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EMPLOYEE LOYALTY AFFECTING A COMPANY'S STABILITY

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Abstract

The growing interest in the matter of employee loyalty shown by organizations is generated by the current trend in employees being the most valuable assets an organization has. A genuine desire expressed by the employees of an enterprise to provide excellent performance is one of the keys to corporate success. In order to ensure a sustainable development of a company, a certain type of balance must be achieved in terms of loyal customers, loyal employees and loyal investors enjoyed by the company. Building positive corporate relationships between brand and customer guarantees financial success in business. Grasping the importance of commercial efficiency of the impact made by the employees on the company as well as customer loyalty and staff motivation necessitates providing employees with favorable, if not, appealing and comfortable working conditions.

The relevance of the chosen issue lies in the profitability of any organization identified to be a major indicator of the stability and closely correlated with the efficiency of employees. The results achieved by people in business operation rest not only on their expertise, skills and abilities, but also on the willingness of employees to work for the benefit of the organization.

Key words: employee loyalty, company profitability, staff assessment, organization stability factor, employee loyalty assessment, staff loyalty formation.

Introduction

Numerous present-day companies face the issue of organizational brain-drain that has a negative bearing on business operation as a whole. Dismissing an employee and replacing it with a new one appears to be a crisis at the micro level and is further exacerbated by the recruitment and occupational skills development costs, exercising a considerable impact over business stability, requiring "the management to run the staff retention process at a scientific level, further facilitated by developing a loyal staff policy within the company".[1]

The improvement of personnel management system as well as committing more investments into the development of staff skills, creative employee initiative and corporate performance encouragement and successful team building are of vital importance for any modern enterprise. Respectively, the formation of the employee loyalty becomes a necessary precondition for thriving business operation and enjoying relative stability.

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[1] Maloney, D., Effective project management: the gift that keeps on giving. https://slack.com/collaboration/effective-management. 2019 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

The first ever references to the motivation and invigoration of personnel, also affecting the present research topic, can be found in the works of Western and American researchers of the 20th century: A. Maslow, F. Herzberg, C. Argyris, D. McGregor, etc.

The theoretical and methodological foundations of employee loyalty research are laid by the following foreign authors: M. Armstrong, D. Droubi, F. Reichheld, L. Thurston, J. Hesketh, L. Schlesinger and the others.

An analysis of the Georgian and foreign sources revealed that managers in many modern organizations fail to pay due attention to the personnel management process and neglect the strong correlation of the financial stability of the company with the satisfaction and loyalty of their employees.[2]

The aim of the present article is to shed new light on research done back in 2011 to develop a set of measures to provide the formation of the employee loyalty at the Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC to ensure the stability of this very organization.

To achieve the set goal, it become imperative to solve a number of issues, namely:

- A study on the concept and main factors influencing business stabilization;
- Consideration of staff loyalty as a stabilizing factor;
- A study on methods of evaluation and measurement of employee loyalty level;
- Description of the scope of the Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC;
- Analysis of the personnel structure at the Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC
- Assessment of the employee loyalty extent in the organization;
- Producing a set of recommendations to reach the company stability in order to increase the employee loyalty;
- Development of measures to strengthen the employee loyalty at the Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC;
- Discussion of the social and economic efficiency of the implementation of the proposed recommendations and putting the works done into scientific publications;
- The Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC was selected as the research object, located at 10 Bakhtrioni St., Tbilisi.

The research subject was the employee loyalty system at the Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC.

In the process of problem solving, the methods of analysis, data synthesis and generalization were used based on the study of specialized periodicals, scientific literature, internet materials; statistical analysis; analysis of primary information about the organization's activities and a method of discussion in scientific circles.

Materials of specialized Georgian-language and foreign publications on the discussed topic, results of the authors' own research, as well as materials of research papers presented on the Internet were used as the information base of the research.

In the process of research, its defining novelty was formed and highlighted:

- When studying the concept of organization stabilization, employee loyalty is justified as a stabilization factor;

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[2] Osborne, S., Hammoud, M. S., „Effective Employee Engagement in the Workplace". International Journal of Applied Management and Technology. 2017 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

- During the evaluation of the level of employee loyalty of the Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC, the role of staff loyalty in the stability of the organization was argued by using the survey and net loyalty index measurement method;
- A number of measures were developed to strengthen the loyalty of the staff for the stability of the Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC.

To sum up the introductory part, it is worth mentioning that the practical value of the research lay in the possibility of introducing the developed recommendations and proposed measures for the formation of employee loyalty in order to increase the stability of the organization - the Institute of Economic Research and Development LLC.

