" in ideational instead of civilian or military terms has been discussed prominently by Manners (2002). The Eastern Partnership initiative was launched on May 7, 2009 in Prague and entailed more ambitious institution building, multilateral cooperation platforms and tailored bilateral policies (Council of the European Union 2009).

tion and the adoption of authoritarian methods by the ruling elites was followed by growing discontent within the Georgian population against a regime that "gradually lost [its] democratic face" (Gegeshidze 2012: 31-32).

Massive public rallies and protests in the run-up to the parliamentary elections 2003 finally removed President Eduard Shevardnadze from office and enabled a power shift towards previously inhibited young reformers and pro-European forces among political elites (Jobelius 2012: 77-79). The Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 as part of the onset of several *Color Revolutions* in Eastern Europe at the dawn of the new millennium led to sudden regime dynamics. With euphoria, the upheavals in Georgia were quickly declared as the beginning of a "second wave of democratization"[58] in the post-communist region; grounded on the legitimation by public will (Timm 2010: 99; see also Bazantová 2011; Ó Beacháin/Polese 2010).[59] However, the exchange of political elites in the wake of the massive mobilization within society did not inevitably entail the democratization of the country; this initial hopeful expectation turned out to be a misleading "predetermined breaking point" of the regime (Stykow 2011: 69).[60] Yet, once again, the crucial difference between *regime change* and *power change* became obvious: as Timm notes, Georgia under its subsequent president, Mikhail Saakashvili, was a "prime example of the renewal of a presidial neopatrimonial system" (2010: 114).[61] The leadership of the long time dominant ruling party of United National Movement (UNM) with an ever growing "authoritarian streak" of its party leader, Saakashvili, came along with a "virtually unchecked executive", limited pluralism, uncertainty of the political direction, clientelism and the centralization of power towards the president (Nasieniak/Depo 2013: 11; see also Bazantová 2011; Jobelius 2012: 80; Tatum 2009: 157). In autumn 2007, only a few years after the Rose Revolution massive political protest conquered the streets of Tbilisi yet again, revolting against painful reforms and infringements of election procedures. The disproportionate deployment of force by the security apparatus, attacks against media outlets and the declaration of state of emergency denoted a relapse of authoritarian tendencies (Aprasidze 2009: 64-66; Gegeshidze 2012: 34; Muskhelishvili/Jorjoliani 2009: 697-698).[62]

Even though "the system integrally allow[ed] opposition to weaken and defeat current incumbents", a highly fragmented, divided and unstable field of political competitors made it a

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58 Original citation: "zweite Demokratisierungswelle" (Timm 2010: 99).

59 Saakashvili was elected in 2004 with an overwhelming 96 percent of votes followed by the election of UNM by significant majority (Stefes 2010: 103).

60 Original citation: "Sollbruchstelle" (Stykow 2011:69).

61 Original citation: "Paradebeispiel der Erneuerung eines präsidial neopatrimonialen System[s]" (Timm 2010: 114).

62 As Tatum stresses about the underlying reasons: "The internal combustible combination of pressure from below – i.e. civil society and the general public – and powerful political elites was brought to a head in the November 2007 crisis" (2009: 170).

Herculean task. Only in 2012 Saakashvili's administration was successfully challenged by the rising opposition led by the businessman and billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili winning the parliamentary elections (Bazantová 2011; Nasieniak/Depo 2013: 11; Nodia 2018a: 16). The defeat was accepted by Saakashvili and his supporters without any resistance, thus, paving the way for the historically complete, peaceful transfer of power to the opposition led by Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream (GD) Party (Lebanidze 2014: 206). While the interim government under Ivanishvili turned out to be only a short intermezzo, as he left the government prematurely, critical voices continuously blamed him for pulling the strings from behind the scenes (Freedom House 2017). However, hardly surprising for the wider public, he declared his comeback as head of the GD Party in April 2018 and triggered the recent resignation of Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili (Georgiatoday 2018a; 2018b).

As Aprasidze raises the question, whether "the Rose [of the Revolution in 2003] [did] have thorns after all?", at least it becomes apparent that "transformation is a long and difficult process that does not conform to theoretical models" and might end up in fragility and instability of a regime "somewhere in the middle" (2009: 70-71; see also Bazantová 2011). The country witnessed two major transitions but no deep and entirely valid democratization, thus, reflecting its ranking within the political 'grey zone' of post-transition countries. However, it differs to its – until recently – stable neighbor, Armenia (Lebanidze 2014: 214). This might be related to the visibly strong dynamics within civil society, which – while keeping the influential and dominant role of the Orthodox Church in mind – enjoy vibrancy on the ground of beneficial legal conditions ensuring free areas of action (Freedom House 2017).

As a state once shattered by corruption, violence and clientelism, Georgia has been praised as a model student of democratization or "beacon of liberty"[63] during the past decade (BBC News 2005; see also Lebanidze 2014: 207; Levitsky/Way 2010: 22). However, the reason why this beacon is only faintly glooming and the country continues to perform modestly in democracy rankings can be found in the ongoing restrictions of a competitive fair level playing field, a hardly trustworthy judicial system and polarized media-outlets in the hands of a highly-concentrated circle of owners (Bazantová 2011; Freedom House 2015; Jobelius 2012: 88-90).[64] The recent fierce protests following the disproportionate crackdown by the police in two night clubs in Tbilisi, Bassiani and Café Gallery, on the grounds of the regime's repressive drug policy as well as the mass mobilization following a vigorously contested criminal case, further challenge the ruling political elites (Jonas 2018; Melchers 2018; Kapuste 2018).

[63] This quote originates from the famous and much cited speech of then US President Georgia W. Bush in 2005 during his state visit in Tbilisi.

[64] Bazantová outlines quite cynical: "We could say without much exaggeration that instead of being dependent on the bribes in most cases justice has now become dependent on the executive" (2011).

3.1.2. Armenia

In Armenia, the "excitement of the new national project 1988-1991 failed to deliver democratic results" and already under the country's first President, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, an authoritarian trend started to diffuse (Freire/Simao 2007: 7). Thereby, political elites in Armenia saw their power underpinned in two ways: the mobilization capacity of rising nationalism through the constant presence of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in the public discourse and widespread support from the worldwide diaspora (Freire/Simao 2007: 4).[65]

Incumbent elites in Armenia at the wake of the country's independence originated to a large extend from the former Soviet nomenclature and Russian associated politicians; clan-based political elites ruling by accumulating economic and political resources (Freire/Simao 2007: 5; Zolyan 2012: 49). "[The](…)"blatnoy" worldview provided a sort of 'quasi-ideological' legitimation to members of semi-criminal informal networks, who exploited the weakness of the post-Soviet state in Armenia and penetrated the ranks of the new elite that emerged in Armenia in the course of the 1990s" (Zolyan 2012: 51).[66]

All "three centers of power" (Armenia's first President, Levon Ter-Petrosyan; second Robert Kocharyan; third – until recently in 2018 – Serzh Sarksyan) originated from the same ideological as well as biographical background passing on power within the chosen incumbent political elite; it is therefore not surprising that one main political party – alias the Presidents' mother party – formerly the Armenian National Movement (ANM), until 2018 the Republican Party of Armenia (RP), dominated the country by winning each and every election by a clear margin – likewise followed by mass protests of the opposition (Lebanidze 2014: 206-207; Nasieniak/Depo 2013: 15; Navasardian 2012: 104; Zolyan 2012: 41, 47, 53-56). Furthermore, security services and the military always played a crucial role for the incumbents to thwart protests that, for instance, followed flawed elections in 2003 and 2004 by repression. Even though protests appeared frequently and with thousands of Armenians conquering the streets, the *Color Revolution* of its neighbor, Georgia, could not be replicated (Freire/Simao 2007: 11; Lebanidze 2014: 209; Stefes 2010: 105; Zolyan 2012: 54-56). This has changed dramatically by the events in spring 2018 when today's Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan started his march known as the "My step" campaign from Gyumri to the capital, Yerevan, where he could unit with movements of grassroots activism (Ishkanian 2018). Large-scale mass protests and Sarksyan's decision to step

[65] The first two presidents of Armenia relied on strong constituencies linked to Nagorno-Karabakh, while Robert Kocharyan had already been President of NK before following the footsteps of Levon Ter-Petrosyans as President of Armenia, after Petrosyan's attempt to make first concessions with a view to Nagorno-Karabakh peace promotion (Freire/Simao 2007: 5, 8).

[66] The term "blatnaya" refers to organised criminial subcultural networks that emerged in post-Soviet countries (Zolyan 2012: 50).

down implied that "in a matter of weeks, the twenty-year rule of the [RP] came to an abrupt and unexpected end" (Ishkanian 2018: 274).[67]

Although the high short-term activism within civil society and its potential for spontaneous mobilization have been omnipresent for nearly each and every election, as well as vehement criticism of dubious decision-making processes of the government by repressed oppositional forces, the coercive capacity, inner-party cohesion and patronage of the authorities was strong enough to undermine any oppositional success as well as to consolidate their own power (Nasieniak/Depo 2013: 9; Way 2006: 9-18, 39-43; Zolyan 2012: 53-54); of course, in this way, any form of popular legitimacy through elections became highly questionable (Zolyan 2012: 56).[68] Until today, judiciary keeps being intensely tied to the executive and all media outlets are bound to business elites which for their part are seemingly related to the political leadership (Freedom House 2018).

Two-digit growth rates between 2002 and 2007, macro-economic stability and the reduction of poverty could not boost major necessary structural reforms; in particular, as due to the tight conflation of business and politics, the economic harvest converged in the hands of only a few members of the oligarchic structure (Navasardian 2012: 100; Nranyan 2012: 202, 211; Walker 2012: 2). Thus, political apathy and social exasperation have shaped the Armenian society since its independence (Freedom House 2016; Nranyan 2012: 201-214). Freire and Simao introduce the term of a "low intensity democracy" in order to refer to the barely visible motivation of the public to participate in the political process and the widespread discrediting of political leaders. However, meanwhile "[d]eclaratory democracy" as its counterpart has been cultivated by the Armenian political elites: even free elections which were often the subject of massive protests and denial, or superficial policies like the anti-corruption strategy by President Kocharyan, could not conceal the lack of democratic practice or counterweigh the absence of any credible checks and balances (2007: 2, 6-8, 11; Navasardian 2012: 97). Furthermore, Zolyan diagnoses a "lack of democratic culture" due to the shortcomings of democratic experience, thus, even the formal establishment of democratic institutions and the preaching of liberal-democratic ideals would not trigger any healing in the long-term (2012: 49; Navasardian 2012: 92-95). Following Ways reasoning, "[the] key source of regime stability was a powerful coercive apparatus" (Way 2006: 39) – or, by referring to his metaphor, the country's "pigs" (representing autocrats) had successfully established a firm brick building steadfast against any upheaval or attack of the

[67] For a comprehensive overview on the events that contributed to the success of the revolution, see Ishkanian 2018.

[68] The immediate reaction following these protests were violence and the arrest of oppositionists throughout the country (Way 2006: 42).

civil society "wolves" (2006: 8). Loyalty within the clans of the oligarchy constituted a major pillar for region stability (Navasardian 2012: 100).

A study by the Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis (TCPA) examined the Armenian civil society in terms of active participation, volunteering and trust by focusing mainly on the question whether it still shows signs of its post-communist past. The results indicate that civil society persists its post-communist weakness, Armenian NGO sector remains detached from the broader public, it lacks vital trust due to "governmental policies including oversight mechanisms", "spread of governmentally organized civil society organizations", "public mentality" and "negative image" and disengagement is still widespread (TCPA 2014). However, the report concludes, that the underlying reasons for the "weakness" are rooted much less in the communist past than dependent on the current reality (TCPA 2014). What sounds like resignation at home, arguable is reversed abroad as the Armenian diaspora – though short-lived – had a considerable impact on the establishment of a multiparty system as well as the active citizenship; a thorn in the side of the ruling elite (Navasardian 2012: 95).Only recently the assumption that as an everlasting tradition "political stability and economic development can be achieved at the expenses of political liberty" has been significantly and effectively challenged by opposition forces and non-violent mass demonstrations in May 2018 known as the Velvet Revolution (Stöber 2018; Zolyan 2012: 59).

3.2. Qualitative research design

In a nutshell, the research design applied here is the qualitative comparison of two cases – so-called pair-wise comparison – which are analyzed on the basis of analytical categories and assumptions deduced from the outlined theoretical framework, enabling the genesis of new typologies according to the primary research interest and the elaboration of differences and similarities (Pickel 2016: 26, 33).

In order to study the historical variance, continuity and change of both the constitution of the intermediary sphere in the selected case studies as well as the different role understandings of key actors, field work represents an essential part of the in-depth analysis. The data foundation is comprised by both a broad spectrum of literature and even more central, on-site empirical data obtained in 37 semi-structured interviews in both Georgia (18) and Armenia (19) during a three-month field visit to the South Caucasus from July to October 2018.[69] The interview guideline as a structuring and steering element covered the following five major aspects, which

[69] In a few cases, interviews have been conducted with two respondents at the same time (as offered by the respective organization), but as they always belonged to the same institution those interviews are treated as one single record.

were discussed in flexible and adaptive manner in individual meetings ranging from 45 minutes to two hours:[70]

- Critical self-perception and role understanding of political elites / civil society (in historical perspective)
- Evaluation of the nexus of civil society and the state
- Political culture and potential changes since independence
- Assessment on effectivity and legitimacy of the political system
- (In)stability and decisive factors or events influencing stability (past and present)

Thereby, the conversational situations varied from private to official venues, depending on the interviewees' preferences in order to guarantee a pleasant dialogue atmosphere. This alignment enabled also to the flexibility in language offered to interviewees in case they did not feel comfortable with English. For three cases (two of them in Armenia) an interpreter has been consulted who provided consecutive interpreting of the conversations on site from both native languages as well as Russian to English or German. Every interviewee orally gave his or her informed consent and other than a few exceptions (four conversations) that have been considered in anonymity, the majority of respondents agreed to be cited and are listed accordingly in the annex. Moreover, all of them agreed to have the conversation recorded which eased the subsequent analysis and enhanced transparency and reliability.

In both countries research institutes guided the research process on site: for Georgia the Caucasian Institute for Democracy and Development (CIPDD), for Armenia the Regional Studies Center (RSC) supported the conduct and constituted helpful entry points into the targeted field. The recourse to on-site data collection is mainly reasoned by the current lack of comparative analysis and a still rather obscure picture of the political grey zone in contemporary research; a contribution that this study wants to provide and purposefully aims at.[71]

Accordingly, the main input data and essential basis for further interpretation is represented by textual data: The literal transcription of all 37 interviews done by the author following the guidelines for simple transcription scheme according to Dresing and Pehl (2015) since the selected research design, the purpose of the subsequent analysis and anticipated results in

[70] Adaptability in this way refers to the flexible inclusion of follow-up questions, attentiveness and responsiveness to interviewees' individual engagement along the major key questions that have been addressed. Contributions in qualitative research handbooks like Pickel/Pickel 2009, Meuser/Nagel 2009, Brinkmann 2013, Misoch 2014 or Gubrium/Holstein/Marvasti/McKinney 2012 (the contributions of Finley, Potter/Hepburn, Talmage, Charmaz/Belgrave and Kaiser in particular) have been very helpful for field-work preparation.

[71] The reasoning behind the quantity and variety of interviewees will be discussed in full length below (see chapter 3.2.1).

terms of understanding dynamics and mechanisms made the semantic dimension most appropriate.[72] Throughout the research process, controlled and reflected subjectivity, adherence to systematic analytical procedure, maximal openness and transparency through clear documentation and auditability as important quality criteria of qualitative interview research have been considered (Flick 2019: 683-684; Kuckartz 2016; Misoch 2014: 231-245; Pickel/Pickel 2009: 445).[73]

The final assessment of data via MaxQDA has been conducted in the framework of qualitative content analysis as frequently used qualitative-interpretative evaluation method of textual data (Mayring/Fenzl 2019; Pickel/Pickel 2009: 449-450). Along strict rules, it enables both the concentration and structuring of the data material for the purpose of extracting compiled information and for retracing explanatory lines and relations. For the purpose of structuring and associating the main variables, the analysis has been carried out along theory-based categorization and overarching typification as the latter acts like "magnifying glasses that allow to set different degrees of sharpness"[74], thus enabling an adequate level of abstraction for the chosen cases (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 37-42). However, this coding process also led to the creation of new, inductively obtained categories in the course of the data analysis, which affirmed the innovativeness of the analysis (Brinkmann 2013: 54; Dresing/Pehl 2015: 35-36).[75]

Apart from the specific demands of the implied research focus, the selection and sampling of key stakeholders and relevant bearers of information followed considerations of elite research as well as fundamentals of qualitative interviewing in the expert field which shall be outlined in the following.

3.2.1. Expert interviews

> We seldom stop and consider the 'magic' of interviewing — that a stranger is willing to tell an interviewer so many things about her life, simply because the interviewer presents herself as a researcher. (Brinkmann 2013: 18)

Expert interviews as micro-qualitative problem-centered technique allow the obtainment of knowledge and experience-based assessments, which make them an important source of spe-

[72] With a view to the very limited value for the research project, the transcription mostly excluded recorded parts of interviews which had no relation to the actual topic (mostly this refers to pre- or post-interview talks off the topic).

[73] Brinkmann employs the very vivid expression of "(playing) the devil's advocate against one's own interpretations" and emphasizes the need to reflect one's own shaped position as interviewer (2013: 65).

[74] Original citation: "Vergrößerungsgläser, die es erlauben unterschiedliche Schärfegrade einzustellen" (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 41).

[75] Hence, Mayring and Fenzl also speak about "Kategoriengeleitetheit" as distinctive feature against other ways of textual analysis (2019: 634). In this way the applied research design differs from the Grounded Theory approach which focuses on theory-generation through open coding of the available material while explicitly excluding any prior theoretical derivation from established schools of thought (Kuckartz/Rädiker 2019: 452; Mayring/Fenzl 2019: 635; Strübing 2019).

cial insider information. Thereby, the assigned status as expert arises either through the individual's active engagement in the respective field (insider knowledge) or through the exceptional familiarity with the topic in question and relation to the field by the own preoccupation (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 86-87; Meuser/Nagel 2009; Pickel/Pickel 2009: 444, 452-453). In this way experts represent "social actors of a particular functional context"[76]. They become central due to their exceptional experience of precisely this context and their knowledge about others (Misoch 2014: 121). The central comprehension-oriented research interest of this study requires insights into yet unexplored aspects of role perception, relations and attitudes within a particular societal context, thus the thick analysis precedes the understanding "from within" (Misoch 2014: 13); this accounted for the application of qualitative interviewing.[77]

Pre-field work selection and sampling processes of interviewees reflected different theoretically-based arguments, thus making political elites and civil society actors the major addressees for interviews. This also implied considerations of representativeness – all central actors involved as well as the approximate comparability in quantity of both cases – gender parity and, in particular with regards to the variety of political elites, ideological balance (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 84). This precursory selection procedure entailed considerations of organizational hierarchy even though in most cases this correlated in the end with the long-term experience of highest officials. Notwithstanding, in the course of the data collection, it turned out that assumed comparative dimensions had to be adjusted: for Georgia for example, the inclusion of a representative from the Orthodox Church reflects the dominant and influential role of the institution in society and the intermediary structure (Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2019: 118). Therefore, adequate flexibility was applied in order to avoid limitations as well as preconceptions of a supposed field of actors and to ensure adaptability of the research approach to the existing rather spontaneous environment.

Unfortunately, the low-key reply and restrained willingness to engage of political elites in both countries represented a serious challenge which issued from different reasons with two seeming to be the most salient ones: the time frame of fieldwork during the summer break and pre-election campaign (presidential elections) in Georgia as well as the very recent complete change of political elites in Armenia. The latter emptied the field of experienced politicians from the former dominant RP, who either vanished from the public surface and sometimes even left the country or refused to speak and perform openly. This is reflected in the lower number of interviewees compared to the list of respondents from civil society.

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[76] Original citation: "soziale Akteure eines bestimmten Funktionskontextes" (Misoch 2014: 121).

[77] Semi-structured interviews are a widespread tool to gain a valuable broader and in-depth understanding of correlations and explanatory lines of developments (Brinkmann 2013: 21; Pickel/Pickel 2009: 447). Accordingly, the collection of data during the field work of this study followed the aim of dialogue rather than interrogation as the main focus was on gaining a holistic picture.

In general, the particular role of elites in moments of political change has been highlighted by transformation theory ascribing them decisive relevance for trigger, progress and (potential) consolidation of conversion (Kaina 2009: 406). This observation alongside the theoretical deliberations outlined above has already delimited the major field of relevant actors. Particularities of those actors in terms of roles and functions and applied selection procedures will be outlined in the following – also to remedy the problem of definitional fuzziness (Misoch 2014: 120).

3.2.1.1. Political elites

Any elite, in a basic etymological sense, is characterized by selection and concentration along certain criteria (Kaina 2009: 387). More specifically, political power, in particular in its institutionalized and rather durable form, features the elite status discussed in the literature which in its more (neo-)machiavellistic tradition is referring both more generally to outreaching power of an exclusive, minority circle of individuals within a society as well as more specifically their regularly exerted influence in society-related decision-making (Hoffmann-Lange 1992: 19; Kaina 2009: 400; Wasner 2004: 29-35, 98).[78] While considering the challenge of any clear delineation of elites and non-elites as well as the wider differentiation in various fields like economic, academic or other groups of stakeholders (Glaab 2016: 516; Kaina 2009: 395), the spectrum of *political* elites in this study as specific societal sector encompasses relevant decision-makers on the political sphere with a potential of immediate and substantial impact on societal developments (Glaab 2016: 512). These include politicians of various parties in both opposition and government, parliamentarians and executive leadership as well as administrative senior officials; in short, political elites who are primarily characterized by their prominent function and position as political actors within society (Hoffmann-Lange 2018: 81-82).

Important aspects for elite analysis highlighted by scholars comprise elite integration – thus, elite unity and differentiation – and assigned role attributions by non-elites as either value-based, functional or power elites.[79] Those will be accounted for in the analysis as both impact inherent regime stability and elite cohesion as well as power dynamics and balance within society (Glaab 2016: 515-516; Hoffmann-Lange 1992: 34-37; Wasner 2004: 98-100). Political style of leadership, thus, can be seen as likewise reflection of the structural and political cultural parameters – the "leadership environment", while patterns of elite constitution and political decision-making are particularly decisive in times of transformation (Glaab 2016: 514, 521). Therefore, it

[78] For an extensive overview, in particular in historical and etymological terms, see Wasner 2004.

[79] Value-elites are seen as role-models by society representing popular ideals, values and convictions in a very convincing manner. Functional-elites, however, literally embody specific capacities which are beneficial for the overall common good and decisive for the warranted attribution of an elite-status. Last but not least, power elites are characterized by their exceptional influence due to particularly powerful positions and the possibility to enforce decisions – even against resistance (Kaina 2009: 388-391).

is significant to include the specific locally prevalent elite understanding in the analysis of the selected case studies.

The purposive sampling process applied for both political elites and civil society actors follows the positional approach of elite identification further refined by Kaina and Hoffmann-Lange, which shall be combined with reputational aspects in order to ensure flexibility and adaptability in the still clientelist and patronage driven field (2009: 394-400; 2018: 80-87). In contrast to the methods of decisional selection, which necessitates extensive preliminary studies on the dynamics of decision-making processes for the purpose of identifying the most influential and assertive individuals, the positional method focuses on the formal institution and ascription of positions allocating power (Glaab 2016: 515-517; Hoffmann-Lange 2018: 80; Kaina 2009: 394-395). The particular advantage of this approach is its high reliability due to the strong coherence within literature on the steadiness of powerful institutional positions and its usefulness for profoundly examining structural as well as cultural characteristics (Hoffmann-Lange 2018: 80-82; Kaina 2009: 395). Reputational methods, however, assume the mutual interdependence of influence and prominence or popularity (Kaina 2009: 394). By means of snowball sampling, this latter approach has been incorporated in the research design, which further enables the determination of first boundary lines, though only partially (Hoffmann-Lange 2018: 87-90).