1. Factors Affecting an Organization's Stability

Today, at the current stage of economic development, facing the ongoing crisis, only a stable and competitive operation of enterprises can ensure both their own financial stability and the sustainable development of the state, as well as the stability and investment appeal of the region as a whole.

According to the encyclopedic dictionary, stabilization (from Latin *stabilis*) is an increase in continuity, reaching a permanent state or maintaining this state, that is, constant, unchanged, maintaining a defined state, level, etc. for a long time.[3]

Stability, implies avoiding recession of the economic system to begin with, determining specific indicators at a certain level and improving pursuit in general.

Stabilization at the level of occupation of economic entities involves a stage when the company carves out a certain niche in the market and the goal of the business becomes to maintain both its positions at the same level and the ones already achieved.

Features of stabilization are as follow:

- Financial stability indicators;
- Slowing down growth rates;
- Stability of tenure of personnel;
- Formalization of business processes;
- Establishing company branches.[4]

Many companies entering the market with a high growth rate have a goal to reach a stabilization stage. After making a management decision to stabilize the economic aspects of the company, the management must collect detailed information about the ongoing situation in the enterprise and develop an individual action plan. This operation can be called an internal audit of the organization's economic situation. The audit can be done both independently and through the outsourcing specialists. The second option is suitable for managers with no enough professional skills in the field of finance.

The first phase of the stabilization process of the company's economic pursuit includes the collection and processing of information from various sources to make management decisions regarding the future operation of the organization.

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[3] Uribe, L., The Importance of Employee Loyalty and How To Improve It. (By Indeed Editorial Team). https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/importance-of-employee-loyalty, 2019 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[4] Barman, J. P., Employee Loyalty- 3 Things to Understand & How to Improve It. (Employee Engagement). https://vantagecircle.com/employee-loyalty, 2022 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

The second phase of the stabilization process is about analyzing the stability of all components of the organization based on the previously collected information, resulting in obtaining the organization's financial indicators.

The third phase covers the development of the goal of managing the organization's stability as well as arranging the fundamental tools for achieving this very goal. The set goals are possible to be achieved using financial, credit, price, marketing policy tools, etc.

The next step in stabilizing the organization's economic pursuit is planning. This process is a method of coordinating the running of all departments of the organization. Planning allows to identify, define and solve the tasks the organization faces, taking into account its specific goals as well as determining the means, methods and time of their implementation. Planning the activities of the entire organization allows management to understand its path, to regulate the impact of the processes on the company's pursuit, and also to provide information to advance to the next phase.[5]

The fifth phase includes the prediction of a new level of stability, serving as a kind of target point for the company path, determined by the results achieved at the previous phase. This is the most important and difficult stage of the stabilization process, requiring great professionalism of the financial manager. It is at this very stage that the budget of the organization is formed, which clearly shows the capabilities of achieving the goals set by the organization.

As a result of this phase, some extent of adjustment is almost always required, which stands as the next stage of stabilizing the pursuit. The essence of the adjustment stage is to bring the desired state closer to the actual capabilities of the company. Subsequently, this very phase allows all responsible persons within the organization to be informed about the final plan of stabilization of economic performance of the organization.[6]

Finally, the last phase of the stabilization process is the control and analysis of the results. The analysis is carried out in two manners:

1) Comparing the set goals with the results obtained during the administration of the process;

2) Through a complete assessment of the stability of the organization (whether it has become stable in relation to both external and internal factors).

A wide variety of factors affect the financial stability of the organization, being core to the stabilization process, including the internal factors directly dependent on the management of the organization's occupation and its operational plan, and the external factors, the change of which is not at all subject to the efforts of the organization's management.

External factors, affecting the stability of the organization, are divided into groups:[7]

1) Economic factors directly affect the efficiency of the firm. In turn, the economic factors are divided into factors of the condition of the financial system and the factors of the general economic situation.

[5] Luong, S., 6 Reasons Why Corporations Should Care About Employee Loyalty. (The Qualities of a Loyal Employee). https://www.viktorwithak.com/employee-loyalty-and-why-it-matters, 2018 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[6] Kreacic, A., Employee Loyalty is your Most Important Resource. (Management & Leadership Coaching). https://www.gbscorporate.com/blog/employee-loyalty-is-your-most-important-resource, 2021 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[7] Nawrat, A., Employee loyalty is only short-term. (It isn't stopping them looking for new jobs elsewhere). https://www.unleash.ai/company-culture/employee-loyalty-is-only-short-term, 2021 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

Among the factors of the disposition of the country's financial system are informational processes and related inflationary expectations, the refinancing rate of Georgia, the policy of the Central Bank of Georgia, the degree of development of credit institutions, etc.