3.2.1.2. Civil society

By referring to the basic understanding of civil society as outlined before, the category of civil society in the respective case studies turned out to require the most adaption and reconsideration in the course of the field research. Unchangingly, the consciously broad coverage included national formal and informal civil society actors – established ones as well as smaller, more innovative interest groups – international organizations, media representatives, and experts from think tanks. In the same manner as the diversity of experiences mattered for the selection of political elites, civil society actors were chosen on the basis of long-term active engagement and thematic variety. NGOs as formally organized interest groups constituted the largest group, which also reflected the tremendous boost witnessed by this sector during the 1990s (Frantz 2007: 185).[80] While additional literature tries to fill this gap, the effort of providing insights from rural areas could only partially – in the Georgian case – be satisfied. This, however, also reflects the remarkable centeredness of the overall political as well as economic and social system in the capital. The inclusion of clerical representatives and activists of informal networks as mentioned earlier, and the omission of (trade) unions mirrored the discovered particularities within the actual field. As a devastating effect, the collapse of the Soviet system cleared the arena of unions

[80] The terms NGO and CSO are used interchangeably throughout this study.

which formerly – in contrast to the Western understanding – had worked as extended arm of the state and important controlling mechanism (Howard 2003: 67).

3.2.1.3. Research community

The third group of interviewees is dedicated to regional scholars who closely investigated and still follow the developments in the respective countries or the region as a whole and explicitly dedicate their research to those. Thereby, in the selection process, the diversity of research institutions and the affiliations of scholars to different main universities were taken into account. In Georgia, researchers from both Tbilisi State University (TSU) and Ilia State University (ISU) have been interviewed, while in Yerevan, both Yerevan State University (YSU) and American University of Armenia (AUA) are represented as well as – on either side – international scholars based there. The purpose of including scholars as third category has both a controlling and thereby reliability enhancing function as well as it enables gathering rather neutral, added value.

3.2.2. Time frame: long-term tendencies and dynamics between 1991 and 2018

> We understand reality from where we stand, but there are still more and less accurate, fruitful, and, valid ways of understanding from where we are. (Brinkmann 2013: 75)

The focus of this study to explore tendencies and deviations makes it indispensable to expand the considered time frame to the early days of independence (starting in the early 1990s) until the very recent developments in the selected case studies. The underlying consideration is based on the objective of identifying fundamental mechanisms and interdependencies, dynamics and functional logics, in short, the understanding of long-term political developments far from limited short-term snapshots. Hence the resemblance of the environment of change and transition is pivotal. This entails, of course, the inclusion of the very recent changes in Armenia in the course of the Velvet Revolution in April 2018, as they considerably altered the political landscape. From a theoretical point of view, it can similarly be argued that alterations in political culture – resulting from socialization processes and historical developments – are confronted by a certain permanence and longevity (Lauth/Pickel/Pickel 2014: 205).

The subsequent analysis is divided into two main parts of investigation: the first part is dedicated to the precise analysis of the cases and observations on the discovered features of civil society, political elites and the nexus as well as the review of already established categories of regimes in the political grey zone by Carothers. This is followed by the discussion of findings on the interrelation of political structure and culture and its connection with regime persistence or instability in the respective cases.

4. Analysis: critical hues of regimes in the political grey zone

The following analysis is primarily based on findings from in-depth interviews in Georgia and Armenia while also incorporating literature at different points of necessity (like for the purpose of explanatory notes on historical events).[81] Prior to the differentiated exploration of the intermediary sphere, contextual factors that have been highlighted by interviewees will be revealed and reflected upon the research interest.

4.1. Georgia and Armenia – common characteristics in the political grey zone

Instantly recognizable similarities of Georgia and Armenia as post-Soviet states can be found in their later transition from a presidential to a parliamentary system, the revolutions ('color' or 'velvet') that have taken place at different times as well as the difficult socio-economic situation (Giragosian 2018: 83; Iskandaryan 2018: 13). According to the initial assumptions (see chapter 2.4) a few common contextual findings will briefly be outlined in the following.

The immediate independence meant leaving behind a planned, dictated and predetermined authoritarian system with absence of diversity or civil voice and consequently the need for a complete shift in the understanding about the roles of political elites in serving the people instead of ruling them (Danielyan 2018: 8, 12; Kldiashvili 2018: 6, 14).[82] Affected societies at that time lacked both readiness, experience regarding the management of a country as well as politicians apart from the nomenclature from Soviet times (Kokheridze 2018: 8, 10). In particular during the "years of darkness and cold" (in Armenian: *mti tsrti trainer*, see Ishkanian 2008: 157) of the 1990s, when electricity, fuel and food were scarce goods and economic crisis amplified poverty, the severe struggle for survival was accompanied with weak state institutions and the outbreak of – until today – unresolved conflicts. In both countries this further exacerbated the barriers of development (Giragosian 2018: 7).[83] In Armenia the pressures of the country's recovery from war added on to the ongoing reconstruction from the devastating earthquake in 1988 which destroyed a third of its industry (Giragosian 2018: 7).

The process of building an independent nation state on the ruins of an empire entails many conflicts and the confrontation with an all in one package that should be accomplished in a short period of time (Iskandaryan 2018: 19). By referring to the Armenian example, Giragosian

[81] References from interviewees' responses are indicated in the format of name/year: paragraph. The full list of interview partners is provided in the annex of this study.

[82] During Soviet Union, only two types of civil society organizations (CSO) existed, namely for vulnerable people and for women's rights (Nersisyan 2018: 96).

[83] During the early 1990s media outlets had to be closed due to the crisis (Navasardyan 2018: 4).

notes: “Armenia – like every other post-Soviet republic – when the Soviet Union collapsed, no one was ready for independence – to govern themselves or their own country. There was no experience with democracy, obviously, no experience with opposition or BEING a political opposition” (2018: 7, emphasis in capitals). Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet system left successor states deprived of any form of civil society structures just as a proper understanding of roles. This is still reflected by the lack of professional unions and membership-based organizations as well as the politicization of civil society and frequent equation of civil society engagement with political activism (Badalyan 2018: 1; Danielyan 2018: 8, 16; Iskandaryan 2018: 1; Urushadze 2018: 12). Despite the sense of renewal, political culture was neglected and did not enter the education system in terms of promoting critical thinking or an atmosphere of free expression (Badalyan 2018: 53; Kokheridze 2018: 46). Instead, the attitude to wait for and even expect the state to provide assistance, the habit of management behind the curtain, the desire for strong personalized leadership as well as the dominant aspiration of power and personal gains are characteristics related to the Soviet governance model; in short, a burdensome patron-client relationship survived (Foundation Rep. 2018: 21; Ghaplanyan 2018: 26; Lebandize 2018: 44; Metreveli 2018: 55, 77; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 50). In terms of generational change, Kokheridze argues that those older generations who experienced the Soviet system cannot be “free” and independent due to their childhood and former belief in the Soviet ideology; thereby the former attitudes of obedience, distrust towards the unknown and hiding of political orientation instead of participation trigger inner fears and uncertainties within the older generation nowadays (2018: 8, 10, 16, 21-22; see also: Aprasidze 2018: 71; Danielyan 2018: 8, 12; Nodia 2018: 36, 40).

In addition, poverty is still considered to have a strong negative impact on the overall development of both countries: it influences not only civil society in terms of strength and self-sustainability but determines also the overall stability of the country (Foundation Rep. 2018: 42). In the case of Armenia economic structures that were exploited for the enrichment of an exclusive group of elites have contributed to the impoverishment of the local people in rural areas and aggravated depopulation by emigration as well as rural exodus (Danielyan 2018: 8, 28, 36; Kubiak 2018: 129-130; Soghomonyan 2018: 76). Long-lasting high rates of unemployment (17-18 percent) and poverty (30 percent) and no cushioning shadow economy have impeded the overall development of the country (Aleksanyan 2018: 10; Ishkanian 2018: 275; Kubiak 2018: 130). In Georgia, despite its increased economic prosperity and rankings like place nine in “Ease in doing business rank” in 2018, reports like the recent one of UNICEF uncover the continuously high and even increasing child poverty (Foundation Rep. 2018: 42; UNICEF 2017;

World Bank Group 2018: 4).[84] Unemployment around 15-16 percent and high rates of self-employment which is considered to be a sign of hidden unemployment, remain among the key social problems in Georgia (Agenda.ge 2019; Muskhelishvili 2011: 7).

Due to the highly appreciated role of the West and the EU in particular, by the Georgian society, the aspiration to join the latter's development path and to adjust to the related norms and values signifies the dominant foreign policy strategy of Georgia (Meshveliani 2018: 23). Saakashvili's openly and proactively propagated pro-European orientation encouraged the alignment of any policy efforts of the country to EU-approximation.[85] The majority of Georgians consider themselves as Europeans and entirely support the country's EU/Euro-Atlantic direction despite of increasing anti-European propaganda (Human Rights Expert 2018: 14, 46; Lebanidze 2018: 40; Pruidze 2018: 4, 8; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 20). The promoted pro-Western image also enabled Western actors to put pressure on the government to accept the formal democratic transfer of power in 2012 (Lebanidze 2018: 2, 40). The more critical stance of Western actors on the Saakasvili administration as of 2007/2008 also helped to empower civil society as the latter could build on bypassing strategies in order to pressure the government (Nodia 2018: 10, 22; Urushadze 2018: 14). The strive of Georgian governments to ensure good reputation in Brussels enabled the implementation of interaction mechanisms between civil society and the government as part of the EU requirements (Urushadze 2018: 6, 8, 9-10, 22). In contrast to the more one-directional foreign policy of Georgia, it is impossible for Armenia to bypass its "chief ally" Russia due to economic, military and social dependencies while, in parallel, the country committed itself to the EU Integration, first by negotiations on the Association Agreement with the EU and later on Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) (Nodia 2018a: 15; see also European External Action Service 2017; Ryabov 2012: 267). The divide between West and East is further exacerbated by the huge Armenian diaspora living mostly in Western countries (Danielyan 2018: 8; Voskanyan 2018: 38). During Sarksyan this juggling act became more obvious as his government maintained close connections to the European People's Party while loyalty to Russia still served as a crucial factor for regime stability by protecting the regime against challenges inside and outside (Navasardyan 2018: 36). Surprisingly, the Russian response to the revolution in April 2018 has been unexpectedly neutral in terms of welcoming and congratulating the revolutionaries, though previously both opposition and civic initiatives have been proclaimed as risk for another *Color Revolution* (Safaryan 2018: 14; see also Nodia 2018a: 15).

[84] From 2015 to 2017 UNICEF observes an increase of 4.3 percentage points of children living below the extreme poverty line reaching 6,8 percent in 2017 (2017: 11).

[85] Tellingly, the Rose Revolution was accompanied by the erection of the European flag on every state building (Muskhelishvili 2011: 6).

4.2. Design of the respective intermediary structure at different times

In order to obtain a detailed picture of the intermediary structure in both selected case studies, it is necessary to first consider the involved actors, their characteristics and role perceptions in the course of time before assessing their interlinkages and the overall context of interaction.

4.2.1. Civil society

The civil society sector in both Georgia and Armenia has developed impressively in terms of quantity, with thousands of nongovernmental organizations (NGO) registered today although the sector was built from scratch after independence (Nodia 2018: 32, see also Civicus 2016; European External Action Service 2018). The limited understanding of civil society to the very specific form of organizational activities – namely, NGOs – reflects the previously outlined shared characteristic in the post-Soviet space.[86] However, the mere statistical number does not necessarily imply real efficiency, de facto operability and prominence in society. For instance, in Georgia, interviewees shared figures of 100 potentially known organizations, of which only about ten were well-known and actively engaged as well as predominantly located in the capital; notwithstanding the number of formally registered organizations is about 26 000 (Kldiashvili 2018: 18; for official figures see European External Action Service 2018). In Armenia the contrast is similarly strong with approximately 5 200 formally registered NGO and only ten percent active ones, which are mostly directed to anti-corruption policies, women or children's rights and are based in Yerevan (Aleksanyan 2018: 2, 4; Doydoyan 2018: 21; Iskandaryan 2018: 1; Nersisyan 2018: 63; for official figures see Civicus 2016).

4.2.1.1. Georgia: recurring fluctuations of the NGO-community

Apart from its constant numerical expansion, the civil society sector in Georgia experienced several ups and downs in the past decades in terms of strength and differentiation. Already during the early days of independence a few big players and names like Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy (ISFED), Transparency International Georgia or CIPDD established themselves based on Western donor support and their explicit rejection of the corrupted state at that time (Tchiaberashvili 2018: 7; Tugushi 2018: 3). The special attraction of the sector was also linked to material reasons as higher salaries compared to both governmental posts and academia encouraged many people to join the "NGO elite" as well as the historical moment of dramatic changes; thus, the initial devel-

[86] As Muskhelishvili (2018: 6) outlines, this "civil community" of NGOs is characterized by professional organizations that are experienced in political activity and staffed by specialists paid fulltime for their engagement in lobbying, advocacy or watch-dogging.

opment was not from the grassroots but driven by well-educated young people (Nodia 2018: 2, 4; Pruidze 2018: 34). Already during the Shevardnadze government civil society actors were the main driving force that pushed for reforms, although from the political periphery by voicing strong accusation against the regime, thereby intimidating the ruling powers (Aprasidze 2018: 12; Metreveli 2018: 89).

The contribution of civil society to the Rose Revolution in 2003 as a driving force of powerful resistance remains uncontested.[87] However, the subsequent absorption of civil society actors into the Saakashvili government had a devastating effect on the sector (Metreveli 2018: 15; Meshveliani 2018: 12; Nodia 2018: 18; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 14; Urushadze 2018: 6). Simultaneously, the international donor community withdrew funding from civil society in order to forward it directly to the government for the purpose of democratic reforms and state building, by considering Georgia as being directly heading towards democracy (Kldiashvili 2018: 4; Metreveli 2018: 89; Pruidze 2018: 18; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 14; Urushadze 2018: 6). The availability of funds for the government also enabled it to pay higher salaries for public officials, thereby attracting civil society actors to join politics (Navasardyan 2018: 8). This was further exacerbated during the second term of the Saakashvili regime (in particular from 2009 to 2011), when civil society was rather weak and dominated by the government, which created an environment of fear and declared civil society actors redundant. As the government stopped listening to NGOs' claims, the communication gap widened and the pursued neoliberal agenda clearly mismatched the real struggles of society in terms of unemployment and poverty (Kldiashvili 2018: 4; Metreveli 2018: 15; Muskhelishvili 2018: 10; Nodia 2018: 18; Tugushi 2018: 3). Both the slow recovery of the civil society sector as well as the government's dismissive attitude and the latter's immunity against criticism provoked the politicization of civil society which became more actively engaged and advocating. While anti-corruption measures had been very successfully implemented, human rights violations became an issue of huge public discontent that has also been taken up by civil society (Pruidze 2018: 18; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 11, 15).[88] Civil society in this regard was also useful for oppositional forces that needed political support in the 2012 elections against Saakashvili's UNM (Kldiashvili 2018: 4). Speeches at that time by the opposition were markedly based on CSO findings and the strict election monitoring by civil society added on the external monitoring missions in ensuring the democratic conduct of the 2012 ballot (Hu-

[87] The "Kmara" ("enough") youth organization, which had been inspired by the Serbian equivalent became one of the symbols of civil society engagement in the revolution (Reisner 2018: 14).

[88] Jobelius stresses the impressive progress in modernization and anti-corruption efforts while the latter lifted Georgia from rank ten of the most corrupt states worldwide in 2003 to rank 68 (of 178) in 2010 (2012: 82-83).

man Rights Expert 2018: 31-32, 34; Urushadze 2018: 14).[89] Until today, this critical role of civil society is seen as crucial for detecting government mismanagement while the scope of fulfilling this function has been volatile (Kokheridze 2018: 36). After UNM was thoroughly defeated in the 2012 elections, those former civil society actors that had served in the government during Saakashvili returned back to civil society which partly sheds light on the "irreconcilable rigor how civil society [sometimes] confronts the government"[90] nowadays (Foundation Rep. 2018: 5; Kldiashvili 2018: 18).

Blurred roles of political and civic activism

Civil society used to grant a grace period or "honeymoon" (Tugushi 2018: 75, 77) to any new regime in office by granting it immunity for making mistakes (Saakashvili/UNM or Ivanishvili/GD) and refraining from criticism throughout the first years of government. Only gradually civil society has lost this inattentive and hesitant attitude towards the new government and become more vocal as soon as promised changes did not materialize (Nodia 2018: 22; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 7; Tugushi 2018: 77). However, the role perception of interviewed civil society actors pointed to ambiguities in the strict distinction of political and civic activism, with the latter referring to working with society, and not necessarily with the political sphere (Kokheridze 2018: 6, 44).

> You know in our country the difference between NGO and political activities is very (…) weak. When we are speaking about Transparency (International, SB) Georgia or GYLA or about others, you cannot understand where the NGO is and where is the politically influenced actor. Because sometimes they make these statements which are very political statements, and these are statements just for the political parties. So, even the people who are working in the NGOs never clearly understand where the differences between civil society activism and political activism are. (Kokheridze 2018: 44)

This blurring of roles issued from the period of conscious political engagement of civil society members during and after the Rose Revolution (Nodia 2018: 14). As NGOs have mirrored the political setting, it is not surprising that it became a popular claim that civil society has to substitute the lacking political landscape and parties (Aprasidze 2018: 14; Nodia 2018: 22; Tugushi 2018: 37; see also Reisner 2018: 17).

A key aspect highlighted for the meaningfulness of civil society is the resource function that it fulfills in providing public officials with training. Thereby, it creates a critical mass of

[89] As an example, the National Integrity System of Transparency International was mentioned which had been introduced in 2011 as a tool for assessing the healthiness of the governance system and its institutions. Based on this empirical evidence, the opposition formulated its heavy criticism (Urushadze 2018: 18, 20).

[90] Original citation: "unversöhnliche Härte mit der [die Zivilgesellschaft] der Regierung gegenübersteh[t]." (Foundation Rep. 2018: 5).

skilled and equipped people sharing the same foreign policy priorities – primarily EU and Euro-Atlantic Integration – and promotes civil consciousness in publishing reports and publicly available information (Lortkipanidze 2018: 94; Metreveli 2018: 3, 7, 47, 51; Meshveliani 2018: 12; Tugushi 2018: 31). This image of a "pool of human capital" was strongly reflected during the Rose Revolution when the young reformers, their ideas and their agenda originated from civil society and were key for the revolutionary political climate.[91] As "talking heads", they critically analyzed necessities in times of political changes and developed concepts for future progress instead of the state actors perceived to be highly corrupt and incompetent;[92] although actual mobilization came from political parties (Nodia 2018: 14; see also Lebanidze 2018: 10, 46; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 5, 19; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 12).[93] Overall, this potential of civil society to influence decision-making processes is considered to promote regime change and democratization; thus, the impact of civil society on political life is apparent even though connected to Western engagement and conditionality (Human Rights Expert 2018: 31-32, 34; Kldiashvili 2018: 4, 8; Lebanidze 2018: 6; Nodia 2018: 14, 15-16; Pruidze 2018: 8, 16; Tugushi 2018: 3, 5; Urushadze 2018: 9-10, 12, 14). Yet, the creation of political friction does not automatically lead to fundamental political change or democratization if there is no leadership. Therefore, the broader masses of society would need to be motivated to become active in order to develop strong political parties (Aprasidze 2018: 19, 59).

Media in Georgia remains highly disputed due to unchanged strong polarization and politicization during all ruling governments: "the media landscape is like an island that has somehow immunized itself from political games and remains diverse, very polarized, very (...) politically engaged but importantly, pluralistic and diverse and it really plays a central role in political life" (Lebanidze 2018: 46).[94] That way, major media outlets do not only create the news agenda but their agenda is visibly taken up and followed by the government (Media Rep. 2018: 12, 20). In parallel to regime change in 2012, the control exercised by political powers towards media outlets simply switched directions and roles of publicly supported and offended players: Imedi, Maestro TV and the Public Broadcaster benefit from governmental support and protection, while Rustavi, the former mouthpiece of Saakashvili, acts as the only highly critical and popular channel linked to the weak opposition (Human Rights Expert 2018: 63; Kldiashvili 2018: 24;

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91 As an example, during Rose Revolution Rustavi 2 screened a film on the overthrow of Milosevic in Serbia and did live broadcasting during the revolution (Lebanidze 2018: 46).

92 Gherasimov also refers to the recruitment process in post-communist states based on loyalty and obedience instead of professionalism or critical thinking (2019: 5).

93 ISFED, for instance, revealed great violations of the electoral rules, which led to the nullification of the election results by the Supreme Court (Tchiaberashvili 2018: 5).

94 Original citation: "die Medienlandschaft ist so eine Insel, die sich irgendwie immunisiert hat von politischen Spielen und sie bleibt divers, sehr polarisiert, sehr (…) politisch engagiert aber wichtig ist pluralistisch und divers und sie spielt wirklich eine zentrale Rolle im politischen Leben" (Lebanidze 2018: 46).

Media Rep. 2018: 52; Tugushi 2018: 24). The latter's approach is to continuously criticize the lack of efficiency of GD government, to monitor and to disclose non-transparent, corrupt deals and hidden political processes (Media Rep. 2018: 4, 12, 38; Muskhelishvili 2018: 2). Thereby, diversity is indeed preserved but any objectivity in coverage is absent (Metreveli 2018: 15). Interferences into internal editorial policies and open rejection by the government peaked in struggles over ownership during the last few years which put high pressure on the oppositional TV channel (Media Rep. 2018: 3, 4, 8, Tugushi 2018: 63, 69).[95]

Increasing tendency of diversification and decentralization

Against the formerly narrow understanding of civil society as a network of professional organizations, in recent years, the field of actors has become more diverse and differentiated. This can be seen in terms of ideological orientation and functionalities but also in the genesis of CSOs that combine criticism with suggestions for improvement (Kldiashvili 2018: 18; Metreveli 2018: 3, 9). This "maturity" is also reflected in the recently increasing efforts to strengthen regional development, forming networks across the country and slowly counteracting the gravitational pull of the ultimate center, Tbilisi (Tchiaberashvili 2018: 35; see also Nodia 2018: 28). Notwithstanding, the "big sharks" – like GYLA, Transparency International or ISFED – still play a crucial role since influential newcomers are rare (Aprasidze 2018: 8). Civil society in terms of membership based self-reliant organizations is almost completely absent and until today, the lack of resources is one of the biggest challenges for civil society actors; both to become autonomous from foreign donor aid but also to move more to the rural regions (Human Rights Expert 2018: 14; Muskhelishvili 2018: 6; Nodia 2018: 18, 34).

Notwithstanding, Georgian society is not described as passive and networking is perceived as an essential part of its culture (Muskhelishvili 2018: 6; Nodia 2018: 24): although civic movements cannot rely on established traditions, as of recently, society has become more activist in terms of mobilization which took shape during the protest against the harsh drug policy of the government after large-scale police riots in Bassiani night club and Café Gallery in May 2018, or the very recent demonstrations in June 2019 against the increasing and politically accepted influence of Russia in the country (Antidze/Osborn 2019; Kapuste 2018; Nodia 2018: 10, 34).[96] Other movements like the "White Noise movement" successfully demanding the legalization of marihuana or green movements have developed as new, distinct forms of broader societal en-

[95] For a comprehensive overview on the Rustavi 2 case see Schiffers/Smolnik 2017: 3-4.

[96] In May 2018, about 10 000 people protested for the liberalization of drug policies and against police violence (Kapuste 2018). The recent demonstrations in June 2019 which were answered by police with teargas and rubber bullets as protesters stormed the parliament, responded to the invitation of a Russian delegation on occasion of a conference of Orthodox Christian lawmakers. The speaker of the parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze, who bleared responsibility, resigned (Antidze/Osborn 2019; Sueddeutsche Zeitung 2019).

gagement (Nodia 2018: 34). Apart from this informal activism, lately mainly youth driven grassroots organizations without any financial interests started to gain momentum. They act aside and even intentionally distanced from the more politically oriented NGO community despite their commonly shared pro-Western focus (Gherasimov 2019: 8; Lebanidze 2018: 6, 18; Nodia 2018: 34). This might also explain Kldiashvili's (2018: 20) notion that today civil society actors' reputation in society crucially depends on not being related to political parties. However, as Lebanidze argues, sooner or later these accented apolitical issues will become political (2018: 18; for example, as seen for drug policy). In terms of countering the cliché that participating in politics is bad business and for motivating the young generation to engage in politics and to develop political consciousness, political activism is seen as a tool for strengthening local self-government in particular and political responsibility in general as well as for involving the broader society in the political process (Aprasidze 2018: 15; Kokheridze 2018: 22, 24).[97] However, this perception might not reach down to the level as citizens are described as "lazy" and difficult to motivate for becoming actively engaged in decision-making processes (Kokheridze 2018: 30; Lortkipanidze 2018: 36).

Competition instead of cohesion within the sector

Apart from these societal challenges, the internal dynamics within the NGO sector are contentious: the frequent lack of internal democracy and leading personalities' consultations with international donors or governmental offices behind closed-doors reinforce the exclusive character of a small circle of actors in the capital that dominate the sector because of their visibility and funding opportunities over the non-elite NGOs (Aprasidze 2018: 21, 65; Human Rights Expert 2018: 6, 40, 41-42; Metreveli 2018: 39; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 38). Whereas the period under Shevardnadze's government prior to the Rose Revolution was characterized by increasing cooperation and assertive unity among the civil society/NGO sector, this changed drastically during the following years of Saakashvili's government (Lortkipanidze 2018: 11; Nodia 2018: 26). Its strong politicization since the late years of the Saakashvili government impedes agreement within the civil society community. Attempts – driven by the EU – to establish a coordination mechanism failed due to the lack of a clear responsibility as well as tough competition and thematic monopoles that sometimes cover the ideational proximity of actors. Several efforts to promote wide-ranging partnership of NGOs degenerated into attempts of getting grants. This polarization and rivalry over resources hampers communication and is seen as weakening the proper functionality of the civil society sector. The intrinsic motivation for cooperating remains

[97] Kokheridze gave the example of the recent initiative of a "Civil Advisory Council" in Kutaisi where he himself as civil society actor is actively engaged and which aims at making peoples voices heard in local self-government (2018: 24, 34). However, interviewees' responses show that advocacy and political activism are intermingled by civil society actors that are convinced about their role as encouraging people to become active and to mobilize (see Kokheridze 2018: 24, 44).

therefore obscure and is frequently linked to the attempt of making a name of oneself vis-à-vis the donor community (Aprasidze 2018: 21; Muskhelishvili 2018: 14, 18).

It comes as no surprise that unity, most notably, is possible within the same thematic areas by formulating joint statements coordinated by active umbrella organizations like GYLA or Transparency International and around grant projects that explicitly demand partnership; in this regard, the formation of coalitions among NGOs is even increasing (Foundation Rep. 2018: 27-28; Kldiashvili 2018: 18; Lebanidze 2018: 14; Metreveli 2018: 15, 21, 25; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 26).[98] Still, the major gap that existed during the Saakashvili rule between very critical parts of civil society and a section of liberal NGOs that supported even the increasing non-democratic political orientation, meritocracy and liberal authoritarianism has made room for more consensus (Lebanidze 2018: 16). The latter effect – particularly in the area of thematic cooperation – is also expected to have resulted from "trickle-down" habituation processes of donor-driven and obliged collaboration (Aprasidze 2018: 21).

In one respect respondents shared ambiguous convictions: with a view to conversion in civil society agendas. While some clearly outlined a shift from the former CSO's commitment in the human rights and justice field towards an agenda more dedicated to the environment as well as social and economic rights, others still point to serious thematic gaps in the latter sphere and criticize the absent progress moving away from issues like human rights or simply advocating for a change in the government (Kldiashvili 2018: 12; Muskhelishvili 2018: 10; Pruidze 2018: 16; Tugushi 2018: 5).

Disconnection between regional needs and metropolitan ideas

More clearly, however, the interviews unveiled a discrepancy between smaller regional civil society actors and the capital-based established CSOs in terms of self-understanding (for a greater outline: Aprasidze 2018: 65, 67): the role perception of civil society actors in the region is more related to raising and legally defending citizen's voices in the municipalities as well as on empowering and encouraging active citizenry; there, NGOs and media are considered lawyers and spokespersons of citizens and they coordinate quite well in terms of uniting citizens for protest actions (Lortkipanidze 2018: 6, 19, 21, 36, 53, 83).[99] Renowned actors based in Tbilisi, however, emphasize the impact of lobbying and advocacy for specific issues as well as monitoring

[98] As examples, issues like the environmental protection, the commonly shared approach on EU/Euro-Atlantic integration, the question of the role of Gazprom in Georgia or unity with respect to resisting Russian aggression and soft power and upholding sovereignty are mentioned as areas of unified positions (Foundation Rep. 2018: 27-28; Metreveli 2018: 15, 19, 39; Urushadze 2018: 8).

[99] As one example, Lortkipandize referred to the successful initiative "Petition people's voice in the self-government" in Batumi which aimed at empowering the population of 20 municipalities to prioritize key challenges and to prepare petitions (see also Guria Youth Resource Center 2019; Institute of Democracy 2019).

and public disclosure of abuses or mismanagement that affect public opinion and democratic development (Human Rights Expert 2018: 34; Kldiashvili 2018: 6, 12; Meshveliani 2018: 12; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 20; Urushadze 2018: 14).

Yet, looking back, a human rights expert – formerly high-level staff at GYLA – concludes:

> We (civil society, SB) don't know how to talk the language that is understood by for instance 80 percent of this country. So, we are talking about – many people in the NGOs after all are lawyers, I myself am a lawyer – and we are talking in a language that […] at some point you will understand that your neighbor cannot really understand you, what you mean behind that. We are talking about the high values, about tolerance and these European values and we should be proceeding this way etc. and people cannot really follow. (2018: 14)

While during the early years of independent Georgia the NGO community enjoyed widespread public support, which was also related to its commitment to work directly with society, the Rose Revolution implied a turning point when the argument of having civil society representatives as government officials outweighed the need for engagement with the broader citizenry. The central focus on working with politicians and along the donors' agenda but not *with* society – as it can be seen in flagship formats like the OGP or policies on transparency and accountability – instead of systemically addressing inner generation challenges or the lack of common values and visions, strengthened the disconnection (Aprasidze 2018: 8, 10, 17; Kokheridze 2018: 10, 20). Today, the institutionalized civil society sector is perceived as weak, unpopular and its heavy polarization, which is particularly apparent in media[100], impacts society: it fosters the latter's sense of alienation from the state due to the broken linkage between the majority of the public and the intermediary structures (Human Rights Expert 2018: 10, 14, 63; Kokheridze 2018: 10; Lortkipanidze 2018: 19, 36, 79). The elitist decoupling of civil society from the broader societal base entails the lack of incorporation of different visions, ideas and what Archimandrite Adam frames as "polylogue" which otherwise would ensure intercultural and innersocietal understanding (2018: 24, 32). Although this might not properly reflect their actual contribution to structural developments, the public attitude towards civil society activities remains skeptical and reserved. Until recently it has been quite popular to consider NGOs either as "grant eaters" – businesses that sell projects to international donors – or to confound them with political actors (Foundation Rep. 2018: 1; Kldiashvili 2018: 4; Lebanidze 2018: 10, 12; Lortkipanidze 2018: 19, 79). There is a clear controversy as the assumed role of civil society actors as specialists does not necessarily imply that they represent the voice of society; their legitimacy is rather based on knowledge and values and not on their representative capacity. This provokes distrust in society against the perceived elitist "cluster", which comprises only a very thin layer of society

[100] Until today, the overwhelming majority of society get its news from television, where coverage is described as very polarized (Human Rights Expert 2018: 63).

(Muskhelishvili 2018: 2, 6, 40; see also Aprasidze 2018: 8; Lortkipanidze 2018: 19, 79; Pruidze 2018: 34, 36). Although civil society actors see themselves as important facilitator of communication by reminding people about lasting problems, advocating for improvements and monitoring the government on diverse implementation processes, they sometimes face public discrediting and rejection. This is also related to their commitment towards liberal values like the protection of minorities or LGBT rights, which are seen as a threat to the Georgian identity (Human Rights Expert 2018: 2, 6, 12, 20; Tugushi 2018; Kldiashvili 2018: 4; Lebanidze 2018: 10, 11-12; Lortkipanidze 2018: 4; Muskehlishvili 2018: 6). The widely held view of the role of civil society today is limited to controlling the government as "non-elected representatives" and protesting against misleading trends rather than struggling for positive changes or supporting the government (Muskhelishvili 2018: 2; Nodia 2018: 50).

Furthermore, values that are promoted by civil society actors are hardly internalized by the broader population or seen as desirable, as intermediary actors themselves showcased dualistic roles and have changed their attitudes in moving from civil society to public offices or back (Kokheridze 2018: 28, 30, 42). Because of the "filter bubble" or "echo chamber" in which civil society engagement takes place, civil society actors run the risk of lacking information about the situation among the wider population, which is further exacerbated by deficient communication strategies with society (Foundation Rep. 2018: 7, 15; see also Muskhelishvili 2018: 6, 40). The framework of interaction is therefore limited to the narrow triangle of donor community, the government and civil society, distinct and isolated from society (Muskhelishvili 2018: 40; Nodia 2018: 10; Urushadze 2018: 12, 42). The dominant aspiration of NGOs and media to perform as watch-dogs in detecting scandals, uncovering hidden information and critical developments, is seen as factor that increases the "bubble of distrust" between society and the state (Muskhelishvili 2018: 2, 38). This detachment is further boosted by the domination and full control of one ruling party that has no need to take alternative outside views seriously (Urushadze 2018: 4, 22).[101]

4.2.1.2. Armenia: NGO-ization and the rise of informal civic activism

The early days of civil society in Armenia were characterized by a spontaneous and massive social movement in 1988-1989, even before the country gained independence: the Karabakh Movement brought one-third of the entire population to demonstrations (Kubiak 2018: 131; Paturyan 2018: 10). Furthermore, the consequences of the war on Nagorno Karabakh and the related discourse of nationalism made civil society less open and less diverse, while the reconstruction processes after the devastating earthquake in 1988 capacitated civil

[101] This will be discussed at length in chapter 4.2.2.1.

society in delivering goods and services and made any restrictions of civil liberties untenable (Giragosian 2018: 7). Apart from this, civil society gradually developed along societal changes and, fueled by donor-driven NGO-ization, slowly filling the post-Soviet vacuum in the late 1990s (Badalyan 2018: 5; Danielyan 2018: 8, 16; Iskandaryan 2018: 1, 5; Paturyan 2018: 22).[102] Yet, in the years that followed, the core of active and prominent civil society actors narrowed down to a short list of NGOs and activists (Republican Party 2018: 16).

Clear role understanding of advocacy and service provision

Overall, however, the role of institutionalized civil society actors did not change that much (Paturyan 2018: 10): also linked to the prospect of gaining donor funds, advocacy has been the most popular function claimed by almost each and every NGO (Manasyan 2018: 22; Navasardyan 2018: 4; Paturyan 2018: 10; as an example: Nersisyan 2018: 33). This encompasses also the increasingly stronger role of public communication in terms of providing information and formulating policy recommendations that represents and displays the *vox populi* towards policy makers and contributes to transparency; supported by Western donors (Doydoyan 2018: 1, 3; Manasyan 2018: 8, 22, 26; Mission Armenia 2018: 6, 15; Safaryan 2018: 24).[103] Moreover, advocacy represents a tool uniting different political camps in the CSO sector along commonly-shared solidarity issues and values like the independence of media (Navasardyan 2018: 4). Intertwined with advocacy, another function of civil society is seen in its provision of resources which is clearly linked to the historic developments when social support for vulnerable people was needed in times of humanitarian crisis (Aleksanyan 2018: 4, 10, 30; Mission Armenia 2018: 6, 15, 20; Paturyan 2018: 10). Especially on the regional level, NGOs enjoyed respect and reputation as they served the vulnerable sectors (Mission Armenia 2018: 6, 15; Paturyan 2018: 42). But CSOs also play a role in strengthening social capital and educating the younger generations (Aleksanyan 2018: 4). Due to limitations in its own capacity, but also in order to make use of the available expertise in civil society, the government has frequently relied on services by CSOs. This entails academic guidance and discussion of societal developments, preparation of survey data including recommendations on issues such as corruption, tax reform or decentralization, as well as capacity building of public administration representatives. This promoted the role of civil society as an additional "labor force" – in the words of a government representative (Republican Party 2018: 10; see also Doydoyan 2018: 3, 7; Manasyan 2018: 14, 24; Voskanyan 2018: 4).[104]

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[102] The spread of the internet, which improved communication channels, is seen as another contributing factor of this transformation process (Manasyan 2018: 25-26).

[103] For instance, civil society underpinned the claims of the Electric Yerevan movement by presenting an analysis on the lack of justification of any increase in tariffs on electricity while corruption and mismanagement were not tackled (Manasyan 2018: 26).

[104] The claim of an CSO active in the social security sector claim that they sometimes feel like an agency of the government is telling (Mission Armenia 2018: 106-108).

Non-restricted but governed environment of action

"[T]he real advantage or difference is, Armenia is probably THE leading post-Soviet country in terms of the rights we have to criticize the government and NOT be threatened, the security that entails, but also the space in which we operate" (Giragosian 2018: 27, emphasis in capitals). Apart from this positive and enabling environment, civil society representatives themselves depict their commitment as stable, brave and energetic (Doydoyan 2018: 21). Possibilities to voice critique even in direct interaction with the president have been institutionalized and are intensively used as an approved way of engaging for adjustment and progress by alerting the government on necessary corrections (Aleksanyan 2018: 4, 8; Doydoyan 2018: 3, 13; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 38). Criticism, therefore, is seen as the major contribution of civil society and – in its constant application – as a tool for promoting regime change and weakening the government's position (Navasardyan 2018: 8, 14).[105]

Whereas in the past constant deprecation of government actions and decisions were the order, during the last years political policy approach of NGOs includes recommendations and solution-oriented proposals (Navasardyan 2018: 14; Nersisyan 2018: 31, 33). In this way, exerting influence on agenda setting and decision-making is considered to be easier for civil society (Paturyan 2018: 10). Apart from criticism, the outstanding example of successful agenda setting by CSOs that interviewees frequently highlighted, was the Law on Freedom of Information jointly elaborated by the parliament and civil society in 2003, with civil society contributing experience and expertise. Nonetheless, the law has not seen any changes until today (Doydoyan 2018: 1, 3, 7; Melikyan 2018: 18).

The benefit of monitoring the government, however, remains disputed: every election, though rigged, has been observed by NGOs with lots of efforts (Manasyan 2018: 48):

> [E]ach time last elections, parliamentary elections, there were a lot of monitors, again huge preliminary preparatory work by NGOs preparing observers, putting these cameras, changing the electoral law. But when I went to the voting station and I saw guys with bunches of passports. So, I was so so killed. I felt that my voice is NOTHING. Nothing! You vote, you don't vote, everything is predetermined. (Manasyan 2018: 48, emphasis in capitals)

While the overall sphere of action for civil society actors is qualified as open and non-restricted (Badalyan 2018: 5; Manasyan 2018: 16), state interference manifests itself in censorship (especially under Kocharyan) but also in the financial support of certain selected actors which are repeatedly classified as a government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGO): over the past twenty years more patriotic NGOs mushroomed in order to counterbal-

[105] As one interviewee described it: consistent appeals to the government to acknowledge civil society rights also bore fruits (Mission Armenia 2018: 2).

ance pro-Western, pro-democratic civil society while the latter clearly dismiss their actions (Danielyan 2018: 16; Melikyan 2018: 14). This is different to neighboring Georgia where GONGOs are not considered to be a real challenge due to their very limited number and powerlessness (Kldiahsvili 2018: 20; Tugushi 2018: 3).

Although the media sphere has been open and vibrant during the early 1990s, until the revolution in 2018 state control and interference in terms of content limited the freedom of press (Melikyan 2018: 14, 33, 66; Navasardyan 2018: 4). In particular under Kocharyan and Sarskyan, media was restricted in terms of criticism, as private companies funded by parties were incorporated into the system, media was repressed by censorship, and sometimes even faced shutdown. Until recently only two or three independent media outlets have been active, but they remained controlled (Melikyan 2018: 26, 49-55, 61).

Exclusiveness and detachment of institutionalized civil society

The exclusiveness of the civil society sector, being composed of a distinct group of people who were mostly educated abroad and had worked in foreign countries exposes the obvious communication dilemma towards the broader society: their interaction with the majority of the (local) population was difficult since they used paradigms from experiences abroad and aimed at changing the Armenian society in a specific externally inspired way – by promoting democracy, rule of law, modernization and "Westernization" (Safaryan 2018: 24; see also Iskandaryan 2018: 1). The proclaimed "Open Data Culture" of civil society which signifies open access to their research and programs to the broader citizenry cannot fully solve the challenge of disconnection even though expectations are high that sharing knowledge and experience might provoke changes in people's mindset (Manasyan 2018: 8, 14, 22; Nersisyan 2018: 9): "Sometimes civil society people, they can communicate with a person from Germany, from Brussels, from Washington, but not with their neighbor in […] local houses they're living in" (Iskandaryan 2018: 1). Furthermore, the political orientations of CSOs had been increasingly critically assessed and rejected (Nersisyan 2018: 24). Besides, Paturyan argues that the NGOs lack the ability to defend those values that they account for themselves, thus, there is no deep understanding on what the propagated Western models and values actually mean and entail (2018: 28).

Commonly shared with its post-Soviet neighbor, Georgia, civil society in Armenia became equally politicized and pooled in the capital and did not stay "beyond the political struggle" (Republican Party 2018: 10, 16). Iskandaryan argues that if politics are not a real part of the political agenda, it will emerge at other places, namely media and civil society: "Some civil society organizations […] played the role of political parties. So, it was first extremely centralized, second extremely politicized" (Iskandaryan 2018: 3). By being considered a part of the political system and by acting like a political party, until April 2018 civil society actors either supported

(keyword: GONGOs) or, like the majority, opposed the dominant ruling party (Giragosian 2018: 7; Iskandaryan 2018: 1, 3, 9 13; Republican Party 2018: 10, 16; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 6).

> What they call civil society, especially before the April transit of power, usually was a form of political opposition. Usually what they did want was to try to get from government this or that. It's not about washing the streets; it's about organizing demonstrations for government to wash the streets. This is a form of political activity. Why it was like that: because in politics, you didn't have politics. (Iskandaryan 2018: 3)

This does not apply for think tanks that share a more balanced and objective view, however, as only three of this kind have effectively been working, this non-politicized part of civil society is apparently limited (Giragosian 2018: 9). This narrowness of the civil society sector is further aggravated as trade unions are rare and prefer to stay neutral and mute; and religious institutions are reduced to the domination of the Apostolic Church of Armenia to the detriment of religious freedoms and tolerance (Aleksanyan 2018: 4; Badalyan 2018: 1; Voskanyan 2018: 40).

The Nagorno-Karabakh war and the risk of new tensions limited civil society's standing as the argument of internal stability in times of war outweighed their claims of societal developments. Especially during Kocharyan's rule, the dominant narrative focused on the preservation of national security and inhibited any discourse on human rights (Aleksanyan 2018: 6; Manasyan 2018: 20). Furthermore, financial limitations and substantial donor dependency decisively impacted the framework of action of CSOs, making them highly flexible towards the preferences of donors even if they ran against their actual missions; this sometimes disclosed obscure understandings of roles (Mission Armenia 2018: 22-24; Nersisyan 2018: 70, 104; Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 3, 7).

> [A]fter almost 30 years of privatization and wild capitalism in Armenia, they (CSOs, SB) don't, they really don't tackle, they don't address issues that affect people's dignity, human rights in terms of, I don't know, economic prosperity or (…) even labor rights. I mean some organizations might have a few things about labor, because it's sexy and some donors will like it, but they don't really address those issues. (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 3)

Rivalry and competition for grants as well as the domination of a few exist within the NGO community and it has even been observed that small groups of NGOs have established "cartels" for implementing projects (Foundation Rep. 2018: 27-28, 30; see also Badalyan 2018: 27; Mission Armenia 2018: 42; Nersisyan 2018: 63; Paturyan 2018: 20). Ghaplanyan argues that the (by the government) intentionally undernourished and weak civil society had a few "nucleuses" but overall lacked strength and fortitude to fight against injustices and to gain momentum in mobilization (2018: 8).

Collaboration that developed in recent years among the institutionalized civil society has been limited to the boundaries of thematic areas or specific fields of shared views like poverty,

social justice and equality, women's and children's rights while in general activities remain uncoordinated and spotty; though slowly getting closer, informal and institutional civil society are still distanced from each other (Aleksanyan 2018: 6; Danielyan 2018: 18, 20; Ghaplanyan 2018: 12; Giragosian 2018: 13, 57, 69; Mission Armenia 2018: 39, 45, 47; Navasardyan 2018: 10, 14, 20). The media sphere stands out with good coalitions that have been established backed by the donors' preferences of joint applications from consortiums. Furthermore, there is unity among journalists on professional ethics and the protection of media freedoms (Doydoyan 2018: 13; Navasardyan 2018: 6).

While the majority of the active NGOs are driven by personality, not policy, and follows a funding-related focus or deals with niche issues, personalities *per se* are more respected by the broader public than the related NGOs to the detriment of discourse or debate (Giragosian 2018: 11; Navasardyan 2018: 20). In general, public attitudes towards civil society actors have been characterized by distrust and critique on their inefficiency – for instance, suspiciously calling employees of Western funded institutions "Sorosians" (Manasyan 2018: 22; Navasardyan 2018: 20, 22). Also, young activists voice their incomprehension about the questionable motivation of grant-focused, narrow-minded NGOs that represent decent workplaces offering high salaries instead of being committed to non-profit and sacrificial work for society (Badalyan 2018; 19, 23, 25; Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 3, 7). This bad image of NGOs is further exacerbated as they are immediately labeled as GONGOs in case of government funding even though this label may not even apply (Paturyan 2018: 28).

Informal activism during Sarksyan's presidency

Even though protest culture had always been part of the Armenian culture, overtime people have increasingly withdrawn from public participation (Paturyan 2018: 10). Since the country had relied on the provision of aid by foreign donors for a long time, it took a while until the idea of ownership developed (Badalyan 2018: 19, 23, 25; Danielyan 2018: 26).