General economic factors are characterized by the rate of economic growth, the investment attractiveness of commodity producers in the domestic market, cyclical fluctuations in the economy, and the situation of the country's tax balance.

2) Factors related to the activities of competing companies that produce similar or similar products: This group of factors allows the organization's management to compare the organization of administrative and economic activities to other companies, to identify the properties of the organization, to evaluate the company's marketing policy by analyzing its competitors - benchmarking.

3) Socio-demographic factors are related to the formation of lifestyle, performance and consumption. This group of factors has a significant impact on the activities of economic entities. The emergence of new trends leads to the creation of a new type of consumption, that is, the need for other goods and services appears, which greatly affects the organization's functioning.[8] It incorporates such factors as the demographic situation, the level of unemployment, the level of income of the population, the solvency of the population, the value system existing in society, etc.

4) Scientific and technical factors contribute to the rapid development of certain industries or specific organizations. At the same time, this group of factors can significantly affect the destruction of other organizations. This is due to the uncertainty of the influence of scientific and technical factors. On the one hand, the use of new technologies of scientific development in their activities allows the organization to ensure the competitiveness of its products and entering new markets. On the other hand, the introduction of new technologies and the use of various scientific developments often lead to the transfer of funds from the ongoing circulation for a long time. This is due to significant capital intensity and long-term use of new technologies. The result of using the latter can be both high profits and significant losses due to their non-payment.[9]

5) International factors, including the internationalization of the world economy, the growth of the economic power of individual states, the formation of the international financial system, the emergence of new large markets, the fluctuations of the dollar and euro in the world market.

6) Political and legal factors are directly related to the political situation in the country and the activities of state authorities. Legal boundaries formed by this group of factors regulate the activity of economic subjects by either weakening or strengthening the levers of the state. Political and legal factors include political stability both in the country as a whole and in the regions, stability of the government, arrangement of political forces, legal framework of governance, tax and credit policy of the state, customs policy and legislative acts that ensure control over the activities of economic entities.[10]

7) Environmental and climatic factors, exhibiting no influence on the will of the organization.

Respectively, it should be noted that it is almost impossible to accurately determine and quantify the group of external factors that affect the financial stability of the organization.

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[8] De Castro, Amy., 6 Strategies for Building Employee Loyalty. (To develop loyalty among employees and encourage them to stay, company leaders need to meet workers' basic needs). https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/all-things-work/pages/six-strategies-for-building-employee-loyalty.aspx, 2022 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[9] Barman, J. P., Employee Loyalty- 3 Things to Understand & How to Improve It. (Employee Engagement). https://vantagecircle.com/employee-loyalty, 2022 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[10] Maloney, D., Effective management: the gift that keeps on giving. https://slack.com/collaboration/effective-management, 2019 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

The internal factors affecting the stability of the organization are as follows:[11]

The factors affecting the financial stability of the organization should be divided into organizational, production, personnel, market and financial categories. The financial and human resources of the organization should be highlighted to be the most important internal factors. These factors are interrelated, since while interacting with each other, if one changes, the others will follow the same lead as well.

The fact that the organization has a sufficient amount of its own financial resources, in particular, the profits gained, allows to provide a sense of confidence in a competitive environment. At the same time, it is worth so that a larger percentage of profits is directed to the expansion of production activities. Debt capital has a great influence on the financial stability of the organization. This indicates that thanks to the borrowed financial resources, the enterprise increases its financial capabilities, but the accompanying risk of financial losses should not be ignored either.[12]

Human resource factors incorporate employee qualifications, employee motivation and loyalty, as well as staff turnover. It should be noted that the lower the turnover and the higher the qualification and loyalty of the employees, the more stable the enterprise is guaranteed.[13] Experience demonstrates that a significant part of the failure of the organization can be related to the incompetence, inexperience or insufficient qualifications of management personnel, their inability to grasp the changes occurring in the internal environment.

Market factors, the organization's competitiveness in the market in particular, should be attributed to the virtually uncontrollable ones. New enterprises appear practically every day, which may reduce the level of competitiveness of this business entity in the future.[14]

The success or failure of entrepreneurial activity largely depends on the choice of the structure and composition of the products and services provided, i.e. the factors of production. In this case, it is important to decide what products to produce, as well as to determine how to produce, i.e. what technology and model of organization and management should be applied.