Similar to Georgia, for a long-time civil society in Armenia has solely been equated to NGOs as legitimate representatives of society, implementing projects with Western money. However, informal civic activism has increased since the mid-2000s, thereby bringing more diversity to the civil society sector (Doydoyan 2018: 21; Manasyan 2018: 22; Paturyan 2018: 2, 10, 22; Safaryan 2018: 20; Soghomonyan 2018: 4; Voskanyan 2018: 14). Protest movements, which clearly identified as non-political developed in a period of increasing mistrust and disappointment towards NGO activities and were further driven by the tragic happenings of March 1, 2008 when the government's severe crackdown of post-election protests caused ten fatalities (Kubiak 2018: 131-132; Soghomonyan 2018: 4, 43-44; Voskanyan 2018: 8). This new generation of young people, conscious about their political powerlessness, started to change societal sentiments towards the corrupt regime by applying different means and methods than their prede-

cessors or institutionalized counterparts (Iskandaryan 2018: 5, 7; Soghomonyan 2018: 43-44). As influence via democratic processes was impossible, this form of (civil) society used all means to put pressure, without having high expectations (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 17):

> [D]elegating our will was not something that we were able to do but raising our voice and screaming, and being a screamer, being a troublemaker, making sure they actually are paying attention to us rather than ignoring us was something that we were strategically and tactically doing. (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 17)

While before 2008 only the youth wings of political parties had been involved in actions, these informal structures of activism gained momentum in terms of quantity and quality particularly under Serzh Sarksyan's leadership. Initiated by small groups of mostly young people, civic movements sometimes attracted a few hundred people, while the biggest movement peaked with around 200 000 protesters for Electric Yerevan, when the attempted price rise on electricity triggered two weeks of disruption in the capital (Danielyan 2018: 12; Giragosian 2018: 53, 57; Kubiak 2018; Manasyan 2018: 26; Paturyan 2018: 2, 13-14; Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 9; Soghomonyan 2018: 6, 10). The first success, however, was Mashtots Park as the lengthiest movement (three-month period) that led to a moral and ideological victory of protest against an overstrained state power (Manasyan 2018: 26; Nersisyan 2018: 11; Soghomonyan 2018: 46). The example of the Teghut-movement revealed: the protest actions had a lasting effect as other communities in different regions used the experience as a role model (Soghomonyan 2018: 56).[106]

These initiatives were distinct from others in their reactionary engagement, the clear focus on particular topics, their solution-oriented and dynamic approach and methods of civil disobedience or road-blocs, as well as more commitment to critical discourse and more flexibility in their actions than grant-focused NGOs (Badalyan 2018: 11, 23, 31; Soghomonyan 2018: 4, 6, 10, 46).[107] Only few civic initiatives took up proactive attitudes by actively pointing to changes in the government agenda or promoting their own vision (Soghomonyan 2018: 24).[108] Interestingly, respondents shared the observation that the core of the protesting group comprised of the same

[106] On the basis of the Teghut-experience, parts of the rural population in Tavush region (another area which had been chosen by investors for future a mining project) organized themselves and used PR-material from environmental activists in the capital to struggle against the planned project; this material had also been used in Teghut and got disseminated via Internet (Soghomonyan 2018: 56).

[107] The most prominent have been "Save Teghut", "Let's save Trchkan waterfall" against the construction of a hydroelectric power station nearby the waterfall on Chichkhan river in a challenging environment, "Mashtots Park" against the creation of boutiques in a city park, "Dem em" which opposed the pension reform including obligatory input or "150 Dram movement" against a planned price increase in public transportation (Nersisyan 2018: 3-5; Soghomonyan 2018: 46, 56; for a comprehensive overview see Kubiak 2018 or Paturyan/Gevoryan 2016).

[108] As an example, Soghomonyan pointed to a multilayered civic initiative on education that has formulated an own agenda and is actively campaigning as well as strengthening grass-root education (2018: 22).

people who engaged in several civic movements irrespective of the particular topic of protest and who were in principle opposing and eager to do something apart from the "grant-eaters", the established organized civil society (Voskanyan 2018: 14; see also Iskandaryan 2018: 5, 7; Safaryan 2018: 20). As Iskandaryan discovers: "At 'Electric Yerevan' (…) I asked people who were at the protests, 'what is the price of electricity for you?' Just with one or two exceptions, they did not know. They didn't pay for electricity, because it was their parents who paid for electricity. It was a form of protests" (2018: 5). Importantly, they did not want to be lumped together with the institutionalized civil society, whereas the latter refused to join any protests preceding the revolution (Badalyan 2018: 15, 16-17; Giragosian 2018: 57, 69).

Rift between institutionalized civil society and informal civic activism

The interviews revealed a clear division among the role perceptions of institutionalized civil society actors and informal activists, in particular with respect to the Velvet Revolution in April 2018: NGO-members characterized themselves as important and even indispensable driving forces and preparatory institutions for the revolution by representing scientific and professional schools for criticism and by equipping protesters in seminars with political understanding, capabilities of problem analysis and knowledge about techniques of civil disobedience (Giragosian 2018: 73; Melikyan 2018: 66; Navasardyan 2018: 14; Safaryan 2018: 24, 26). Some even described themselves as active participants (Doydoyan 2018: 23).[109] Activists, on the contrary, claim that NGOs were largely irrelevant for the revolution – although they acknowledge that trainings on non-violent resistance and civil disobedience did contribute in a way (Paturyan 2018: 6; Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 11). Activists and participants of civil initiatives emphasize the inhibitory slowness and inefficiency of NGOs' office work, which did and still does not match the revolutionary dynamic (Soghomonyan 2018: 6, 12, 18). They criticize the hierarchy, non-representativeness and artificiality that civil society implied in its exclusion of other parts of actively engaged citizenry and informal groups (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 3, 7).

Scholars who observed the civic movements over the past years affirmed the role of NGOs as mobilizing networks and interconnecting nots that helped to stir up civic activism behind the scenes. They also emphasize the preparatory work by NGOs in filing court cases, gaining long-term experience and building awareness among citizens about their rights (Manasyan 2018: 22; Mission Armenia 2018: 22; Paturyan 2018 6, 20, 42). What this clearly shows is that both groups did not share a unifying "cultural language", and, in any case, the established political and civil institutions were confronted with public mistrust towards the entire political system (Giragosian 2018: 57; see also Safaryan 2018: 24). The revolution in April 2018 is seen as an end product of all these informal movements and the steady rise of civic activism (Giragosian 2018:

[109] However, this self-perception is disputed among respondents (see Safaryan 2018: 24, 26).

53; Soghomonyan 2018: 6). As the success of the upheaval was tangible, the institutionalized civil society "elite" actively engaged in social networks supporting the protests, although their reactions came late (Badalyan 2018: 11, 31, 33). The competition between the organized civil society that used to be the spokespeople or leaders, and demonstrators who took over leading positions during the recurring protests resulted in deep divides between NGOs and protestors and finally in the NGO community being sidelined from the happenings during the demonstrations (already visible during Electric Yerevan) (Giragosian 2018: 13, 57, 69; Voskanyan 2018: 14).[110]

Future challenges for the Armenian civil society are seen in the grace period that it is currently warranting to the new post-revolution government which is for the first time clearly its "friend"; but also in the formerly independent critical NGOs that lose their objectivity in trying to ensure the success of the revolution (Giragosian 2018: 27; see also Navasardyan 2018: 8, 12). "[T]hose that didn't join the government are challenged on how to behave, how to conduct themselves, how to work with the government who is close to their heart and who they are not used to doing anything but OPPOSE the government, never pur-pose or never engage" (Giragosian 2018: 27, emphasis in capitals). Furthermore, the collapse of the Armenian political system in April 2018 was accompanied by the heavy fluctuation of civil society actors that joined the government and blending of positions and roles (Navasardyan 2018: 12; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 4, 10). Even though a vacuum like the one in Georgia after the Rose Revolution is unlikely to emerge, confusion about the clear role and attitude of civil society towards the government is apparent (Voskanyan 2018: 42).

4.2.2. Political elites

The following sections take a closer look at the particularities, the unity, inner coherence and differentiation of another important intermediary actor, namely the political elite. Beside the consideration of role understandings and the overall style of leadership, the position and function within the political system will be taken into account which is expected to reflect structural as well as political cultural settings. In both cases, power elites clearly dominate the political landscape instead of value-based or functional elites.

4.2.2.1. Georgia: constant rotation and loops of return

Despite the obviously corrupted system, it was generally considered a prestige to be part of the Shevardnadze government (Aprasidze 2018: 21). Therefore, the political elite at that time

[110] Voskanyan described this by stating that CSOs have been limited in their formality and narrow-mindedness on Western approaches that they knew what phrases to use for gaining grants, but their discourses failed to reflect the realities on the ground (2018: 14).

was divided between the former communist bureaucrats and the new generation of young reformers who were personally linked to civil society (Stefes 2010: 102; Urushadze 2018: 42). The Rose Revolution, considered a political break, brought completely new elites to power that were personally and politically close to if not interlinked with civil society (Aprasidze 2018: 37; Nodia 2018: 18, 36). UNM at that time consisted of a small core of reformers that had mostly graduated from Western universities (Nodia 2018: 36).[111] Therefore, political elites since 2003 shared the common characteristic of a young age and foreign education and experience (Gherasimov 2019: 11; Urushadze 2018: 26). The new pro-European reformist political elites of the Saakashvili government raised high expectations regarding the democratization of Georgia, however, this euphoria was abandoned only few years later when distrust and disappointment grew within society towards the increasingly authoritarian leadership in particular and political institutions in general (Gherasimov 2019: 3; Stefes 2010: 103). Determination and decisiveness in its goals shaped the Saakashvili government. This could be seen in the tireless fight against corruption as well as state building efforts by a dedicated and cohesive team, whereas the development of society was not given much attention (Aprasidze/Siroky 2010: 131; Kldiashvili 2018: 14; Lortkipanidze 2018: 105). However, the neoliberal agenda pushed by the determined ruling elites did not correspond to the actual needs of society, which faced unemployment and poverty (Muskhelishvili 2018: 10; 2011: 6-7). In this way, owing to the painful transformation, citizenry became estranged from the government which led to protests in 2007 and 2008 (Muskhelishvili/Jorjoliani 2009: 696-697; Nodia 2018: 68).[112] Looking back with a degree of self-criticism, Tchiaberashvili, former UNM representative and member of the Saakashvili government notes:

> We have been arrogant. So, this is subjective. So that was wrong from our side. I mean, we've been doing such fast and rapid reforms that we didn't have time to explain everything to everyone and we ignored sometimes very valid criticism from the civil society. So, we've been in that regard arrogant. (2018: 11)

Furthermore, for the purpose of seizing even more power, oppositional movements and Eurosceptic parties were stigmatized during Saakashvili (Lebanidze 2018: 26).

Lack of cohesion and reliability of the political elite

The elite that constitutes the ruling GD government since 2012 emerged from the younger parts of the political elite during Shevardnadze's time and are therefore considered to be "spiritually" close to each other; however, in terms of homogeneity, the Saakashvili administration has

[111] Besides the narrowness of the ruling circle around Nino Burjanadze, Zurab Zhvania and Mikhail Saakashvili, a permanent "spinning merry-go-round of personnel", as some Ministers had to change position up to ten times in a six year period, characterized the government at that time (Jobelius 2012: 81).

[112] Georgian citizens at that time faced "obligatory endowments" as they had to hand over pieces of land to the state which would be resold to investors. This triggered massive protests and violent counteraction by police forces (Stöber 2019).

had an advantage (Tchiaberashvili 2018: 21; see also Aprasidze 2018: 37; Tugushi 2018: 13). What aggravates the disunity of the current government is also an apparent clash of generations (Tugushi 2018: 13). Overall, the pursuit strategy of retaining power lies in pragmatically taking small steps within the boundaries of necessity and clearly avoiding any risks, in short: "timid", "neutral" and "anxious" about popular discontent (Aprasidze 2012: 49; Lebanidze 2018: 38; Lortkipanidze 2018: 105). Therefore, Ivanishvili presents himself as very tolerant towards all sorts of political groups, also offering an open stage even for Eurosceptic forces (Lebanidze 2018: 26).

As regards their public presence, the Saakashvili administration radiated reliability and certainty in their actions by effectively communicating with the public, by arguing and defending their positions but also by shifting agendas in order to distract from unresolved problems (Media Rep. 2018: 18-20, 82). These days under the GD government, however, leadership itself is questionable, it lacks a clear, reliable communication strategy or policy agenda, and decision makers and qualifications are absent (Media Rep. 2018: 22, 24, 80; Muskhelishvili 2018: 26, 30). Instead, veto-playing and deadlock of development predominates, and Ivanishvili himself plays an important role in this (Muskhelishvili 2018: 26). Apart from the effective power of the elite, it is even questioned whether the political elite deserves this term, as it lacks both competence, experience and team spirit due to fast changing political personnel, fragmentation in different groupings and overall instable politics (Adam 2018: 55-56; Kokheridze 2018: 6, 24, 36, 42; Lortkipanidze 2018: 105, 110; Media Rep. 2018: 28; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 36). Qualification does not ensure reputation and job security for political elites as society is in constant search for new leaders leaving behind a highly contested political field (Muskhelishvili 2018: 30, 35-36). Also, the lack of cohesiveness within the dominant political camps in power has been a constant feature for the Georgian political elites when Shevardnadze's Citizen Union, UNM in power, or today, GD consisted of competing inner factions rather than a united core (Lebanidze 2018: 24-26; Lortkipanidze 2018: 105; Metreveli 2018: 73; Pruidze 2018: 6, 8; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 25; Tugushi 2018: 13). However, Ivanishvili himself may have played a crucial role in unifying the GD (Metreveli 2018: 73).

Dominant power politics and informality

Overall the political sphere is shaped by strong polarization of the political class, the lack of pluralism as well as antagonism between different political camps (Pruidze 2018: 6, 8; Urushadze 2018: 32, 34). As the political field is highly unfair, this makes it an easy task for Ivanishvili to divide and rule which ended in the split of the political opposition as they themselves lack a shared lowest common denominator and a clear strategy (Lebanidze 2018: 24-26; Nodia

2018a: 16; Urushadze 2018: 32, 34).[113] Comparing the political elite renewal in Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, Gherasimov points out that despite the social upheavals in the past, the mode of governance that has been applied by the subsequent political leadership(s) does not display any fundamental revisions of its formerly poor quality (2019: 3). Instead, charisma and personality outweigh ideological orientations or visions of future development and parties are dominated by and dependent on powerful individuals; as a matter of fact, it happens that debates on social questions sometimes even reveal the proximity of political rivals (Metreveli 2018: 7; Nodia 2018: 38). This top-down party system is based on a clientelist type of networks rather than issued from civil movements and the responsibility of its members is to find adequate loyal supporters (Gherasimov 2019: 5; Nodia 2018: 38).

At the regional level this is further aggravated as local governments are dependent on the central decision-making processes in Tbilisi: "So we don't have these political elites and especially we have no political elites in the regions because we do not have ANY politics in the region. We just have the order from the central government, and they will do everything what the central government will say" (Kokheridze 2018: 24, emphasis in capitals). In terms of regional political elites, the example of Kutaisi is striking as the city according to Kokheridze experienced 20 mayors in only 15 years (2018: 24)[114]. Furthermore, the "big men" in the municipalities and regional governments frequently change party affiliation according to the leadership in Tbilisi. Aspects that matter for politically high positions in the local government are both popularity, financial independence and good relationships to the party leaders (Aprasidze 2012: 39, 57). The centeredness on the metropolis, Tbilisi, in all terms of life but in particular as regards political decision-making and financial capabilities, implies that consciousness about developments outside already end at peri-urban areas, to the detriments of local self-government and the sense of alienation of citizens (Foundation Rep. 2018: 7, 42; Kldiashvili 2018: 28, 32; Kokheridze 2018: 24, 26; Lortkipanidze 2018: 46, 100; Nodia 2018: 28; Tkesheliashvili 2018: 40). The lack of a coherent strategy and policy agenda of the capital appropriate for the regional reality, impedes regional decision-making, reforms and progress (Lortkipanidze 2018: 46, 48, 60).

At large, the overall societal structure itself remains very elitist, aristocratic, discriminating rural population (Foundation Rep. 2018: 7, 42). The latest attempt to reform the constitution narrowed down to the focus on the electoral system, while skipping essential questions on the future vision of the country's structural development like on decentralization or questions on

[113] In January 2017 the majority of 21 of 27 UNM members left their party and established "European Georgia" party. The spit was preceded by a dispute on how to deal with UNM's former leader Saakashvili, while the majority advocated for a fundamental realignment of the party and the abandoning of absolute loyalty towards Saakashvili (Schiffers/Smolnik 2017: 2).

[114] Transparency International (2013) also documented in 2013 the 12th mayoral change in Kutaisi since 2003.

the social state (Foundation Rep. 2018: 17). Furthermore, the envisioned constitutional changes on the electoral system that were intended to increase representativeness and pluralism, thus, preventing future dominant power politics have been postponed until 2024; this obviously benefits the retention of power by GD, though they themselves had advocated for the abolishment of the majoritarian system in 2012 (Metreveli 2018: 55; Pruidze 2018: 6; Tugushi 2018: 57; see also Schiffers/Smolnik 2017: 2).[115]

In terms of leadership, Muskhelishvili observes an oscillating process of shifts between authoritarian leadership and chaotic veto-playing; therefore, as of today, sooner or later another leading personality is expected to replace the GD government (2018: 26). This re-emergence of a one-party rule that assumes complete control and governs without proper checks and balances happened now three times in Georgia's independent history (Urushadze 2018: 32, 34). Since 2016, the political landscape has become completely cleared as political parties do not encompass representative power anymore and are derived from an explicit political mandate (Aprasidze 2018: 14; Human Rights Expert 2018: 55; Nodia 2018a: 16).[116] The power of Ivanishvili as the ultimate decision maker is reflected in his capability to even blow agreed deals in parliament last minute and "cherry-pick" his entourage as he has no class behind him. This symbolism of complete control is not concealed but publicly portrayed (Nodia 2018: 36; see also Human Rights Expert 2018: 44; Muskhelishvili 2018: 26, 30). Informal ruling and the obvious lack of accountability as Ivanishvili had officially left the political arena in 2013 have shaped decision-making processes since then – until his comeback in 2018 (Urushadze 2018: 28).[117] The clear pyramid-shaped hierarchy of political power peaks in a one-person leadership while other members of the political elite are more or less skipped in decision-making, and delegation of responsibility is absent, which clearly runs counter to any democratic system (Kokheridze 2018: 20; Urushadze 2018: 28, 34).[118] The inexperienced, technocratic political elite installed by Ivanishvili that dominate the political landscape is judged as disastrous for representative politics (Muskhelishvili 2018: 30; Tugushi 2018: 47). Instead of the dominant political parties, a more diverse political landscape of three to four permanent parties is considered desirable (Tchiabe-

[115] As of 2018, about 51 percent of voters are represented by the absolute majority in the parliament whereas 49 percent are represented by only 1/5 deputes and completely lack representation in the executive government (Kldiashvili 2018: 24). The electoral reform will introduce a system of purely proportional representation; therefore,it represents the completion of the shift from the former presidential towards the parliamentary system (Schiffers/Smolnik 2017: 2).

[116] At that time GD had reached 75 percent majority in Parliament (Nodia 2018a: 16; see also Schiffers/Smolnik 2017).

[117] This is reflected in high level government positions like the two latest Prime Ministers that have been staffed by former loyal employees from Ivanishvili's companies (Urushadze 2018: 28; see also Gherasimov 2019: 5; Stöber 2016).

[118] Domination is not only reflected in the significantly low level of institutionalized control on the government, but also in terms of resources as the incumbents hold the overwhelming bulk of financial means at their disposal (Tugushi 2018: 57).

rashvili 2018: 21). However, the acquisition of "new comers" remains challenging as the younger generations reject any association with politics, while the political elite is renewing itself in varying constellations and coalitions, but still equipped with the same group of people (Aprasidze 2018: 35).

As government's interest are considered to be dominated by their own personal welfare, the voices of the locals are hardly heard. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that overall trust in political elites is low and the latter visions for the future development of the country do not necessarily reflect the citizens' interests (Kokheridze 2018: 6, 20; Meshveliani 2018: 2, 6; Metreveli 2018: 73, 83). Being involved in politics, what had been prestigious under Shevardnadze and Saakashvili, has become unpopular and even a stigma nowadays – as the experience of a human rights expert, formerly active at GYLA, who joined the GD-coalition for one-year mirrors:

> I was filled with that feeling that as I was with the political party for one year, but I was with the civil society organizations and the international organizations for 15 years, but still it mattered. […] [I]t's a stigma to be a politician in this country. […] [T]herefore, I'm not surprised that not many people want to go to politics. (Human Rights Expert 2018: 22)

Today, young people are afraid to engage with politics due to the lack of stability, thus leaving the political class with no experienced people with principles and values (Human Rights Expert 2018: 22, 55).

4.2.2.2. Armenia: effective reproduction and horizontal elite integration

Political elites in Armenia have always been interlinked to non-political powerful forces from the business sector and high-level military personnel (Zolyan 2012: 56). "Unite and rule" as the dominant strategy of an exclusive and limited circle of leadership has ensured the viability throughout three decades (Navasardian 2012: 100-102). Even though constellations varied, this way of retaining power has been kept until the presidency of Sarksyan:

The first Armenian revolution of 1988 to 1991, also known as the Karabakh Movement, was carried out by people without any political experience but with a background in academia and public reputation, the so-called new intelligentsia (Giragosian 2018: 33; Iskandaryan 2018: 23; Voskanyan 2018: 20). Political careers during Ter-Petrosyan's government were determined by one's closeness to the political forces or the disposition of promising business capabilities. Even though Ter-Petrosyan himself had not been engaged in any oligarchic structures before, he became dependent on the latter in order to retain power. During the second half of the 1990s, however, war heroes and the former military leaders of the Karabakh Movement, the "Karabakh Clan", became increasingly powerful, focusing on the nationalist narrative and the conflict (Giragosian 2018: 33; see also Navasardyan 2018: 48). Thereby, the first president initiated the grad-

ual narrowing of the ruling political circle and made himself vulnerable to the later coup (Giragosian 2018: 33).

During the second president's ruling period, the former nomenclature elite, who had experience in the Communist party establishment during the Soviet Union, intermingled with the Karabakh Clan and returned to office. Kocharyan himself, a strong man with managerial skills, macho mentality and an autocratic and intolerant leadership style, established an oligarchic system – clearly structured in terms of distribution of power and based on strict rules and loyalty (Danielyan 2018: 8; Navasardyan 2018: 8, 24, 38, 55; Voskanyan 2018: 12). His period in office was shaped by restrictions of freedom of expression and assembly, although a beneficial economic situation secured him some legitimacy in the short term regardless of the long-term trade-offs (Giragosian 2018: 35, 41; Navasardyan 2018: 38; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 44). Notwithstanding this welfare did not necessarily reach the ordinary citizenry, instead pompous infrastructural projects like the highly disputed Northern Avenue were realized and Kocharyan had a "bigger pie to share" with his patronage network (Giragosian 2018: 41; Soghomonyan 2018: 60). Kocharyan's intentional non-affiliation to any political party enabled him to juggle everyone and to rule and divide (Giragosian 2018: 35).

The disastrous events of March 1, 2008 preceded and overshadowed the tenure of Sarksyan as it lowered his position and constrained his power already beforehand (Giragosian 2018: 37). Sarksyan appeared as less an autocrat, more patient and reflected than his predecessor Kocharyan as well as less brutal against civil society; his refusal to call the army in April 2018 when protests grew in scale proved it (Paturyan 2018: 12; Soghomonyan 2018: 42).[119] Furthermore, during his tenure freedom of speech and human rights institutions developed at the same time as civic movements increased in number and size (Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 44). On these grounds, Sarksyan's strategy was to tolerate political opposition or protests for balanced policies in a seemingly democratic society, but by orchestrating it (Mission Armenia 2018: 80-81; Navasardyan 2018: 24). However, due to the bad economic development during the global recession, he was confronted with limited resources for taking care of the patronage network and loyal supporters (Giragosian 2018: 41).[120] Even though Sarksyan tried to continue his predecessor's system of power distribution among his loyal circles by awarding political positions for the purpose of intimidation or purchasing loyalty, he could not maintain the core group of unconditional supporters that Kocharyan has had at his disposal (Ghaplanyan 2018: 22; Giragosian 2018: 41, 43). Instead, unity, cohesion and power of the Karabakh-Clan continuously

[119] With a view to Sarksyan's lack of charisma and almost inconspicuous figure, he is even described as "Mr. Grey" (Giragosian 2018: 41, 43).

[120] The dense network of connections throughout the global due to the remittances by its diaspora and dependencies on foreign aid and – primarily Russian – economic support, Armenia was severely hit by the global economic crisis in the late zeros (Navasardian 2012: 100-101).

eroded, and criticism increased even inside the government questioning Sarksyan's eligibility (Aleksanyan 2018: 12; Giragosian 2018: 43). The only tactic that remained for the latter as he lacked both control and legitimacy, was to become flexible and to divide opposing groups within the elite (Giragosian 2018: 37; Navasardyan 2018: 38; Soghomonyan 2018: 40).[121]

Sarksyan's grasp for absolute unrestricted power by becoming Prime Minister in a Medvedev-Putin-manner after his ten years as president is considered as the last straw that broke the camel's back (Navasardyan 2018: 44). This "complacency and arrogance of power" coupled with the rising challenge of the one-party system and the complete disconnection to popular demands or alternative views turned out to be costly (Giragosian 2018: 25).

Patronage networks, personality-driven politics and clear rules

As outlined, the composition of the Armenian political elites has changed three-fold (Danielyan 2018: 34):[122] from a majority of political entrepreneurs (mostly military heroes) during the 1990s to a predominantly oligarchic, business elite under Kocharyan, to mainly technocrats during Sarksyan and finally the politically inexperienced, young protesters and civil society representatives that joined politics after the Velvet Revolution. The events in April 2018 dealt a "heavy blow" to the oligarchic elite (Paturyan 2018: 36). The new political elite under Pashinyan lacks prominence, political biography and experience as well as clear-cut policy concepts (Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 26). However, the realignment of political posts enabled the new post-revolution government to place educated experts on high-level positions in a transparent manner (Ghaplanyan 2018: 30; Safaryan 2018: 6).

Similar to Georgia, the Armenian political elite *per se* has always been reduced to very few powerful individual political figures and equated to personalities like Sarksyan or Kocharyan – people who are in power, even though they do not necessarily take on responsibility (Aleksanyan 2018: 14, 16; Danielyan 2018: 34). The political order has been clear: while the ruling circle comprised smart powerful people, the parliament was equipped by oligarchs united in internally autocratic parties who lend a helping hand during elections but lacked any serious (democratic) political understanding (Badalyan 2018: 35; Safaryan 2018: 6, 8). The presidential system until 2015 implied a strong pyramidal hierarchy of the political system. Furthermore, the state apparatus has seen high inflation with a bizarre high number of ministries with extremely low salaries, just for the purpose to get many people involved by stretching the budgets (Ghap-

[121] The reason for criticism was seen in Sarksyan's incapacity regarding his position like his inability to speak foreign languages or to use modern techniques of communication like social media (Aleksanyan 2018: 12).

[122] The transitions themselves differed as the first shift from Petrosyan to Kocharyan was forced while Sarksyan represented the hand-picked successor by Kocharyan (Giragosian 2018: 35). For a comprehensive overview, see Iskandaryan/Mikaelian/Minasyan 2016: 42-59.

lanyan 2018: 22; Giragosian 2018: 83). Of course, this reinforced the risk of corruption and budget mismanagement (Ghaplanyan 2018: 22). The uniting interest focused on the retention of power while the overall administration lacked competence on necessary reforms and policies (Aleksanyan 2018: 6, 16; Manasyan 2018: 12; Soghomonyan 2018: 40). Put in a nutshell how Safaryan, a former leading member of one of the most successful oppositional party, Heritage, notes:

> [I]t's a drama to speak about the political elite of Armenia, because it's just an elite by name, but not by quality. Because all those people who are in the politics, (…) they are there not because of free and fair competition. They are not there for their merits as political - as politician, as very capable or experienced person. But because traditionally Armenian parties have been clubs surrounding very charismatic personalities and providing - or (…) having loyalty for ALL decisions he made. (2018: 6, emphasis in capitals)

The ruling political elite has effectively reproduced itself while leaving almost no room or flexibility for opposition to develop and rise, instead opposition forces and minority views faced discretization or represented only a clientele opposition (Manasyan 2018: 46; Safaryan 2018: 6; Soghomonyan 2018: 40). Party members, therefore, either signified financial gains for the leadership or acted as their spokesperson but were not politicians (Aleksanyan 2018: 6; Safaryan 2018: 6). Even the members of the dominant RP did not have any effective influence and power as the ruling circle of political elites (Aleksanyan 2018: 16). In this way, the Heritage party as a pro-Western and – initially – internally democratic political party, that had been founded in 2002 by Raffi Hovhannisyan, was as a decisive exceptional case, as it brought politics back in and struggled against the dominant stereotype of politics as a mere fight for power (Safaryan 2018: 2, 4). Tellingly, the opposition party frequently was mistaken with an NGO active in advocacy on public interests, as the mere existence of alternative political views had been unusual for the Armenian reality (Safaryan 2018: 6). However, also Heritage experienced an authoritarian backlash in 2011 coupled with the frustration within the population by not setting up popular figures on the voting lists, the party finally lost power in a very timely manner (Safaryan 2018: 8).[123]

Unlike the Georgian case, the reproduction mechanism of ruling elites in Armenia did not bring civil society members to power, apart from few GONGO personnel that could enter the circle of political elites (Navasardyan 2018: 46). Besides, Giragosian describes the system of elite-reproduction as flawed in itself as the ruling political elites had a limited and even shrinking Yerevan-based pool of candidates at their disposal while the regions were entirely governed

[123] The dependence on funding by the party leader Raffi Hovhannisyan himself exacerbated the rapid breakdown (Safaryan 2018: 12).

by presidentially appointed governors (2018: 33).[124] Sarksyan – the "last of the Mohicans" from the Karabakh-Clan, which had still dominated the political elite during the first years under Kocharyan – closed the system by not listening alternative opinions outside the ruling circle – raising hands for the purpose of legitimating the decisions taken by leaders was seen as sufficient political engagement (Girgaosian 2018: 33, 37; Safaryan 2018: 6). This lack of broader political cadres was also reflected in the attitude of citizens to approach the Prime Minister directly instead of targeting lower-level authorities (Manasyan 2018: 30).

Although formally the former ruling RP was considered a conservative party, in reality, it lacked both a distinct ideological orientation or overall interest in political ideas or vision (Iskandaryan 2018: 3). Instead, what has dominated the political sphere were parties of power, transaction-policies as well as the division of concessions of economic and political power (Iskandaryan 2018: 3):

> Political stability over these twenty years mostly were based on the common interest of money. Of course, there were still some rivalries between them because money is the same and the resources are the same, but they somehow agreed to divide, I mean to just 'this is your portion, this is your portion, this is yours'. (Danielyan 2018: 36)

Increasing decoupling of politics and societal reality

While Georgia fought a painful battle against corruption under Saakashvili, until very recently this ruinous informal governance has been an omnipresent characteristic of the Armenian elite – not only political – and is considered a heavy burden for the Armenian society (Aleksanyan 2018: 8; Iskandaryan 2018: 3).

A high-level representative of the formerly ruling RP ascribes a "quite amorphous" role to political elites as well as political parties owing to the ongoing democratic transition of the country that impedes their outright development (Republican Party 2018: 4). This is also reflected in civil society actors' observation that political processes in general took very long (Doydoyan 2018: 5). What becomes clear, however, is that political parties did not fulfil their role in taking on responsibility or "[bridging] public policies with politics" (Safaryan 2018: 20). "[I]t was a great mistake of the Republicans. Because if you don't have politics in parliament and if you don't have politics in politics, it will come from some other place" – while this 'other place' refers to civil society sector and its strong politicization as well as the emergence of civic movements (Iskandaryan 2018: 5). During the one-party rule, the ever-smaller circle of decision makers lost

[124] Interestingly, despite the vigorous policy of centralization in the capital, smaller cities like Gyumri have always kept their revolutionary and anti-government stance during previous years and local voters remained unreceptive for bribes or other forms of interference (Manasyan 2018: 36).

contact to the reality on the ground and thereby, the RP underestimated the societal forces (Giragosian 2018: 25; Soghomonyan 2018: 36):

> The way the government disconnected from the people, it wasn't sensing the pulse of the population that they missed that window where they could […] prevent the further mass scale of the whole process. And they were so disconnected and detached from reality – from what civil society and the population of Armenia wanted or was expecting. (Ghaplanyan 2018: 6)

At the time of the fieldwork, the outlook of the upcoming political developments remained obscure as the Velvet Revolution had created a completely new political situation. In terms of political leadership and political elites, it is expected that Pashinyan – again reduced to a single personality – will take lessons of past failures of leaders' engagement with oligarchs (Navasardyan 2018: 50). However, concerns with respect to the risk of populism, high expectations of society and the anonymity of new post-revolution political cadres have also been raised (Republican Party 2018: 4; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 12, 56). Furthermore, the strong self-confidence of the new government and the lack of skilled officials in terms of political experience and competence in communication policy as well as legal requirements and obligations are considered as crucial upcoming challenges (Badalyan 2018: 49; Doydoyan 2018: 3, 13; Navasardyan 2018: 14).[125] Inherited structures from the preceding regime are still in place and will draw energy and resources of the new political elite (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 13).

4.2.3. Interrelations in the intermediary sphere

In order to understand the complex dynamics within the intermediary sphere and to subsequently derive assumptions with regard to stability of the two grey zone regimes, it is necessary to take a deeper look at the playing field of the outlined intermediary actors – of civil society and political elites – and the established rules of the game.

4.2.3.1. Georgia: blended boundaries through cooperation and recruitment

As discussed previously, in Georgia NGOs are commonly equated to quasi-political institutions since they have often served as helpful stepping-stones to get involved in politics (Muskhelishvili 2018: 34). The blending started already with Saakashvili and the UNM by intentionally selected cooperation and isolation (Aprasidze 2018: 12): in joining the government in the course of the Rose Revolution, most active, Western-educated civil society actors played a significant role for the initial process of democratization during the early 2000s while, as a result, their own sphere of intermediary power was devastated (Human Rights Expert 2018: 16; Mesh-

[125] The high reliance on social media like Facebook is criticized as it is no official and legally enforceable tool for communication, and still, superficially it creates the impression of receptiveness and covers the actual passiveness (Doydoyan 2018: 3, 13).

veliani 2018: 12; Metreveli 2018: 15, 89, 93; Pruidze 2018: 18; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 7; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 14; Urushadze 2018: 6). Beside the lack of a real social power of the remaining civil society at that time, the government – equipped by migrated former civil society members – looked down on those left behind and partnership became impossible (Human Rights Expert 2018: 10; Nodia 2018: 18). The environment of fear due to harsh methods, restrictions and gross human rights violations also created a worldview of black and white (Human Rights Expert 2018: 10; Metreveli 2018: 93; Pruidze 2018: 18; see also Muskhelishvili 2011: 6). The same backward tendency of political officials moving to civil society happened in 2012, which is also taken as an explanatory factor for the latter's irreconcilable rigor towards the current government (Foundation Rep. 2018: 5; Human Rights Expert 2018: 12). However, the atmosphere completely changed and lost its horrors as freedom of expression and civil rights became guaranteed (Human Rights Expert 2018: 16). Besides, it needs to be considered that the mere small size of Georgia has an impact on the exchange of personnel between political posts and civil society and is even necessary in terms of limited human resources (Metreveli 2018: 3; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 23).

The proximity of civil society and political elites due to former political careers of today's CSO leaders is also reflected in their issue-based coalitions, the political orientation of civil society and the overall blending of civic and political activism (Metreveli 2018: 19, 53; Nodia 2018: 10, 18). However, the interlinkage based on mutual recruitment of civil society and political elites is viewed critically by Aprasidze and Kokheridze as it promoted stagnation due to a frequent conflation of roles and merely cosmetic changes (Aprasidze 2018: 43; Kokheridze 2018: 28, 44). Apart from the exchange in personnel, governments tend to take up concepts developed by civil society on various issues (good governance, accountability, transparency, effectiveness etc.) and benefit from reputation, contacts and competence (Lortkipanidze 2018: 64-66; 68; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 20). As Metreveli observes, there has been an eagerness "to get [a] product" from civil society (2018: 47). Thereby, the weakness of political institutions in terms of resources in knowledge and expertise is filled with ideas and approaches coming from civil society (Pruidze 2018: 10, 14). Thus, for instance, in having the political backing of civil society actors during the last years of the Saakashvili administration, oppositional forces gained in power and had an additional entitlement for justifying the installment of a new government during the 2012 elections (Nodia 2018: 22; Urushadze 2018: 15-18). This has also been prominently displayed during the Saakashvili administration which pursued ideas that obviously had been developed by civil society, inter alia fueled by the discourse of the Rose Revolution (Nodia 2018: 14). However, in particular Saakashvili's government intentionally disconnected with civil society negating their need and ignoring criticism; thus, only highly selective formats like an inter-agency council with an exclusive group of three to five most active NGOs were accepted (Human

Rights Expert 2018: 16; Kldiashvili 2018: 4; Metreveli 2018: 90-91; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 11, 15; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 32). Today, political activism and advocacy are regarded as important tools to persuade the central government of the crucial prevention of an even more severe uneven development in the future (Metreveli 2018: 53; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 40). While in the past, the intermediary sphere was quite imbalanced in terms of authorities' and NGOs' strengths and weaknesses, today both are equal in terms of capacity and expertise (Human Rights Expert 2018: 16; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 20).[126]

Funding practice by the government has never played a decisive role in the civil society-state relation, apart from the media sector (Metreveli 2018: 45). The special role of media as being strongly interlinked with political camps – also funding-wise due to the lack of self-sustainability of media outlets (Media Rep. 2018: 14; Tugushi 2018: 69, 71) – and shaped by politicization as well as polarization has already been discussed. It needs to be emphasized that the repeated attempts to fully control the media sphere failed, though, leaving behind an ambiguous atmosphere and uncertainty (Lebanidze 2018: 46).

External driven and selective cooperation

The publicly voiced willingness to get closer to the EU and to follow the direction of Euro-Atlantic Integration has required the government to listen to CSOs (even though sometimes just half-heartedly) (Kokheridze 2018: 6; Metreveli 2018: 3; Urushadze 2018: 10, 22).[127] An even stronger incentive is seen in the donors' conditionality to have more interaction within the intermediary sphere as funding remains vital (Nodia 2018: 10). However, these developments are rather linked to the late years of Saakashvili and beyond as under the latter's government, authorities at that time frequently interfered in cooperation formats by introducing newly created NGOs supportive of the government, or interacted only superficially with civil society (Human Rights Expert 2018: 10, 16; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 30): "It was kind of 'façade', a window dressing for the government – they were turning to the donors, to the EU, to the US that you know: We have these NGOs everywhere and we were allowed to express our opinion. But the problem was that our opinion was not taken into consideration" (Human Rights Expert 2018: 16).

[126] Strong civil society before the Rose Revolution was coupled with a weak state – and vice versa during the Saakashvili era. Civil society has gained strength since the late years of Saakashvili (Lortkipanidze 2018: 11, 13, 31).

[127] The particular examples of close cooperation between civil society actors and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on visa liberalization action plans as well as within the Interagency Commission on a migration strategy have been mentioned (Tkeshelashvili 2018: 26).

Today, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) program is frequently mentioned as a prime example of successful high-level cooperation (Kldiashvili 2018: 2; Pruidze 2018: 10).[128] Relating thereto, institutionalized forms of interaction have been set up like annual meetings between political elites and civil society as well as the obligation to provide explanatory notes on new or amended legislation, which both serve the overall transparency of political processes (Pruidze 2018: 10). Another outstanding example for successful and far-reaching cooperation can be found in joint European Integration efforts, where partnership between civil society and political elites is actively cultivated (Pruidze 2018: 8).[129] Cooperation is also positively assessed on the local level, where civil society councils are established that enable more transparency and monitoring mechanisms (Lortkipanidze 2018: 4, 6, 11). Apart from these examples of formally created mechanisms of interaction, however, real cooperation remains limited to the field of human rights and good governance, and established consultation mechanisms are often assessed as "wasted time" because decisions have often already been predetermined (Kldiashvili 2018: 2; Media Rep. 2018: 28; Urushadze 2018: 6).

Lobbying of CSOs, however, has had multiple success stories in terms of changing the legislation for the benefit of democratization (Urushadze 2018: 14).[130] Viewed positively, the government benefits from the public oversight that is exercised by civil society as long as it is balanced with cooperation (Kldiashvili 2018: 6). Therefore, the government appears receptive to dialogue and is open-minded to the alternative views and perspectives coming from civil society (Tchiaberashvili 2018: 13; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 32). In this way, consultation with civil society is used for legitimizing decisions as being democratic, even though the recommendations are frequently not taken into account later on (Metreveli 2018: 31, 95; Lortkipanidze 2018: 13, 36, 43; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 31-32).

Inconsistent and dualistic roles of intermediaries

The atmosphere between intermediary actors has also been reflected on broader society: The hostile attitude of the government towards civil society during the Shevardnadze regime for instance impacted the overall stance of the population towards the regime. The same was true for the Saakashvili era which was shaped by abuses of power and favoritism that triggered discontent and mobilization (Tkeshelashvili 2018: 12). Nonetheless, today, viewed from the societal perspective, the blended boundaries and dualistic roles of civil society and political elites

[128] The Permanent Special Council of Open Government represents an institutionalized and interfactional format for collaboration with 15 CSOs in the consultative group with a focus on the creation and implementation of action plans (Pruidze 2018: 10).

[129] The Eastern Partnership civil society forum is both platform and successful tool to generate interlinkage as well as cooperation by having joint hearings, sharing information or discussing shadow reports (Tkeshelashvili 2018: 26; Pruidze 2018: 10).

[130] Informally, civil society actors had already been lobbying during the Shevardnadze regime by engaging with allies in the government (Urushadze 2018: 42).

remain obscure, incomprehensible and make intermediaries even alien in that sense (Kokheridze 2018: 42; see also Aprasidze/Siroky 2010: 125). As a result, there is high distrust between society and the state (Muskhelishvili 2018: 37-38).[131]

As being involved in politics is increasingly stigmatized, the nexus of civil society and political elites resembles more a rupture than cohesion (Human Rights Expert 2018: 22, 38). This is also supported by the idea that the mere role of civil society in criticizing the state leads to a relation of discomfort between the intermediaries (Kldiashvili 2018: 2). While informal civic activists have more difficulties in communicating with the state, cooperation and openness towards organized civil society exists, but it often remains quite superficial as successful joint negotiations can be abandoned overnight (Foundation Rep. 2018: 34, 38). Furthermore, though linkage always existed, it has been narrowed over time in terms of representativeness and today only involves a small circle of NGOs which by number remain non-representative of the broader society (Aprasidze 2018: 8, 12; Muskhelishvili 2018: 40).

The ambiguous post-"honey-moon" period of reciprocal critical and even negative attitudes of both civil society and governing political elites requires communication as a connecting link. In particular, as increasing discontent is voiced within a completely free and non-restrictive environment for criticism and even willingness to engage (Tugushi 2018: 3, 15, 75). Today, however, the government often responds to NGOs' criticism offensively and by using pro-governmental allies to back their views (Kldiashvili 2018: 2, 4, 20; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 21).[132] Still, the government remains fearful of the streets and potentially bigger consequences of protests (Nodia 2018: 10). Therefore, the atmosphere is equated to a blend of the Saakashvili and Shevardnadze period in terms of the government's anxiety coupled with apparently more openness towards civil society as the costs of isolating actors are seen as high (Aprasidze 2018: 12; Metreveli 2018: 47). On the other hand, maximum and non-compromising demands of civil society actors towards decision-makers are considered challenging to be meet (Foundation Rep. 2018: 38). As a representative of an international foundation argues, there is a dire need to abandon intransigence: "Somehow, you have to go back to a more realistic expectation manage-

[131] In comparing Georgia to Moldova and Ukraine, Gherasimov points to the high distrust in all three countries while the former shows the highest distrust in political parties which has even increased significantly from 2006 to 2016 (2019: 7).

[132] The personal example of an interviewee from civil society in being surveilled and arrested after criticizing the law enforcement agency about illegal surveillance evidently affirms this observation (Kldiashvili 2018: 2). Another example for the challenging communication gap is reflected in NGOs demanding the resignation of the justice minister and the government keeping her on purpose, even though they otherwise would have wanted to dismiss her (Tugushi 2018: 3).

ment – about what politics can actually do etc., in the difficult circumstances" (Foundation Rep. 2018: 40).[133]

To conclude on the relationship status of intermediary actors: it is complicated (Foundation Rep. 2018: 11, 34, 38). However, a clear difference to neighboring Armenia – apart from the timing – is the possibility and actual experience of movement and collaboration between civil society and political elites (Aprasidze 2018: 6).

4.2.3.2. Armenia: consultation under Chatham House rules

Alternating professional careers in both civil society, academia and politics have not been very common in Armenia (Badalyan 2018: 35; Navasardyan 2018: 8, 46; Safaryan 2018: 2).[134] Instead, separation and polarization prevailed (Giragosian 2018: 7).Tellingly, a long-term civil society representative concludes, that though the success of the revolution and the shift of civil society actors to government, the former finally "became a power" (Nersisyan 2018: 11).

During the early years, the state had shown little interest in the civil society spectrum, thus refrained from interfering but also from contributing (Mission Armenia 2018: 6). Advocacy, therefore, became an important tool for civil society in order to come into the government's view and to be able to trigger progress (Mission Armenia 2018: 6, 15). As CSOs also tried to use different solution-oriented approaches apart from mere criticism, the political forces allowed more openness (Mission Armenia 2018: 8-10; Nersisyan 2018: 33). While under Kocharyan, receptiveness was limited to few specific policies, Sarksyan further opened up the political game towards civil society (Paturyan 2018: 10). However, the political elites were generally displeased to be criticized and though civil society pro-actively and non-conditionally offered its support towards the political regime, the latter's attitude remained superficial, solely approving government-directed cooperation under Chatham House rules (Aleksanyan 2018: 2, 6, 8; Nersisyan 2018: 33).[135] In this way the government kept civil society "malnourished" and did not commit itself to consider outside views (Ghaplanyan 2018: 8; see also Giragosian 2018: 7, 25). The reason why civil society's field of action has apparently been free and non-restricted is related to its perceived harmlessness in the eyes of the ruling elites and the mutual benefit of foreign funding (Navasardyan 2018: 8, 18; Voskanyan 2018: 14, 44).

[133] Original citation: "Da muss man irgendwie zu einem realistischeren Erwartungsmanagement zurück – überhaupt darüber, was Politik überhaupt leisten kann, usw. unter den schwierigen Umständen" (2018: 40).

[134] However, by pointing to his own individual experience, Safaryan acknowledged the interlinkage of expert and political society (2018: 2).

[135] Under Sarksyan political meetings had been subjected to privacy (Melikyan 2018: 96).

Dependency structures and decoupling effects

By effectively ignoring criticism and not attending genuine discussions with civil society actors – which for their part were primarily seen as service providers in terms of research and handy policy recommendations – the government did not take dissatisfaction seriously and became detached from civil society in particular but also from broader society in general (Ghaplanyan 2018: 6, 8; Manasyan 2018: 8, 10). This has also been reflected in the reactions towards civic pressure. Sometimes these actions were repressed (even violently) – in case the actions were politically sensitive – sometimes they were successful, sometimes they were ignored; but in any case, they did not see consequences in terms of reforms or political changes (Danielyan 2018: 16; Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 17; Soghomonyan 2018: 48, 50). Instead of representing and taking public will into account, power and domination of the previous regime governed all spheres of life (Shahndazaryan A. 2018). This also targeted the media sector as outlets acted like "party attributes"[136] are still renowned for being associated to specific political parties (Badalyan 2018: 63; Melikyan 2018: 43, 45-47)[137].

Whereas one part of CSOs officially receives funding according to a resolution by the president, serious doubts have been raised on state donations as increases in financial support correlated with election periods and, therefore, are classified as bribes for acquiring votes under the pretext of project implementation (Nersisyan 2018: 75, 89, 93). "I cannot say that if we are talking about the government that it cared about any specific role of civil society. If they were accepting civil society as such, only if this civil society organizations are loyal to them. So, we had a big army of so called "GONGOs" in Armenia until recently" (Navasardyan 2018: 8). For the purpose of counterbalancing the critical, pro-Western and pro-democratic NGO community the government even funded several organizations with a patriotic and more tradition-oriented agenda (Danielyan 2018: 16). Another strategy was to cherry-pick and promote favorites within the large array of politically supportive GONGOs among the donor community in order to receive financial treatment which could be kept more under their control (Navasardyan 2018: 8).

Over the years of Sarksyan's leadership, when criticism was tolerated but did not show any impact, the relationship between institutionalized civil society and political elites developed a tacit callousness of 'live and let live' or as Navasardyan framed it:

> So, it was a comfortable life. You are kind of playing your role and you're fine. So (…) And this was also ok for Sarksyan, because he never cared about criticism. 'Ok, if this does not prevent me from doing what I want, let it be such criticism.' So, it was kind

[136] Original citation: "Partei-Prädikate" (Melikyan 2018: 57). Stefes notes that during Kocharyan the only TV stations critical towards the government (A1+ and Noyan Tapan) closed down (2010: 108).