Thus, based on research, we can argue that internal factors that directly affect the financial stability of enterprises make it possible to regulate the organization's activities.

To sum up, it can be assumed that the financial stability of the organization, providing the basis of stabilization, is a condition in which solvency, competitiveness and long-term predictable perspective of the organization's development are ensured. As a result of the research, the main external and internal factors affecting the financial stability (stabilization) of the organization were identified.

When controlling the stability of the organization, special attention should be paid to internal factors, since they directly depend on the activities of the organization and the measures taken by the organization to manage them. In addition, it can be argued say that it is the internal factors that influence the financial stability of the organization, shaping the activities of business entities.[15]

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[11] Hoek, J., What is employee loyalty? (The principles of loyalty). https://www.effectory.com/knowledge/what-is-employee-loyalty, 2013 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[12] Carver, C., Employee Loyalty: The Secret Sauce and Tips Your Organization Needs. (Employee loyalty is volatile). https://astronsolutions.net/employee-loyalty, 2021 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[13] Утенин, В., Ключевые показатели эффективности (KPI) и практическая система мотивации персонала. «Elitarium». Издательства «Фолио», Київ. 2019.
[14] Kreacic A., Uribe L., Luong S. - Employee loyalty is declining. Here's how to build it back. (How can we bring back loyalty?). https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/11/employee-loyalty-declining-how-to-build-it-back, 2021 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[15] Luong, S., 6 Reasons Why Corporations Should Care About Employee Loyalty. (The Qualities of a Loyal Employee). https://www.viktorwithak.com/employee-loyalty-and-why-it-matters, 2018 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

2. Employee Loyalty as a Factor of a Company's Stability

Employee loyalty is one of the factors affecting the stability of the company's economic pursuit. The employees serve as a basis for any modern enterprise, since they allow the effective utilization of all types of resources available to the company. The employees are good indicators of successful financial operation of an enterprise, hence forge its competitiveness. The engagement of personnel in the company's business operations, contributing to the transformation of inbound resources into the final output, is found to be the implementation of the main business function, ensuring the achievement of the main goal. The well-coordinated cooperation of employees can ensure the organization to achieve perfection, resulting in its ability to meet not only the needs of its personnel, but also to anticipate the expectations of customers and other stakeholders.[16]

In order to study staff loyalty as one of the factors of company stabilization, general concept of loyalty can be considered as an example.

Loyalty is a positive attitude of a person towards a specific object or subject. Many experts point out that the basis of loyalty lies in the desire to benefit, a dedicated attitude, preventing anything that could harm the object of loyalty.

The concept of staff loyalty is often identified with the concept of reliability, which is not entirely correct, so their differences are worth noting. Credibility of an employee involves the compliance with the legal and moral standards adopted by the company, or the desire to comply with them. Many experts define the credibility of personnel as a law-abiding notion. By definition, the credibility acts as an individual characteristic and personality trait.

Loyalty to the organization can be manifested in different types:

- The customer, implying the customers to be loyal to the company producing goods and services, recognizing the high quality of manufactured goods and services, trusting the representatives of this very company;
- The personnel, found to be loyalty to the organization.

Loyal employees of the company are ready not only to wait for the temporary difficulties of the company to emerge and to accept the necessary organizational changes, but also to personally contribute to the quick overcoming and solving of the problems that arise. Such employees value their work in such an organization, i.e. they try to do their job in the best manner available and also encourage their colleagues to do the same. Only dedicated staff can make effective use of creativity to solve the emerging problems, take individual and collective responsibility and make all possible efforts to achieve the company's goals. If the employee is loyal to its manager, implying the recognition of their competence, admiration, authority, the employee is ready to sacrifice their personal interests for the common cause.[17]

It follows from the above that loyalty is an indicator of a person's attitude towards something specific.