[137] Like Yerkik Media to Dashnaktsutyun, Hash Yerek (H3) to Orinats Yerkik or Ararat TV to the RP (Melikyan 2018: 43, 45-47).

> of a bilateral game. Both sides were happy and no dialogue, real dialogue was taking place - constructive dialogue, when we are suggesting something, but when you see strong argument from the government, you might agree and compromise. This process almost was non-existent. (2018: 18)

Another view on the nexus describes it as a mode of delegation and pool of resources for the government: services were delegated to NGOs based on their lack of capacity, experience and knowledge, sometimes even backed by financial support (Manasyan 2018: 14, 24; Mission Armenia 2018: 6, 17, 19, 20; Nersisyan 2018: 75; Republican Party 2018: 12):

> [W]e have good experience in the social field as compared to the government (…) colleagues that do not have so much experience […] [I]n this regard, they trust us, and they ask for experience, for knowledge. Up to now. Sometimes I feel like we are the state (haha). (Mission Armenia 2018: 15)

From the side of political forces, this form of cooperation was beneficial in terms of gaining first-hand expertise for policies and laws (Doydoyan 2018: 9; Paturyan 2018: 10; Republican Party 2018: 10). Similar to Georgia, the field of OGP opened up another opportunity for successful cooperation when civil society engaged in co-designing action plans with the government (Doydoyan 2018: 9, 11).

Ambiguous interlinkages

The government tolerated civil society actors by inviting them or establishing advisory committees or groups for discussion on the basis of obliged formality but not on an equal basis for discussion (Manasyan 2018: 22). As a sign of more transparency and openness to cooperate, respondents pointed to the establishment of a portal for draft legislation including the possibility of suggestions on amendments and comments (Mission Armenia 2018: 8-10, 129-131). The formation of different councils and platforms like the Public Council in 2009, which brought together civil society and political elites was also meant to enable exchange and more transparent procedures (Aleksanyan 2018: 4).[138] The assessments of its meaningfulness, however, remain ambiguous as the Council unites around 1 000 NGOs and meetings were only for protocol but without real impact (Aleksanyan 2018: 6, 8; Navasardian 2012: 102). Interlinkages were also smartly driven by foreign donors that obliged the government to establish close cooperation between civil society actors; in particular during the negotiations on the Association Agreement and later on CEPA the EU-demand was well received by the government. This was particularly linked to the applied conditionality by the EU which offered the prospect of financial resources in the case of meeting certain requirements (Badalyan 2018: 3, 35; Paturyan 2018: 38). Yet, even those formats had a very limited framework of action without comprehensive discussions but

[138] Another example is the Analytical Council under the auspices of the Committee on Foreign Relations (Republican Party 2018: 10).

room for uploading criticism and for directly addressing officials. The ruling elites, however, mostly ignored external pressure and stuck to their agenda, thereby leaving behind mere mock involvement and cooperation (Aleksanyan 2018: 6, 8; Soghomonyan 2018: 48).

The perception about the atmosphere of interlinkage between civil society and the political forces therefore proved to be divided among the respective actors: while few emphasized the possibility to actively participate in law-making processes based on civil society expertise (Doydoyan 2018: 7; Nersisyan 2018: 33), others qualified the relations as constantly oppositional and confrontational (Danielyan 2018: 54; Giragosian 2018: 7, 17; Republican Party 2018: 10). The latter does not come as a surprise as political elites – like Ter Petrosyan after 2008 – tried to use civic movements and the support of institutionalized civil society for their own political benefit. This resulted in the conscious departure and split of civic movements from politics and the widening gap of mistrust towards political institutions but also civil society (Safaryan 2018: 20).

Prior to the happenings in April 2018, civil society's opportunities to participate or influence were similarly limited like those for oppositional forces and had been reduced to a more "decorative role". Therefore, NGOs frequently complained about the state being deaf to their voices (Voskanyan 2018: 17-18, see also Paturyan 2018: 22). This changed dramatically afterwards as roles and personnel of civil society, civic movements and political parties became interlinked (Aleksanyan 2018: 2). After ten years of civil disobedience, civic movements like "Reject Serzh" for the first time operated together with "My step" of Nikol Pashinyan during the revolution. As of this date, activists approved to combine civic activism with a political agenda, which is considered a U-turn in collaboration. Also, the political figure of Pashinyan took partnership and cooperation seriously (Paturyan 2018: 2, 4; Safaryan 2018: 20, 30; Soghomonyan 2018: 10). This powerful unification has been considered a pivotal moral and ideological advantage of the protesting masses against (overstrained) state power (Soghomonyan 2018: 46).

4.3. Tracing back (absent) deviations of stability

On the basis of the outlined characteristics of the intermediary sphere in both countries, the following analysis focuses on identifying factors of divergent outcomes of regime persistence and instability. Therefore, it also incorporates theoretical arguments delineated at the beginning of this study (see chapter 2).

4.3.1. Georgia: destabilizing factors triggering fluctuations and changes in direction

First and foremost, a reflection will be given on the interviewees' direct responses and assessment regarding stability, both with a view to the past and the present and by offering their own ideas on potential influencing factors and dynamics at different times. This allows for a first

idea about important considerations that need to be taken into account for the subsequent analysis and it provides a mental framework to structure the following thoughts. Nevertheless, these more general observations require further differentiation with regard to the (in)congruence of political culture and structural developments, or in other words, the societal fabric that provides insights into varying degrees of stability.

4.3.1.1. Encounter of internal and external dynamics

Overall, respondents have come to a negative assessment of the stability of the Georgian political system, and – until recently – have considered recurring instability a prevalent characteristic of the country's independent history (see for example Kokheridze 2018: 42; Lebanidze 2018: 40; Muskhelishvili 2018: 50; Tugushi 2018: 37). Although Shevardnadze (until 2002) as well as Ivanishvili enjoyed credibility in terms of representing stability by personality, their increasing unpopularity, at least in Shevardnadze's case, proved to have consequences (Aprasidze 2018: 47; Lebanidze 2018: 40). Apart from his personality, the entirely corrupted government bureaucracy of Shevardnadze lost control, had no effective response to protests and simply collapsed (Lebanidze 2018: 40; Stefes 2010: 107; Urushadze 2018: 40). The Saakashvili period for its part is considered revolutionary but not durable forever as the population got deprived of "oxygen" and would not obey in everything, in particular as UNM lost sensitivity to context and connection to popular feelings (Kldiashvili 2018: 38; Metreveli 2018: 99). This disconnection has been further exacerbated by the one-party regime that displayed an incredible arrogance combined with serious human rights abuses (Lebanidze 2018: 40; Urushadze 2018: 38). However, the crisis during the second term unveiled that protest could appear one day or another (Urushadze 2018: 38).

Instability today is associated more to intra-societal cleavages, in particular of the generation born after independence that is confronted with uncertainty about their future, and clashes of liberal and conservative narratives and visions (Kokheridze 2018: 6, 8, 20). But, socio-economic conditions and the divide between rich and poor have also influenced societal discontent. At the same time, these days, this also averts a revolutionary atmosphere as people are more passive and occupied with earning their daily living (Tchiaberashvili 2018: 50; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 50; Tugushi 2018: 54-55). The lack of alternatives as well as the low trust in both political parties and NGOs leads people to draw back and accept stagnation whereas the situation within the political arena remains aggressive (Muskhelishvili 2018: 8, 30; Tugushi 2018: 3, 55).

The interference and leverage effect of external actors, most and foremost the EU and the Russian Federation, as well as regional dynamics are seen as crucial factors for past and future (in)stability (Human Rights Expert 2018: 46; Kldiashvili 2018: 34, 40, 42; Meshveliani 2018:

25): in particular, Russia's borderization policy, the ongoing occupation of territories and anti-Western propaganda are claimed to continuously destabilize the country. People are in constant fear of a renewed outbreak of violence while the country is in permanent search of the right approach to balance Western and Eastern influences (Media Rep. 2018: 36; Lebanidze 2018: 40; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 42; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 50; Pruidze 2018: 26). In this regard, the August War between Georgia and Russia in 2008 is considered to having had a huge backlash on stability of the country (Pruidze 2018: 32). The European direction itself with the uniting strategy of EU and Euro-Atlantic Integration acts as a stabilizing factor (Adam 2018: 18, 44; Human Rights Expert 2018: 46; Meshveliani 2018: 25). The instabilities in the immediate vicinity have also impacted Georgia. As Kldiashvili framed it, developing democracy in Georgia in this regional neighborhood is regarded as living in an "oasis [within a] desert" (2018: 34; see also Muskhelishvili 2018: 54; Stöber 2016). Interestingly enough, on the downside this fear of the outside enemy delineates also the smallest common denominator, which strengthens national unity and is used for externalizing internal problems (Foundation Rep. 2018: 50).

The constant search for new political elites and leaders which is based solely on their reputation further destabilizes the political system (Lortkipandize 2018: 60; Muskhelishvili 2018: 8, 30). This fragile political environment, however, is also positively assessed as a possibility for change in terms of having forced the government to be more open and to attentively listen to citizen's voices. Therefore, as of today, people are more worried about stagnation than instability, in particular as economic success has largely been limited to macroeconomic stability but not necessarily to an improvement of ordinary people's lives, which entails a potential for radicalization (Kokheridze 2018: 38; Nodia 2018: 62; Urushadze 2018: 38, 46).[139]

4.3.1.2. Subject-attitude of citizenry: control instead of participation

With independence and the collapse of communist ideology, the Georgian society demodernized and went back to traditional values, as the past as well as an attitude of survival and the orientation towards church and the private space became the foundations of the self(-identity) (Muskhelishvili 2018: 46). Informal ways of interaction like the management behind the curtain, kinship networks and the focus on personal gains had survived from Soviet times and as during these early days of independence there was no arena for people to speak publicly

[139] The latest crisis of public protests in May and June 2018 (one due to a police raid in the famous techno nightclub Bassiani and the other on the controversial investigation of the murder of a teenager) demonstrated the government's overstraining as it showed more flexibility and made concessions (Urushadze 2018: 38).

besides the 'supra'[140] – instead, they went into private (Gherasimov 2019: 5-6; Kokheridze 2018: 10, 14; Nodia 2018: 40, 44; see also Reisner 2018: 12-13).

What has changed though, is the understanding of freedom of speech and the value of voicing criticism without restrictions. It has become the 'new normal' within the Georgian society that people are now used to being actively demanding and collaborating in public space along commonly shared values apart from former kinship networks (Kokheridze 2018: 8; Nodia 2018: 44, 46). In this way, Nodia speaks about a "mental revolution" during the UNM-rule, when informal and non-cooperative behavior owing to high distrust towards formal justice changed places with openness and a broadening social base (2018: 46). Previously, in a post-Soviet manner, it had been unusual and unpopular to voice and disclose political preferences, whereas today the development of civil consciousness is clearly noticeable (Aprasidze 2018: 17; Kokheridze 2018: 6, 8; Lortkipandize 2018: 110).

However, participation in political terms is further on rejected (Nodia 2018: 46, 50). What Muskhelishvili labels as "Общественность"[141] implies the *subject* attitude of citizens who freely express themselves and criticize but refuse to participate and take on responsibility (2018: 6; see also Aprasidze 2018: 71, 73). As interviewees argue, the new generation has acquired skills of communication, is receptive and open but their knowledge, which they have mainly acquired through, and which is dependent on trainings and seminars of CSOs is not linked to critical thinking, scrutiny, internalization and deep understanding of concepts. Instead, there are high demands towards the government and the need for state regulation – an attitude of alleged liberals propagating social topics which Kokheridze strongly challenges – coupled with an obvious irresponsibility of society (2018: 8; see also Muskhelishvili 2018: 26; Foundation Rep. 2018: 21).

In this way, there is no significant and profound change in terms of political culture as people are still voting for power and personality (Kokheridze 2018: 10; Lebanidze 2018: 44; Metreveli 2018: 7, 53). As an illustrative example on the last presidential elections in 2018, a human rights expert stated:

> Davit Usupashvili (opposition candidate during presidential elections 2018, SB): Like we can stop anyone here and every second person will tell you that he is very educated, he is professional, they like him but they will not vote for him, because they do not see the power in him; because they don't think he will be running as a presidential candidate and he will not get this – this is really unfortunate – maxi-

[140] Supra is the name of the traditional Georgian banquet and signifies "a highly formalized [feast], structured by toasts and ruled by a toastmaker (*tamada*)" (Mühlfried285; italics in the original; see also Kotthoff 1995).

[141] Translated as "community".

> mum 5 percent. While 60 percent will tell you that he is the best politician – one of the best. But they don't see power in him. (2018: 26)[142]

Therefore, instead of political programs reputation matters. Losing reputation means losing everything since public support of political leadership is based on credibility and "big man" personality who are politically or economically strong; despite the fact that incumbency is constitutionally limited to two terms, popularity and public support has equally been bounded (Aprasidze 2018: 43, 47, 73; Lebanidze 2018: 44; Muskhelishvili 2018: 2; Nodia 2018: 66; Stykow 2011: 63). Time and again this has repeated itself throughout the Georgian independent political history – by Shevardnadze who failed on corruption, by Saakashvili who exhausted society by abusing human rights and, presumably, by Ivanishvili who already failed to keep his promises and who instead has levered out democratic procedures through informal ruling (Foundation Rep. 2018: 40; Kldiashvili 2018: 8; Media Rep. 2018: 22; Metreveli 2018: 53, 71, 89; Tkeshelashvili 2018: 36). Big men, big promises – and time and again, a "big bang" of complete elite change (Foundation Rep. 2018: 40).

At times, the bubble of citizens' distrust towards the regime is further increased by the pooled commitment of civil society actors (NGOs) as watch-dogs criticizing and monitoring the government which might lead to political crisis: "[d]emocracy becomes periodic [...] interrupted with sharp and sudden changes", a "populist democracy" (Muskhelishvili 2018: 2, 38). In this way, the instability of the Georgian regime is also reflected in the oscillation of modes of governance between authoritarian leadership and veto-playing (Muskhelishvili 2018: 26).

As change requires leadership, the current situation evokes thoughts on the "instable stability" that Armenia lived in over several decades when authorities survived by simply managing apathy. Similarly, today the Georgian regime faces huge dissatisfaction and public passivity, but so far, no new leader is visible (Human Rights Expert 2018: 55; Iskandaryan 2018: 27). As convincing powerful alternatives to the repudiated ruling elites are absent, society is not willing to participate even in elections and, instead, exposes nihilism and disillusionment (Human Rights Expert 2018: 57, 59; Media Rep. 2018: 40, 42, 66; Metreveli 2018: 53, 55, 75, 81; Muskhelishvili 2018: 22). Hitherto, the powerful personality of Ivanishvili with his huge financial assets remains the sheet anchor for the ruling elites, whose major mission is not to fail in maintaining the regime in power (Human Rights Expert 2018: 44, 55; Metreveli 2018: 71; Nodia 2018: 64).

4.3.1.3. Structural change and political culture: transformation at different paces

A factor that stood out from the comparative analysis is the multi-speed – and therefore diverging – development of structural and political cultural transformation. Common to many

[142] Ivanishvili announced to back Salome Zurabishvili's presidency which is seen as a powerful determinant concerning the outlook of elections (Aprasidze 2018: 47).

other post-Soviet countries, independence abruptly hit and painfully challenged the Georgian society, also in terms of their absent readiness for profound change and building institutions (Kokheridze 2018: 8, 10; see also Aprasidze/Siroky 2010). As the early years were fragile due to the disastrous economic, political and social conditions, this radical structural transformation has further aggravated during the Saakashvili regime: "I won't call Saakashvili's government a democratic revolution as you know, people do. It was the state building revolution" (Metreveli 2018: 95).[143]

The political structure under Saakashvili has been liberalized and partly democratized with drastic measures inspired by the Western models and backed by Western influence, while contact with the population has been completely neglected (Aprasidze/Siroky 2010: 122, 131). The unity among citizens in 2007 when first protests emerged against the Saakashvili regime, displayed the overstress of painful structural reforms without caring about people's adaptation to all those changes (Kokheridze 2018: 10).[144] In short, the structural developments have not been accompanied by the same changes in terms of political culture:

> [T]here are other people, who, you know, in rural areas also, who want their road to be fixed or something to be done – some things to be fixed (…) And on quite a lot of occasions they would say they don't care who is sitting there, Saakashvili or Ivanishvili, so 'I want a better life' – not better, you can imagine what rural people are requesting, (…) very limited improvements in their everyday life. (Tkeshelashvili 2018: 42)

This has been shown by the tough implementation of anticorruption reforms under Saakashvili that meant unemployment for thousands of people (Tchiaberashvili 2018: 11). Yet, until today, the daily struggle of the local population is more focused on socio-economic challenges than political dynamics. In this way, civil society and political elites, however, disconnected from the broader population; in particular in terms of the discourse on values and the Western-oriented development path (Human Rights Expert 2018: 14).

> In Soviet times we were building communism. Now, we are building European integration. It doesn't matter what it is called but the legitimacy comes from the future and from the outside, you see – not from the people. This makes (…) the emergence of any bottom up ideological way of struggle very difficult. (Muskhelishvili 2018: 22)

While the environment during Saakashvili was dominated by fear, attitudes and orientations were hidden and kept inside people. They only came to surface as soon as freedom of ex-

[143] Beside the success of the Saakashvili government in strengthening administrative capabilities of state institutions, also tax collection increased by 700 percent from 2003-2008 (Aprasidze/Siroky 2010: 131).

[144] For instance, the tough anti-corruption reform led to the unemployment of 15 000 traffic police men over night (Tchiaberashvili 2018: 11). Another figure, of 19,441 imprisoned persons in penitentiary facilities compared to 6274 in 2003 is telling (Muskhelishvili/Jorjoliani 2009: 704; Human Rights Watch 2008: 2).

pression was guaranteed in an anxiety-free environment: it showed that a significant part of the population felt alienated from civil society because of their efforts to promote liberal values like the protection of minority rights, as this is assessed as opposed to the Georgian identity (Human Rights Expert 2018: 10, 14; Lebanidze 2018: 2, 11-12, 28; see also Reisner 2018: 21-22).[145] Narratives like on tolerance are seen to be only superficially supported and propagated by citizens but not internalized and transferred into action. "We have the liberals, who are just fashion. It's fashion. It's the fashion style to think like a liberal but nobody is liberal" (Kokheridze 2018: 8).

Although society and political players declare to only support democracy as the appropriate type of governance, "winner-takes-it-all" mentalities are still present, and polarization shapes the political sphere (Schiffers/Smolnik 2017: 4). The majority of people have repeatedly been voting for one single party – which time and again has reached the constitutional majority. And political players have aspired to stay in power by all means, refusing to hand it over (Lebanidze 2018: 2). Irrespective of the fact that a true internalization of democratic rules of the game has not taken place yet, the dynamic at the institutional level since the Rose Revolution is positively assessed, with the prime example of the 2012 democratic elections (Lebanidze 2018: 2, 4). The repetition of those free and fair elections as yet another democratic experience is highly valued for the future outlook on stability (Aprasidze 2018: 52-53; Tugushi 2018: 5).

Another testimony of the outlined uneven development refers to the internal governance of NGOs as the main civil society actors, which are supposed to teach others in democracy. Their internal governance, however, is seldom democratic (Human Rights Expert 2018: 6; Metreveli 2018: 31).[146] Instead, NGOs are often characterized by a pseudo decision-making power of the broader base and an actual domination by a small leading circle (Aprasidze 2018: 21; Kokheridze 2018: 28). The same can be seen as regards the apparent formally democratic institutional settings, when parties are created around personalities who take ultimate decisions that in turn are blindly followed by the rest in fear to displease the powerful leader – as it can be seen by Ivanishvili today, or previously, by Saakashvili (Human Rights Expert 2018: 20, 44; Meshveliani 2018: 10, 18, 19; Tugushi 2018: 3).[147] At the rural level this is further exacerbated as personalities in local self-government hold positions for ages and only hand over power to self-chosen successors (Aprasidze 2018: 51, 57). Although in both cases of intermediary actors this lack of internal democracy is an open secret, it is neither scrutinized, nor challenged (Aprasidze 2018:

[145] In July 2017 ultranationalists took to the streets in their "Georgian March" (Reisner 2018: 22), headed by a Georgian millionaire dressed as "medieval knight on horseback and flanked by Orthodox priests" (Pushaw 2019).

[146] A human rights expert mentions GYLA and ISFED as exceptions of having rotating leaderships and limitations in consecutive leadership (2018: 42).

[147] Prominent examples are former Prime Ministers Irakli Gharibashvili and Giorgi Kvirikashvili who stood out in their neutrality and inactiveness, trying to be as loyal as possible to Ivanishvili (Aprasidze 2018: 49).

21, 23, 27). There have recently been some attempts, for instance by European Georgia Party to establish a democratic party leadership (Human Rights Expert 2018: 44; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 21).

Another aspect that is linked to instability and the dissociation of structural and cultural transformation is the disarray and incomprehension about roles of positions and institutions throughout the entire political system and beyond (Pruidze 2018: 6, 22). What respondents describe as the lack of the development of a political culture is reflected in the politicized attitude of the public to unreflectively link civil society to the political opposition (Kldiashvili 2018: 4, 6). Citizens are still accustomed to and distrustful of standard-type NGOs and the latter presumed linkage to politics (Kokheridze 2018: 28). But also, in the political sphere, the lack of diversity in terms of political forces, the lack of readiness to build coalitions and consensus-oriented alliances apart from ideologically opposed camps as well as the confidence about a monopoly on truth do not correspond to the narrative of Western oriented democratization and structural demands relating thereto (Foundation Rep. 2018: 24; Kldiashvili 2018: 8, 24; Metreveli 2018: 101). Instead, over time the boundaries between intermediary actors – civil society and political elites – blended, thereby triggering even more incomprehension and alienation on the side of the population towards the political (Metreveli 2018: 93).

In order to establish congruence between political culture and structure, today's political system of Georgia would require a completely different understanding of political elite and its role of serving the people (Kldiashvili 2018: 14). However, on the local level in particular interviewees argue that officials do not know and understand civil rights as well as their own responsibilities and competences (Kldiashvili 2018: 28; Lortkipanidze 2018: 19). As far as society is concerned, the political discourse shows that instead of political representation society strives for having control and oversight of chosen managers who run the country but refuses to take on responsibility and to participate (Foundation Rep. 2018: 26; Muskhelishvili 2018: 2). This gives rise to *subject* attitudes of both general society and political elites, when the strategy of European Integration has been chosen and declared as favorable for the common good but no critical reasoning about its meaning, its appropriateness or its implications is taking place, thus the pursuit of the selected line of development remains unquestioned (Kokheridze 2018: 42).

> I mean, when I say 'to revive' that we need to refresh our – we have to go back to the real definition, because we knew what the democracy is, we knew what the European values are, but we forgot, because we started to move, move, move (…) and during this moving and during this speaking to everybody, we forgot the real definition. And we made the step left, the step right and forgot about the real – because when you have a goal, it's likely to lose that goal. When you have a goal you always, always remind yourself, what is the goal. (Kokheridze 2018: 52)

In terms of giving an outlook, however, as it has already been described for the recent strategic realignment of civil society actors towards more grassroots work, recent changes in attitudes of political leadership can be observed, as the government has started to listen more attentively to societal demands and realized the need to become a servant instead of a "teacher" (Kokheridze 2018: 38). In this regard, political elites find more demanding citizens for whom not only charisma matters but teams and topics as well as; and a stronger culture of debates has emerged (Pruidze 2018: 6).

4.3.1.4. Generational change thwarted by inherited uncertainty

In Georgia, frictions between generations that manifested themselves in the political sphere have repeatedly triggered change: in 2003/2004, a new young political elite around Saakashvili replaced Shevardnadze's team, while in 2012 this was answered by a "generational revenge" (Tugushi 2018: 81; Urushadze 2018: 26, 42). However, this does not necessarily imply generational changes in terms of attitudes, norms and values. What Kokheridze frames as "learned […] behavior to survive" refers to respondents observed flexibility of people, as uncertainty about the future and potential future external influences necessitates survival skills and to live for the moment (2018: 10). Yet, to exploit the moment does not mean that citizens are effectively connected to the present reality: "Now everything is so detached from the people, and so much in the future or in the past that they don't, they can't connect themselves with this, you know, very abstract agenda, which doesn't make sense for them" (Muskhelishvili 2018: 20).

To overcome this nostalgy about the past or insecurity about the future, high hopes are set on the "generation of freedom" – the independence generation – which is expected to have different understandings of political representation, diversity and the role of political elites (Kokheridze 2018: 10, 30; see also Metreveli 2018: 53, 55, 87; Nodia 2018: 34; Tchiaberashvili 2018: 37). In 2018, however, generational change is considered doubtful due to brain-drain, growing Russophobia and an overall dismissive attitude towards politics (Adam 2018: 50; Muskhelishvili 2018: 48, 54). What respondents have observed in terms of change is an increasingly open discourse on taboo topics that are now articulated more actively (Aprasidze 2018: 63; Kokheridze 2018: 8). However, this new generation is raised in an unstable environment and torn between uncertainties of reality (there are no clear official statements on Georgia's future development apart from the external alignment) and narratives cultivated in their families (the Soviet generation) (Kokheridze 2018: 10). This remains a dilemma of ambiguity and inner strife as visions inside and outside of the family realm about the future of Georgia clash and beliefs and actions contradict one another (Kokheridze 2018: 6, 8).

This leads to the paradoxical situation in which rising dissatisfaction demands alterations, however, the lack of a commonly shared vision about Georgia's future and fears about instability

within society has a paralyzing effect (Kokheridze 2018: 6, 10, 22; Lebanidze 2018: 40). Though the young generations are willing to change, respondents argue that they lack knowledge, understanding and experience and have no impetus for active engagement; instead they expose attitudes of non-participation and preference of being apolitical persons (Aprasidze 2018: 45, 47; Kokheridze 2018: 22; Tugushi 2018: 41).

Responsibility, therefore, is eschewed today: decision-making under Saakashvili has been determined by a very narrow circle of leadership with a clear road map and intentions, clear distinction between black (anti-government) or white (pro-governmental voices) but also clear responsibility for failures and achievements, whereas today, accountability remains obscure (Human Rights Expert 2018: 52; Media Rep. 2018: 92; Nodia 2018: 16, 18, 36; Urushadze 2018: 38). Kokheridze describes it as a vicious cycle and reciprocal dilemma: "[T]his is a both-way problem: […] We have no professional parties because society is passive. But we have the passive society because the political parties never involved the people in decision-making processes" (2018: 22). While civil society experience maturity and shows an increasing habituation to externally driven cooperation, this does not automatically trickle down to the broader citizenry (Aprasidze 2018: 21, 71).

4.3.2. Armenia: stabilizing factors strengthening regime persistence

Compared to its unstable neighbor, the Armenian regime until recently, has been qualified as surprisingly persistent over time (Badalyan 2018: 49; Giragosian 2018: 49; Paturyan 2018: 48; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 21-22). Clearly, control had been permanently lost in the course of the April upheaval 2018, when on April 13 at the latest the former system forfeited its viability (Ghaplanyan 2018: 10; Navasardyan 2018: 28).[148]

4.3.2.1. Unstable stability by definition: the apple-worm dilemma

During the 1990s, regime persistence implied that instability in terms of a weak state and protesting citizenry were countered by the state applying force and violence that in turn averted the outbreak of a civil war (Giragosian 2018: 49; Soghomonyan 2018: 66). The 1999 terrorist shooting in Parliament which caused the assassination of the Prime Minister, the Parliamentary Speaker and a number of officials is judged as a highly critical moment, which was yet smartly navigated by Kocharyan and backed by his Russian support (Giragosian 2018: 49; Manasyan 2018: 26; Paturyan 2018: 48). Kocharyan's cleverness further enabled him to coopt his biggest critics and to neutralize them, whereas the very repressive environment during his tenure in-

[148] As important puzzle pieces for the snowball effect that resulted in the revolution Ghaplanyan notes the following three: youth mobilization, Pashinyans personality and his "walking saga" known as "My step" combined with the "Reject Serzh" or also known as the "Merjir Serzhin (arm)" initiative (2018: 10; for a comprehensive analysis see also Kubiak 2018).

timidated any form of protest (Manasyan 2018: 42; Paturyan 2018: 48). Sarksyan for his part has been characterized as a capable broker who managed to outweigh divided elite groupings and to balance Eastern and Western external actors by cautiously carrying about his loyalties, both the European People's Party (EPP) and the Russian leadership (Navasardyan 2018: 36).

The continuance of a "no war, no peace"[149] (Ishkanian 2008: 157) situation and the instrumentalization of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict by the government in regards to protecting national security against the external threat and not to show inner weakness are seen as crucial factors that upheld stability for such a long time. Besides, the exploitation of national patriotism[150] and threat perception outweighed any strive for sincere democratization as well as upheaval (Foundation Rep. 2018: 48; Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 35; Soghomonyan 2018: 66; Voskanyan 2018: 52).[151] For the first time during the revolution, however, this argument of "Don't make [any] noise, menaces are there" (Safaryan 2018: 34) and "[W]e don't fight each other. Armenians shouldn't be killing Armenians" did not work (Danielyan 2018: 38; Paturyan 2018: 48; Voskanyan 2018: 52).

Nevertheless, as the recurring protest movements and the delaying of any important decisions by the incumbents revealed: on the very inside, the system had some serious cracks and started to shake and crumble (Aleksanyan 2018: 24; Manasyan 2018: 40). The disastrous happenings of March 1, 2008 obviously branded the Sarksyan government (Paturyan 2018: 48). Criticism thereof targeted the national patriotic rhetoric in particular, and until then highly appreciated and honored people came under scrutiny and completely lost any moral backing. In this regard, another peak of outrage was provoked by the April war in 2016, which revealed the corrupted structure of the army itself (Soghomonyan 2018: 66). Although the clear majority of respondents said they had not seen the revolution coming, the prospects of the regime to successfully manage apathy and their obvious low legitimacy have been evaluated as impossible for long term survival and only a question of time for the trigger (Iskandaryan 2018: 27). This "worm in [the] apple", which gradually and in an unperceived manner eroded the system was also linked to the worsening socio-economic conditions under Sarksyan's leadership (Danielyan

[149] As Ishkanian notes, "there is a constant gnawing unease and fear that open warfare may erupt at any time" (2008: 157).

[150] This has been underpinned by a former high official of the ruling RP who emphasized that the question of the "physical existence" of the Armenian nation has been the top priority, though admitting that in terms of securitization, this has also been used as an excuse for domestically unsolved problems (2018: 8).

[151] The power of this argument can also be seen in the forced resignation of Ter-Petrosyan the moment he intended to make concessions and to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict, when "warlords" of the Karabakh war took power in 1998 (Foundation Rep. 2018: 48; Stefes 2010: 104-105). Recurring but time and again failing negotiations with Azerbaijan and fatalities at the border secure the expansion of power of incumbent elite (Soghomonyan 2018: 66). Interestingly, the EU and the Union's interest and efforts in stability of the region is only mentioned once by respondents (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 35).

2018: 36). With reference to the many civic grassroots initiatives since 2008 (but especially as of 2013), Kubiak therefore speaks of a "creeping revolution" that finally led to the "change of the oligarchic political system" (2018).

The incumbents, busy dividing wealth among their loyal circle for retaining and reproducing their power, felt completely safe against internal threats. In this way, any happenings in society did not touch them (Badalyan 2018: 49; Mission Armenia 2018: 78; Nersisyan 2018: 110; Voskanyan 2018: 54). Due to this obvious lack of connection or harmonized relationship between the public sector and the Armenian citizenry, some respondents emphasized the fragility of the former regime "by definition", contrary to some political science scholars who had even forecasted anocracy in Armenia (Ghaplanyan 2018: 16; see also Melikyan 2018: 69; Safaryan 2018: 36, 38). Safaryan therefore speaks about "frozen instability" that just needed one trigger in order to collapse (2018: 38).

The most unstable situation, of course, is seen in the revolution and its aftermath due to many uncertainties of the new transition period (see for example Aleksanyan 2018: 21-22; Giragosian 2018: 49; Manasyan 2018: 28, 40, 44; Nersisyan 2018: 110; Voskanyan 2018: 54). In contrast to the former regime, the current elites enjoy high legitimacy; however, populistic and non-sustainable policies instead of real programs and mechanisms combined with the overstated expectations of society are viewed with concern (Iskandaryan 2018: 27; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 20, 26, 72). On the other hand, this unique moment of political crisis and the current dynamic equilibrium are also positively assessed as a chance for changing the concept of stability and for triggering a vivid democratic process, in which the government should not be relaxed but constantly satisfying people's needs (Safaryan 2018: 34; Soghomonyan 2018: 72; Voskanyan 2018: 54). Stability, in this way, is considered detrimental to overall development and progress: "They (political elite, SB) need to move themselves or whenever they are stuck and they don't want to move, they need to be moved" (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 35).

4.3.2.2. Paralysis through political apathy and nihilism

An outstanding factor for regime persistence in Armenia has been the pervasive desperation within society. Time and again, citizens expressed their dissatisfaction not only in an apathetic way but by means of a particular form of activism: in escaping the country. What was more, their constant fears of clashes at the border and the maintenance of only relative peace inhibited any progress in terms of prosperity. The massive brain-drain in the 1990s that first and foremost had been related to the disastrous economic situation, saw recurrence after March 1, 2008, as a response to discontent and an expression of desperation against the political repression (Badalyan 2018: 37-39, 43; Giragosian 2018: 53; Manasyan 2018: 20). The majority of those who stayed silently and apathetically accepted the situation (Manasyan 2018: 34). This

attitude has also been reflected in the leadership style since the early years of independence, when authorities adapted to living with very low "psychological" legitimacy by managing this apathy.[152] The strongest sign of their success is seen in the last pre-revolution elections in 2015, when protests were completely absent though people were tired of their government and the lack of real political representation (Iskandaryan 2018: 27; see also Republican Party 2018: 4; Safaryan 2018: 6; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 18). In the conceding words of a high-level official from the former ruling RP:

> We failed to explain the people, to communicate with them, we underestimated the gap that has been formed between the political elite and society. We have misinterpreted election results, we underestimated the fatigue that the Armenian society had on our government, on our party. (Republican Party 2018: 8)

How drastic the desperation was could also be observed in the incident of "Sasna Tsrer", when a terrorist attack was even sympathized by society which considered it a chance to escape the hopeless situation. Therefore, Pashinyan's movement, the "Way Out Alliance" raised extraordinarily high hopes among the people to have a chance for change apart from militarized conflict (Voskanyan 2018: 8-10).

A participatory political culture of civil society has been dismissed by the previous government as "myth" coming from abroad as European aspirations and "alien" to the Armenian society (Aleksanyan 2018: 4). In this regard, respondents concertedly agreed that political culture in independent Armenia had not really changed much in terms of values until very recently (Aleksanyan 2018: 2, 4, 16, 29-30; Paturyan 2018: 43-44; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 50). This is also reflected in the challenge of the new post-revolution government in parallel to the lack of democratic political institutions as for instance, LGBT and transgender are still very disputed – in discourse and in reality (Aleksanyan 2018: 6, 30). Instead, society adapted to command and compliance by respecting power and status: thus, for instance the high public officials have been defended and shielded from criticism and irresponsible behavior did not entail any consequences (Aleksanyan 2018: 16, 29-30). This is what Voskanyan depicts as "dumbness of society":

> If everyone knows what's going on but nobody talks about it. And there were two different parallel realities: the words that describe something, and that's why I call these two discourses – that is, nationalistic or Western – that makes no difference in the words that say something. And the reality you know, but you do not talk about it. That's what it was. (2018: 30)[153]

[152] Easton also refers to "the psychological need to believe" as source of legitimacy (1965a: 309-310).

[153] Original citation: "Stummheit der Gesellschaft. Wenn alle wissen, was sich da bewegt aber niemand darüber spricht. Und es gab zwei verschiedene parallele Realitäten: Die Worte, die etwas beschreiben und gerade deswegen nenne ich diese zwei Diskurse – also nationalistischer oder westlicher, das macht keinen Unterschied in den Worten, die etwas sagen. Und die Realität, die man kennt, aber darüber spricht man nicht. Das war es." (Voskanyan 2018: 30).

Instead of a genuine broader societal discourse, informal realities developed due to fake discourses out of touch with reality but either nationalist/patriotic or Western-oriented (in terms of market economy/human rights) (Voskanyan 2018: 2). This silent and obedient, *subject* political culture entailed that problems were not voiced loudly:

> I mean, that's not a national mentality, that's not how it is. It's not like that – though, if you do not have a developed political culture. But people say, 'You know, we are a Caucasian people. It is forbidden to criticize anything.' You know, in Armenia we have a culture, I say that is a culture for silhouettes. As a matter of fact. You cannot talk about these problems. (Aleksanyan 2018: 16)[154]

While statistics prove, the willingness to participate in demonstrations and to engage in political activism has increased, the level of discourse and understanding of ideologies has remained very poor, coupled with zero understanding about the "Western model" that has apparently been followed (Paturyan 2018: 52). There has been an unseen determination in people going to protests even though being disillusioned about having any significant impact (Paturyan 2018: 4). "The willingness to take to the streets was far greater than the awareness of what the change actually is. So, to speak: 'How should we?' – the ABILITY of change" (Soghomonyan 2018: 62, emphasis in capitals)[155]. The uncertainty of population about the essence of change has been reflected in both catch-all programs of the majority of parties and in the exception of Dashnakcutyun party with an explicit socialist program that supporters of social-democratic ideas did yet not vote for. The only prevailing ideology that remained is seen as the nationalist ones that focused on war, on the genocide, on building a strong nation and the latter's defense (Iskandaryan/Mikaelian/Minasyan 2016: 82; Paturyan 2018: 52).[156]

Unlike political institutions like parties or their respective programs, individual leadership and strong personalities are still highly valued by society and perceived as a tool to realize the wishes and dreams of people (Aleksanyan 2018: 2, 14, 16; Navasardyan 2018: 20, 22, 66; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 78). This has again been reflected by Pashinyan – the number one most trusted institution of 2018 – whose legitimacy is first and foremost based on charisma (Danielyan 2018: 42; Navasardyan 2018: 66; Safaryan 2018: 6; Voskanyan 2018: 60).

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[154] Original citation: "Ich meine, das ist keine nationale Mentalität und so, das ist nicht so. Das ist eine nicht so - also wenn du keine so entwickelte politische Kultur hast. Aber die Leute sagen, dass Wissen Sie, wir sind ein kaukasisches Volk. Das ist verboten, etwas zu kritisieren'. Wissen Sie, in Armenien haben wir eine Kultur, ich sage das ist eine Kultur für Schemen. In der Tat. Du darfst nicht über diese Probleme sprechen." (Aleksanyan 2018: 16).

[155] Original citation: "[D]ie Bereitschaft, auf die Straße zu gehen, war viel viel größer, als das Bewusstsein, worin die Veränderung steckt. Sozusagen: 'Wie sollen wir?' – die FÄHIGKEIT der Veränderung." (Soghomonyan 2018: 62, emphasis in capitals).

[156] The underlying trend of nationalism is also described as an inherited trait of Soviet times, by maintaining a different language, identity and religion (Giragosian 2018: 5).

A clear indicator of the lack of internalization of values and civic consciousness is the absence of vision and ideas about what is needed for local development by the local population, which has been revealed in the aftermath of the revolution.[157] This is also ascribed to the intentional malnourishing of society by the aloof RP-regime to prevent the formation of a citizenry capable of critical thinking and reflection; which effectively worked in terms of influencing the education system as creating a system of reproduction (Badalyan 2018: 53; Ghaplanyan 2018: 8; Soghomonyan 2018: 32). The lack of an own set of convictions among civil society actors has been reflected in their high degree of flexibility and adjustment towards the foreign donor environment apart from any genuine capacity development (Badalyan 2018: 19). Common to the Georgian experience, this is further exacerbated by the cleavage of aspirations and understandings of a future (democratic) development between the social center in the capital and the rural population (Badalyan 2018: 53; Iskandaryan 2018: 13).

4.3.2.3. Accepted structural stagnation of an informal non-democratic system

> At least one year or two years ago, many people would say 'ok, we understand, we just realize what's going on, but we have no power, we don't believe in our power, so if we can at least during four or five years take some 5 000 or 10 000, let's do it.' (Danielyan 2018: 32)

The massive bribery over many years and the absence of room for political ideas or programs impacted the attitude of people who had become used to expecting money for their vote (Safaryan 2018: 4). A feeling of powerlessness among the citizenry towards the corrupted system and consciousness about the immutable informality pervaded society.

> ALL knew that there are problems. ALL knew that the elections were rigged. ALL knew that there was massive vote buying. So, it was not NEW that you should address these topics or first try to make people believe in it. NO. Everyone had first-hand information. (Badalyan 2018: 43, emphasis in capitals)[158]

Politics itself had been an "amateur hour", a hobby but nothing real which both lacked debate and ideology as well as an understanding and sense of responsibility and accountability; thus, political failures like the still pending reconstruction after the 1987 earthquake never saw any consequences (Giragosian 2018: 77). The same accounts for the obvious lack of internal democracy and instead the prevalence of leadership of commanders and clubs around charismatic personalities inside the ruling parties (Safaryan 2018: 6, 8, 12; Shahnazaryan D. 2018: 50). State bureaucracy solidified in complete orientation towards the president as the final decision-

[157] However, this consciousness is predicted to develop as people today are united and constructive in their aspiration for change (Aleksanyan 2018: 30).

[158] Original citation: "ALLE wussten, dass es Probleme gibt. ALLE wussten, dass die Wahlen gefälscht waren. ALLE wussten, dass es massiven Stimmenkauf gab. Also, das war jetzt nicht NEU, dass man diese Themen erstmal bringen sollte, erstmal sich bemühen sollte, dass die Menschen daran glauben. NEIN. Alle hatten Info aus erster Hand." (Badalyan 2018: 43, emphasis in capitals).

maker (Nersisyan 2018: 58). “In other words, this was not political culture, because it wasn’t real politics and it wasn’t real culture” (Giragosian 2018: 77). The single exception of the Heritage party as being initially internally democratic and therefore alien to the autocratic environment and internally autocratic parties proved to be without any chance of surviving within the established rules of the game (Safaryan 2018: 6). But as Safaryan, a former leading head of Heritage notices, it is impossible to create an image of democracy without representing it (2018: 12). As discussed before, the same is true for civil society actors: although it is considered the duty of civil society to bring a cultural transformation to Armenia, organizations are strongly linked to the leading personalities, in most cases the founding member, and frequently act in closed and exclusive groups. While personalities are valued, NGOs themselves are distrusted (Badalyan 2018: 27; Doydoyan 2018: 23; Giragosian 2018: 11; Iskandaryan 2018: 13; Navasardyan 2018: 20, 22).

4.3.2.4. Concealed maturity of citizenry? The independence generation

What has changed, however, in terms of political culture is bravery (Danielyan 2018: 14; Manasyan 2018: 31-32). In particular the events of the 2008 crackdown provoked the young generation to think about the future of society, acknowledging their powerlessness vis-à-vis the corrupt political sphere (Soghomonyan 2018: 44): previously and even then, Armenians acted like “sprinters” in view of venting their anger and dissatisfaction via short term actions and participation in protests followed by first hope and then withdrawal and apathy; a repeated cycle under all three presidents when any real control of the persons in power remained a challenge (Navasardyan 2018: 58).

This dissatisfaction could be silenced by the repressive character of Kocharyan’s regime, but due to an increasing openness and tolerance of a few civic actions under Sarksyan, outright rejection of the government by citizenry and growing demands came to surface (Giragosian 2018: 53; Manasyan 2018: 34, 44; Mission Armenia 2018: 51). A first sign of protest has been the belief in Raffi Hovhannisyan and his oppositional party, Heritage, that obtained unforeseen popularity and support after the 2007 elections (Manasyan 2018: 48). Strong youth movements and informal civil initiatives showed the rising civil consciousness and growing understanding for debate and consensus-based approaches, not in the entire but in fragments of society (Badalyan 2018: 23; Danielyan 2018: 12; Voskanyan 2018: 8). Although the population in 1996 and 2008 had shown its willingness to protest, it had remained immature for executing change and clearly lacked capacity (Soghomonyan 2018: 60, 62). Protest actions, whether under Kocharyan, Sarksyan or after the failure of Hovhannisyan in 2013, were followed by apathy and disillusionment about the outlook of change (Badalyan 2018: 37-39; Navasardyan 2018: 24, 58). Thus, maturity of people mattered, but the larger part of society needed to be “woken up” by the youth that for its part had nothing to lose (Soghomonyan 2018: 86; see also Badalyan 2018: 37-39):

The primary driving force behind past civic initiatives and especially behind the mobilization that triggered the transit of power in April 2018 was the very young, non-Soviet but mostly Western-educated independence generation who have different life-strategies than their parents and not the same baggage of patron-client relationships (Badalyan 2018: 44-45; Danielyan 2018: 12, 14; Doydoyan 2018: 21; Ghaplanyan 2018: 26; Iskandaryan 2018: 5, 7, 9).

Still, what the revolution revealed as soon as the single focus on "removing Serzh" had been achieved, however, was the lasting lack of a commonly shared vision and ideas about the future development of the country (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 19, 21). People changed from powerlessness in a predetermined authoritarian system to freedom and self-responsibility; they realized their capacity and power but with the addition that apart from a discernible socialist mentality, they remain a "politically uneducated" and non-participant citizenry (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 21, 23; see also Paturyan 2018: 44, 46; Soghomonyan 2018: 86).

As regards the outlook on the post-revolution environment, some respondents pointed to visible positive developments like the change in attitudes towards and demands from the leadership, off the cliché of personal material or political power and authoritarian decision-making towards more debate, accountability, transparency and representativeness of people's interests (Mission Armenia 2018: 54; Safaryan 2018: 28; Soghomonyan 2018: 34). But notwithstanding the fact that the young politicians in power look fresh, modern and smart, respondents are concerned about their lack of political experience and professionalism; therefore, in order to avoid future instability, the change in political culture has to go deep and cannot remain as superficial as visible to date (Aleksanyan 2018: 16, 30; Giragosian 2018: 81; Iskandaryan 2018: 15, 21, 32).

> So, it infers, or it requires a psychological change of mind-set – some can do it, some can't. And what's interesting is there has already been some observations where – if we look at some ministries – the change has not been very deep and in some offices, they've simply took down the picture of Serzh Sarksyan and put up a picture of Pashinyan. Nothing else has changed. This is also why the real revolution must be psychological. (Giragosian 2018: 83)

Thanks to the success of the revolution and the preceding years of civic activism, a certain degree of critical reflexivity, reinterpretation and political self-organization has emerged (Badalyan 2018: 7, 55; Soghomonyan 2018: 34). However, the sudden change from kleptocracy to democracy still needs to be internalized apart from citizen's preliminary euphoria (Navasardyan 2018: 58; Soghomonyan 2018: 62).

> [P]eople understand politics, but they don't formulate political actions ok, and that's the problem. They will join, when they are called, which is another danger, because (…) it's one thing that people really understand that they need to block the parliament in order to block a particular law. And they understand the dangers of this law. And it's another thing, they go to block the parliament because Nikol said 'People come!'. They don't even know what exactly is there. They just went, because their

> favorite leader said 'Go!'. That's like (…) that's authoritarianism itself. (Shahnazaryan A. 2018: 25)

Uncertainty as a clear indicator for instability is only voiced with respect to the current post-revolution future outlook of the country's development, not with respect to the past: today, this feeling is nurtured by fear about an uncertain future as people lack knowledge and shared visions about how they want to develop, the new government being entirely centered around Pashinyan (as a person) still displays its inherent weaknesses, and it remains unclear whether there will be new movements and new conflicts (Aleksanyan 2018: 8, 28; Badalyan 2018: 67; Manasyan 2018: 51-52; Soghomonyan 2018: 36).