Loyalty can be defined by the following attributes:[18]

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[16] Kreacic, A., Employee Loyalty is your Most Important Resource. (Management & Leadership Coaching). https://www.gbscorporate.com/blog/employee-loyalty-is-your-most-important-resource, 2021 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

[17] De Castro, Amy., 6 Strategies for Building Employee Loyalty. (To develop loyalty among employees and encourage them to stay, company leaders need to meet workers' basic needs). https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/all-things-work/pages/six-strategies-for-building-employee-loyalty.aspx, 2022 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

[18] Uribe, L., The Importance of Employee Loyalty and How To Improve It. (By Indeed Editorial Team). https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/importance-of-employee-loyalty, 2019 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

1) Identifying their basic values and beliefs with the object of loyalty;

2) Applying the personal experience for the success of the object of loyalty;

3) Honesty and positive attitude towards the object;

4) The desire to protect the object of loyalty from any danger or negative risks;

5) If necessary, demonstrating the readiness to make certain sacrifices for the benefit of the object of loyalty;

6) Desire to perform the assigned duties, functions, mission of the company in the best possible way;

7) A sense of pride in belonging to the object of loyalty.[19]

Thus, loyal staff are the employees who are committed to their work and to the company, comprehending that their personal growth as a professional in this field also contributing to the growth and prosperity of the company. These are people whose interests directly coincide with the company's goals. These are performers who not only fulfill their duties, but are ready to show a creative approach to solving problems arising from management. This is the staff that ensures the company's financial success and stable development.

Conclusion

Today, the organization requires not only the recruitment of well-qualified employees but turning them into loyal ones as well to sustain effective corporate culture. The following are the most important preconditions for the formation of employee loyalty:[20]

1) Proper pay for work performed: Monetary remuneration should be equal to the efforts made by employees, and the proportions should be equal for employees of the same level.

2) Fulfillment of personal goals of the employee through the employment in the company: As statistics show, a person spends about a third of his/her active adult life at work. Therefore, it is important for the employee to feel themselves necessary and important individual for the company, being on the right track for personal growth and the attainment of personal and corporate goals.

3) Compliance with the agreed terms of the employment contract: When deciding to apply for a job in this very company, the potential employee primarily pays attention to the terms of the contract. At this stage, it is important for the employee that the reality does not differ from what was pictured before the start of work. Frequent changes made to the contract are perceived by people as unfair, especially if they are initiated unilaterally.

4) Comfortable working environment: Nowadays, people are coming to the realization that it is better to be not only rich but also healthy at the same time. Currently, indicators such as noise and radiation levels, workplace lighting, air cleanliness, etc., are gradually becoming important for employees. This also includes a favorable atmosphere in the team, which is characterized not only by the company's corporate culture, its common goals and mission, but also by respect, mutual support and solidarity among the colleagues.

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[19] Carver, C., Employee Loyalty: The Secret Sauce and Tips Your Organization Needs. (Employee loyalty is volatile). https://astronsolutions.net/employee-loyalty, 2021 [L. s. 04.11.2022].
[20] Nawrat, A., Employee loyalty is only short-term. (It isn't stopping them looking for new jobs elsewhere). https://www.unleash.ai/company-culture/employee-loyalty-is-only-short-term, 2021 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

5) Relationship with management: This situation is one of the most important factors in the emergence of loyalty. In this case, the main points are the popularity of the criteria and the fairness of work evaluation, the manager's equal attitude towards all employees (absence of favorites), the manager's compliance with the company's internal rules, consistency in goal achievement, clarity of task setting, constructive criticism, the ability to express gratitude and many others.

If many of these conditions are met, then employees tend to become largely loyal to their organization. The experience of many well-known companies around the world shows that the optimal use of the organization's human resources is one of the most decisive competitive advantages, allowing the company to obtain a leading position in the market. Such companies have achieved outstanding economic performance, in particular, by increasing the involvement of their personnel in solving the problems the organization had faced. They regard people as the key agents behind the company's achievements. Employee loyalty (commitment), including their acceptance of the organization's goals and values and willingness to work hard for their implementation, are found to be the most important preconditions not only for human resources, but also for the maximum output of human resources. All other resources of the organization are dependent on the individuals in terms of effective use of finances, technical means, etc.[21]

It should be noted that many companies have considerably succeeded not only by developing the loyalty and commitment of their employees, but also by the competent structure of their business processes, through properly developed marketing strategy, effective application of technical, informational means and other resources of the organization. Employee loyalty as a process should not be idealized, but it should have an important place in personnel management and personnel performance.[22]

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[21] Hoek, J., What is employee loyalty? (The principles of loyalty). https://www.effectory.com/knowledge/what-is-employee-loyalty, 2013 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

[22] Kreacic, A., Uribe, L., Luong, S., Employee loyalty is declining. Here's how to build it back. (How can we bring back loyalty?). https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/11/employee-loyalty-declining-how-to-build-it-back, 2021 [L. s. 04.11.2022].