5. Conclusion: implications and outlook for research on the political grey zone

An attempt to unravel the political grey zone

This study has focused on the "scientific 'puzzle'" (Albrecht/Frankenberger 2011: 39) of political grey zone regimes and their particuliarities in terms of persistence and instability by taking inherent functions and mechanisms into consideration. Carothers, whose ideas about this specific zone represent the starting point of the analysis, emphasized that still a lot of effort has to be taken in order to fully comprehend the nature of regimes in the political grey zone (2002; see also Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 41-42). In its attempt to contribute to filling the observed research gap, this study clearly revealed that almost two decades after Carothers had claimed the end of the transition paradigm, the initial assumptions on the political grey zone – namely the presence of dominant power politics and feckless pluralism – can still be confirmed in both selected case studies. This has been reflected in the field of action and the rules of the game for civil society (including media) and political elites as major intermediary actors and important players in mediating interests and connecting society and the state. In both cases, their corridors of action displayed common traits in terms of the formal existence of an open space for voicing criticism coupled with the predominance of one single political group to the detriment of pluralism. Political elites operate in a context which is characterized by a strong focus on powerful personalities, society's high expectations towards the state and mistrust from a rather passive citizenry towards intermediaries. Likewise, predominantly *subject* orientations among the population have had an impact on the constitution of the structural setting. In both countries, civil society emerged as a rather closed, elitist institutionalized circle of NGOs, which became very politicized and mostly opposed to the regime in power and remained highly dependent on financial support by foreign donor funding. In principle, possibilities for participation have always been present, although this access developed as exclusive. Therefore, civil society often acted within its "filter bubble", detached from societal needs and situations on the ground (Hett 2018: 7, 15). As a result, in the context of the considered grey zone regimes, it proved challenging to apply democracy-inherent functions of civil society or publicly controllable and functions of service delivery uncritical of the regime like in an authoritarian environment (Geißel/Freise 2016: 528-529). Apart from antagonism between different political camps, political elites reflected a very limited diversity and immunized themselves from alternative views outside of the dominant ruling party cadres. The centeredness of political power in the capital underpins this argument as well, as voices from the local government were hardly heard.

Another important feature both cases share is their Soviet background which can be retraced in both structural and cultural dynamics. Post-Soviet traits like the trust in kinship networks and powerful personalities make broad-based public support for the political regime itself dependent on individuals and loyalty to them rather than on political or civic institutions, parties and programs. This solidifies structural weaknesses in terms of checks and balances (Gherasimov 2019: 5-6). In particular, this is reflected in the intermediary sphere: while political socialization and political communication is thought of as essential functions of intermediary actors in terms of embedding a political system, it is precisely these functions that are consistently weak in the considered grey zone regimes (Gherasimov 2019: 7). While both countries are striving for parliamentary democracy, the actual implementation remains challenging: "a parliamentary democracy only works if there are parties, if the parties also have ideas and contents, if the parties also bring ideologies, and party structures work, etc." (Badalyan 2018: 61).[159] Instead, in the absence of social and political pluralism in the intermediary sphere both political elites and civil society actors have often reverted to polarization and politicization.

(In)stability explained by (in)congruence of political structure and culture

Apart from the observed commonalities in both considered grey zone regimes, the key value of this study lies in its approach to gain a deeper understanding of regime persistence and instability within this specific zone, which differs in the selected cases. Preliminary assumptions based on theoretical arguments of political culture theory considered the congruence of political structure and culture as decisive settings for stability.

In this respect, the Georgian example revealed: as long as structural changes are not accompanied by an equally deep and concurrent cultural transformation in terms of altered orientations, norms and values – and *vice versa* – the political system becomes fragile. The early years of independence showed this dynamic as the breakdown of political structures correlated with the formation of participatory orientations, or what Aprasidze and Siroky term "political emancipation" tendencies in society (2010: 128). Whereas under Saakashvili's government the entire political structure was (re)-constructed, liberalized and incipiently democratized, at times through drastic and also painful measures, but contact with the population was neglected and the communication gap widened. Since intermediary actors at that time lacked strength and impact in terms of connecting society and the state, decoupling tendencies intensified. Blended boundaries between intermediaries and the overall politicization of the civil society sector further contributed to this disconnect. Therefore, the language spoken by civil society actors and political elites was no longer understandable for the majority of the population and until today

[159] Original citation: "eine parlamentarische Demokratie funktioniert erst dann, wenn es Parteien gibt, wenn die Parteien auch Ideen und Inhalte haben, wenn die Parteien auch Ideologien mitbringen und Parteistrukturen funktionieren usw" (Badalyan 2018: 61).

their discourses are often judged as detached from people's reality of life. Although input structures exist and are even promoted by foreign donors, a *subject* political culture of the broader citizenry does not match those structural conditions. Because political structure and culture are not coherent, the political system is destabilized. This is also reflected in the regional-metropolitan divide in terms of ideas and strategies about future developments of the country which mostly emerge in the capital but are not necessarily accepted and replicated in the rural areas. Structurally, this centralization is common to both case studies.

Regarding situational experiences in Georgia that are considered to having had as socializing effect on citizenry, the power change in 2012 unveiled that:

> [S]ociety […] was able to tell what they want, and it made a huge difference not only in societal and political developments but also in economic developments afterwards. […] [S]ociety felt that they CAN. So afterwards, all the governments knew that they are under control and they have to take into account any sign of protest, which was not the case for Armenia. (Manasyan 2018: 20, emphasis in capitals)

However, until today this participatory attitude has been limited to elections and occasional protests, and as the study showed, the majority of society restrains from becoming politically active. Apart from enthusiastic "honeymoon" periods granted to any new regime in power, at some point, disillusionment about profound changes and nihilism would always increase among the citizenry and also lead to the politicization of civil society actors. This disenchantment is also reflected in the fact that the majority of voters nowadays do not know whom to vote for. With respect to political socialization effects, the Georgian case also points to the dilemma of ambiguity and inner strife among the young generations who have grown up after independence: raised in an unstable environment, uncertainty about the future shapes their withdrawal from political participation.

In contrast to Georgia, until very recently, the Armenian political system had been characterized by a permanent authoritarian political structure with superficial democratic features – like regular but rigged elections. While corruption penetrated all spheres of life, protest had been repeatedly silenced and the official and commonly accepted narrative subordinated domestic challenges to external threats. Political elites were limited in terms of new dynamics and alternative views as they effectively reproduced themselves. Backed by loyal supporters, the small ruling circle of individuals dominated and controlled the intermediary sphere which was shaped by clear rules and distribution of roles. In this way, the prevalent *subject* political culture among society and the (semi)authoritarian political structure proved to be congruent and for many years this congruence remained unchallenged from any substantial changes. However, first cracks in the solid political structural setting emerged in 2008, when the events of March 1 meant a bloody and burdening start of Sarksyan's leadership. In capitalizing on the window of opportunity, a more demanding, actively engaged and informally organized citizenry could de-

velop more easily over the following years apart from *formal* intermediaries; this distinct participatory part of society was mainly composed of young people who had grown up after independence. The emergence of informal activism and the establishment of alternative forms of articulation of interests as well as the consideration of informal ways of engagement also stemmed from civil society's limited room for maneuver in terms of triggering change. As a result, apart from the widespread conformity of society towards the dominant authority in terms of "compliance without commitment", cultural discontinuities developed (Eckstein 1988: 797). The revolution revealed that the long-term effects of these silent networking and socializing processes of informal activism had not been anticipated by intermediaries or the ruling power.

Today, due to the successful revolution, the situation in Armenia is similar to the initial phase after the Rose Revolution: "[P]eople now feel that they represent a power and they can demand, and they can achieve changes in society" (Manasyan 2018: 26). However, what Aprasidze and Sirkoy call "frozen transitions" with respect to the Georgian experience refers to the repeated outbreak of mass participation which is not accompanied by the establishment of participatory and representative institutions (2010). This observation is in line with the culturalist argument that any process of deep transformation of political culture is both costly and time-consuming due to "cumulative" learning processes in societies. Any "revolutionary artifice", therefore, remains without consequence in the short term, while in the longer term "engineer[ed]" changes in social and political structures might be able to make an impact (Eckstein 1988: 798).

Nevertheless, the revolution in Armenia itself is considered a clear testament of the depicted divide or disconnect between state and society, since the former ruling elite had not sensed the "pulse" of the people – neither their needs nor their expectations (Ghaplanyan 2018: 6). Today, the Armenian authorities can draw on their neighbor experience after the Rose Revolution as a comparative model in order not to repeat certain mistakes – in terms of losing the contact to society. However, as corruption has penetrated the entire political and social structure and there is no tradition of issue-based voting, any future structural developments each require a change in the prevalent political cultural setting so as to avoid a similar degree of instability as experienced by Georgia. Although the Yerevan City Council Elections in September 2018 were regarded as a successful test of electoral processes in the relative absence of bribes, it is argued that voting is still based on sentiments and the non-critical respect and commitment towards the leader (Danielyan 2018: 30; Ghaplanyan 2018: 26, 83; Iskandaryan 2018: 15; Nersisyan 2018: 50, 58).

Outstanding role of informality instead of legitimacy and trust

As expected, in the particular post-Soviet environment that is shaped by passivity and depoliticization in absence of vertical and horizontal trust, other sources of legitimacy are neces-

sary in order to stabilize a political regime over a longer term. Like authoritarian systems, regimes in the political grey zone suffer from a "structural deficit in legitimacy" which is counterbalanced by legitimacy "qua person and merit" (Albrecht/Frankenberger 2010: 57). In addition, the study has shown that *informality* constitutes an outstanding element of socialization processes which is also used by incumbents to gain legitimacy.

In particular, the double-headed or even multifaceted nature of informality in the political grey zone is a key observation. Informality in terms of corruption and patronage-client networks has penetrated both countries since independence. In Georgia, this has essentially been the case prior to the Rose Revolution, while in Armenia corruption has pervaded society even until recently. In the Armenian case, the entirely corrupt system which involved basically everyone in combination with the narrative on the preservation of internal stability and unity against external threats have been major sources of legitimacy for the previous regimes. However, this stabilizing method suffered a serious setback by the violent crackdown on protests in March 2008 when the regime directed violence against its own population. Since then, informal civic initiatives have increased in frequency and strength, which is why Kubik referred to the Velvet Revolution of April 2018 as a "creeping revolution". While corruption increased societal apathy, informal ways of engagement empowered the younger parts of the population, who committed themselves to informal activism in protest movements in which hierarchy was less important than unity over the issues of protest action (Badalyan 2018: 9-11; Iskandaryan 2018: 15; Paturyan 2018: 2). Thus, informal structures have also been mirrored by informal practices. Voskanyan even goes so far as to qualify Armenian realities as "informal realities"; two main strands of discourse – Western and patriotic – were omnipresent on the elite level but did not reflect the situation on the ground (2018: 2). Thereby, the revolution could win so easily as there had not been any social contract, but instead, a complete disconnect and lack of mutual responsibilities between the state and the population (Voskanyan 2018: 38).

In the Georgian case, since Saakashvili, legitimacy of the regime has predominantly been drawn from future perspectives in terms of European/Euro-Atlantic Integration and aligned narratives on external policies instead of bottom-up autonomous developments. While corruption as an informal practice had been significantly countered under Saakashvili, informal governance again gained in importance after 2012 with Ivanishvili as the ultimate decision-maker.

In this way, the role of informality and legitimacy as well as their interrelation have to be reconsidered, or as Lebanidze and Kakachia argue: "in hybrid regimes […] informal governance structures rely on public legitimacy provided by public support in the form of elections" (2017: 531). This raises the question whether diffuse support is still the appropriate category to look at in the political grey zone. The present study points to the observation that legitimacy in both cases is rather time-limited and strongly interlinked with effectivity in terms of performance

within the framework of the government's tenure. In short, informality seems to be an important feature in the political grey zone and its different facets still require investigation and in-depth analysis.

As possibilities for generalization of the study's findings are limited due to the small-N consideration of two most similar cases, further research on regimes in the political grey zone in different regional settings would add valuable insights. In particular, the inclusion of cases outside of the specific post-Soviet space might further substantiate the outlined discoveries and enable the isolation of key inheritances from the common Soviet past which are not expected to be present in other countries. Furthermore, when aiming for generalization, quantitative data could be involved to build on the qualitative comparative approach.

As a way of conclusion, some thoughts will be discussed on more recent considerations of global dynamics and ideas on alternative conceptions as well as conclusive future perspectives on the processes in the explored countries.

Consideration of global dynamics and alternative concepts of governance

> [W]e are influenced by the trend of development which is not ours, it's global, and which pushes this society into developing as a protest society, so irresponsible, disappointed, angry and finally revolutionary. We can consider this as an institutional form of civil society, but it's definitely lacking some elements. The element is: deliberation, the element is: representativeness – so we don't have institutions of representation of people, not enough – we have, but not enough. (Muskhelishvili 2018: 18)

Apart from the particularities of grey zone regimes on the national level, the incorporation of overall global and regional dynamics as well as alternative conceptions of governance signifies an important extension in contemplation about dynamics in this specific zone and potential of further studies (see for instance Crouch 2017; Rosanvallon 2008). Although recent approaches like "post-democracy" by Crouch or "counter-democracy" by Rosanvallon revert to the former sub-categorization of democracy, their ideas target the widespread tendency of political disintegration – even in established democracies. The two authors point to the widening gap between "civic-civil society" and the political sphere as well as the alienation of society from the latter. In times of increasing distrust, the role of elections as a democratic tool for ensuring representativeness is considered to lose importance: "The citizen-as-watchdog gains what the citizen-as-voter loses" (Rosanvallon 2008: 253; see also Crouch 2010: 10). While Crouch finds an increased passivity and even apathy of the citizenry along with political decision-making behind closed doors, Rosanvallon argues that political participation of a "veto-demos" takes alternative forms in terms of 'oversight', 'prevention' and 'judgement' (2008: 29-248; see also Crouch 2017: 10; Heidenreich 2016: 58): "The people are omnipresent and no longer content to make their voice heard only on election day" (Rosanvallon 2008: 254). In line with citizens as "political consumer[s]" (2008: 253-254) who have high expectations and demands towards political institutions,

it is increasingly challenging for elites to react to negative evaluations or to foresee reactions (Heidenreich 2016: 58, 63; Rosanvallon 2008: 256-257). Rosanvallon (2011) also challenges the previous conceptualization of democratic legitimacy and points to its multifaceted nature – an approach which might be worth considering in the political grey zone. In line with this, Nodia points to the questionable role of elections in countries like Georgia and Armenia, where "'direct democracy' – defined as people expressing their will taking the process to the street – claims moral superiority over an electoral process that is presumed corrupt and unfair" (2018a: 16).

Between apathy and revolution? Future perspectives on the selected case studies

Finally, what outlook can be given on the considered regimes in the political grey zone?[160] As of April 2018, like back in the 1990s, reconstruction is needed in Armenia, in particular in terms of building political institutions, which had been drastically neglected during the previous regimes (Ghaplanyan 2018: 2; Iskandaryan 2018: 16-17; Safaryan 2018: 28, 30). The enthusiastic and hopeful atmosphere which, up to now, stems from the revolution is reflected in discussions about decentralization processes of public administration offices as well as the increase in CSOs reaching out to the regions, where in 2018 Independence Day was celebrated for the first time (Badalyan 2018: 57). However, the immediate post-revolution period also revealed huge difficulties in terms of power being centered around individual personalities to the detriment of a real re-allocation of responsibility. This is coupled with the overall politically inexperienced crowd of new public officials in office which is being critically judged (Nersisyan 2018: 52, 89, 131; Safaryan 2018: 30). The urgent need for staffing the government in the period of transition has brought faces from civil society and revolutionary youth to politics along with fresh perspectives and dynamics but also contradicting visions (Doydoyan 2018: 4-5; Ghaplanyan 2018: 6; Paturyan 2018: 10; Safaryan 2018: 20; Soghomonyan 2018: 36). Similar stories were told about the situation in neighboring Georgia after the Rose Revolution in 2003. At the time of research, however, the majority of interviewees rejected the concern that there might be a vacuum in civil society similar to the one in Georgia, since the Armenian civil society remains divided into actively engaged and cooperative parts as well as critical and more distanced ones towards the government (Iskandaryan 2018: 3; Paturyan 2018: 38; Republican Party 2018: 16; Voskanyan 2018: 45-46). A key outcome of the revolution, however, is that the grassroots agenda which had been propagated for by civic initiatives over the past years was now lifted to the decision-making level. Furthermore, officials' culture of communication has changed towards directly requesting advice and recommendations from the public (Badalyan 2018: 6-7, 31, 35; Soghomonyan 2018: 34).[161]

[160] These final assessments are primarily based on interviewees' responses.

[161] As examples Badalyan mentioned the founder member of a civic initiative advocating for reforms in the education sector who now serves as the Deputy Minister of Education; as well as the cases of for-

In Georgia, the current situation is assessed more cautiously: the competition between pro-Western, democratic values and structures and conservative, anti-Western trends are considered contemporary and future challenges (Lebanidze 2018: 10, 11-12, 28). On the intermediary level, initial attempts were made in order to set off the overall elitist and centralized structure, yet, profound structural changes with respect to more representativeness and pluralism have been postponed. Regarding civil society, interviewees also stress the challenge of sustainability and neutrality of the sector apart from the dire need to go grassroots and ensure pluralism.[162] Furthermore, the latest presidential election in October 2018 which brought the country's first female president, Salome Zurabishvili, to power were accompanied with extreme political polarization and vote-buying of a new intensity (Kakachia/Lebanidze 2018).[163] Once again the conduct of the elections confirmed the omnipresent centeredness around charismatic personalities – with Ivanishvili and Saakashvili as leaders of opposing political forces who dominated campaigning: "voters live in alternative realities defined by partisanship" (Kakachia/Lebanidze 2018; Stöber 2016).

In June 2019, a new wave of massive protests formed in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, which were responded by police using tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets to prevent protesters from storming the parliament. Initially, the unrest targeted the increasing openness of the government towards Russian influence in the country. Allowing a Russian MP to chair a special session of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy in the Georgian parliament was understood as a clear sign of this trend. In another respect, however, the fierce demonstrations are considered to mark the peak of citizens' disenchantment towards the GD government following the continuous drop in support during the last years (Walker 2019; Stöber 2018; Civil.ge 2019). It is thus not surprising that protesters are even calling for early elections: "We are here to demonstrate our anger and our readiness to change this country" (activist cited in Antidze/Osborn 2019).

Apathy and revolution have shaped both countries' independent history. Although it does not allow for any forecast, this study has shed light on one part of the political grey zone, the question of stability. However, a lot remains to be discovered with regard to other factors, as the recent events in Georgia and Armenia tellingly reflect.

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mer leaders of youth movements who could be spotted on the candidate lists of leading parties for the Yerevan Municipal elections in September 2018 (2018: 6-7, 31).

[162] See for instance Metreveli 2018: 45, 49; Media representative 2018: 3; Lebanidze 2018: 18; Nodia 2018: 10; Tugushi 2018: 5; Aprasidze 2018: 17; Urushadze 2018: 22; Pruidze 2018: 34, 36. The lack of sustainability and serious donor-dependence are also stressed in the latest EU-Roadmap for Georgia, although a positive trend of increasing state funding is detectable (European External Action Service 2018: 7-8).

[163] Shortly prior to the election, the GD government announced to pay off debts of 600 000 citizens which was heavily criticized by international and local observers (Kakachia/Lebanidze 2018).

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Annex

List of Interviews

Interview Partner Georgia	Position/Function	Date of Interview
Alexandre Lortkipanidze	Executive Director of the Institute of Democracy	August 1, 2018
Archimandrite Vakhtang Akhaladze Adam	Rector of Saint King Tamar University of the Patriarchate of Georgia	August 16, 2018
Bidzina Lebanidze	Research Associate and Lecturer at University of Bremen, Associate Professor (non-resident) at Ilia State University	August 21, 2018
David Aprasidze	Professor and Head of Administration at Ilia State University	August 7, 2018
Eka Metreveli	Executive Director of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies - Rondeli Foundation	August 9, 2018
Erekle Urushadze	Program Manager at Transparency International Georgia	July 30, 2018
Felix Hett	Executive Director at the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (South Caucasus) Georgia	August 9, 2018
George Tugushi	Member of Parliament (European Georgia, former UNM), former Ombudsman	September 4, 2018
Ghia Nodia	Chairman of the Caucasus Institute for Peace Democracy and Development, Professor at Ilia State University, former Minister of Education and Science	August 16, 2018
Giorgi Kldiashvili	Executive Director of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)	August 22, 2018
Irina Pruidze	Member of Parliament (Georgian Dream); First Deputy Chairperson: Committee on European Integration and Committee on European Integration	July 24, 2018
Marina Muskhelishvili	Professor of Political Science at Tbilisi State University, Director of the Centre for Social Studies	August 21, 2018
Merabi Meshveliani	Member of the Kutaisi City Council (3rd term)	(written response)
Nugzar Kokheridze	Co-founder and board member of the Research Intellectual Club "Dialogue of Generations", coordinator of working group 5 of EaP CSF Georgian National Platform	August 14, 2018
Media Representative	Reporter	August 21, 2018
Human Rights Expert	Staff member of the Ombudsman Office	September 5, 2018
Tiko Tkeshelashvili	Project manager at Caucasus Institute for Peace Democracy and Development (until 2018)	July 17, 2018
Zurab Tchiaberashvili	Member of Parliament (European Georgia, former UNM)	August 13, 2018

Interview partner Armenia	Position/Function	Date of interview
Alexander Iskandaryan	Executive Director of the Caucasus Institute	September 25, 2018
Anna Shahnazaryan	Activist	October 17, 2018
Ara Danielyan	Rural economic development expert at SHEN - NGO for rural development	October 3, 2018
Ashot Aleksanyan	Associate Professor of Political Sciences, Department of Political Science, Chair of Theory and History of Political Science of Yerevan State University	September 27, 2018
Ashot Melikyan	Chairman of the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression	September 17, 2018
Ashot Voskanyan	President of Armenian Research Centre in Humanities (ARCH) Former Ambassador and Member of Parliament	September 19, 2018
Boris Navasardyan	Chairman of Yerevan Press Club	October 7, 2018
David Shahnazaryan	Independent expert	October 15, 2018
Heghine Manasyan	CEO at the Caucasus Research Resource Centers	October 18, 2018
Irina Ghaplanyan	First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Nature Protection (since 2018)	October 15, 2018
Levon Nersisyan	Executive Director of A.D. Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Protection Center, NGO	September 17, 2018
Liana Badalyan	Project Coordinator at Friedrich-Ebert Foundation (South Caucasus) Armenia	September 19, 2018
Mission Armenia	Project manager / legal advisor at Mission Armenia	September 26, 2018
Republican Party	High ranking RP-party member	October 18, 2018
Richard Giragosian	Director of the Regional Studies Center	September 20, 2018
Shushan Doydoyan	Executive Director of FOICA Freedom of Information Center Armenia	October 2, 2018
Styopa Safaryan	Director of the Armenian Institute of International and Security Affairs (AIISA), Former Member of Parliament (Heritage Party)	October 16, 2018
Vahram Soghomonyan	Political Analyst, Founder of the think tank Political Discourse	September 25, 2018
Yevgeny Jenny Paturyan	Assistant Professor at American University Armenia; Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis	September 27, 2018

Susanne Brunnbauer (M.A.) currently works as Deputy Head of Division in the Department for International Cooperation of the State Chancellery and Ministry of Culture of Saxony-Anhalt in Magdeburg, Germany. She holds a Bachelor's degree in European Studies at the Technical University of Chemnitz with a focus on Eastern Europe and a Master's degree in International Relations and Development Policy at the University of Duisburg-Essen. Inspired by her academic education and several stays in the region, her research interests lie in the field of political culture and stability in the South Caucasus, democratization and the role of civil society in transformation processes. In the framework of her thesis, she has conducted field research in Georgia and Armenia by interviewing a wide range of civil society actors, political elites and members of the local research community on political and societal dynamics in the two countries and implications on stability.

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