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THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SCIENTIFIC-RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

More advancement in scientific activity is necessary to reevaluate the challenges of modern world and their possible solutions. Research-based solutions can be effective for the development of numerous fields as well as for resolving issues in economic, social, cultural, or other spheres. This was demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic, when the vaccination was created. The vaccination as a consequence of a scientific approach led to stop the pandemic. Accordingly, it is crucial to support the growth and development of research activities and encourage scientific activities among students in universities and higher education institutions[1] where the teaching-learning process and research activities are carried out, new knowledge and experience are created. This is done in order to update and consolidate existing knowledge, as well as to create new knowledge and integrate it into the educational process and the economy.

The goal of this paper is to reveal the activities of universities and teaching universities in the field of higher education. It does this by providing an overview of international studies, a general discussion of the significance and role of scientific-research activities in the development of higher education, as well as the findings of research carried out in Georgia. The paper includes both an overview of international studies, a general discussion of the importance and role of research activities in the development of higher education, and the qualitative research results conducted in Georgia, the purpose of which is to reveal the activities of universities and educational institutions in the field of higher education.

In this process, employees of the research departments from 10 Georgian universities/teaching universities, who are presented in the study as experts in the field were interviewed (in general 15 experts). The novelty of the study consists in its description of the challenges facing Georgia's higher education system, as well as the identification of the role that research activities play in the activities and development of universities.

The main findings of the research can be considered that the primary function and role of universities is to transfer existing knowledge to younger generations, as well as to create new knowledge. Through their research initiatives, universities play a significant role in the creation of new knowledge, which contributes to the formation of highly qualified personnel and develops various fields. Also, the issue of raising adequate funds for research and internationalization of research, which will increase the accessibility of scientific projects to local and international markets, remains an important challenge.

Keywords: University, Scientific activity, Research, Challenge, Development.

Introduction

In modern reality, people's life moves at an accelerated pace, constantly undergoing changes, which is largely due to scientific advancements. The irreversible process of globalization in itself accelerates the economic, social and cultural processes taking place in the world and, at the same time, makes any

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[1]Higher education institutions – an educational scientific research institution carrying out higher educational program/programs (except doctoral). https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/32830?publication=97 [L. s. 09.11.2022].

information accessible and contributes to the creation of new knowledge, which is to some extent the result of scientific research.

It should be emphasized that technological advancements, the widespread use of the Internet, and telecommunications are commonly mentioned while discussing scientific accomplishments in the modern world. Today, science is viewed as the cornerstone of worldwide social progress as well as the main driving force of economic and social development. Modern science is focused on drawing up a long-term vision and plan for the development of society, which is directly related to the growth of the country's economic indicators. Those countries, where the amount of natural resources is scarce, are mainly focused on the creation and production of intellectual knowledge, therefore, their economic growth indicators depend on scientific and technological advancements.

In the process of developing of the country's social, economic or living culture, the active involvement of the higher education sector is of crucial importance, not only in terms of transmitting and sharing existing knowledge to new generations, but also in terms of creating and producing new knowledge through scientific and research activities.

Universities and educational institutions play a key part in this process because it is there that research is done and new knowledge is generated, which should help to overcome the problems mentioned above. The role of modern universities is no longer only to share existing knowledge, it is very important to create new knowledge and thus advancement of numerous sectors. [2]

The primary difficulty facing contemporary academic institutions is how to address societal issues and educate such citizens who can create better conditions for the life in society. The main objective of the paper is to present the importance of research in academic life, as well as the function and role of the university in the modern world. This paper gives an overview of modern literature on the research topic, along with a brief expert survey and an analysis of the findings.

1. Methodology

First of all, it should be noted that the purpose of this research is to study the significance and role of the research activities in the field of higher education. The research methodology presented in the paper involves the qualitative study of the representatives of the research department of universities and educational institutions operating in Georgia, who have direct contact with the management and development of research processes in the university/teaching university. In relation with this it is noteworthy to discuss the research questions which were given in the questionnaire: why are research activities important for higher education field? What goals should have university elaborated in line with research activities? What are the values that the research activities should be based on at university? What is the main function and role of the university in 21st century? What aims should have the university in modern era? Also, the questionnaire included the topics related to existing challenges in higher education system. Moreover, the study aimed to reveal the fields where the scientific activities are actively presented and fields that need more support.

The participants of the study have some level of expertise in the relevant field, as they are in direct contact with the development of research activities and management processes in the sector of higher education. A semi-structured questionnaire was used for the research using a qualitative research methodology. Through open-ended questions, participants were given the chance to express their thoughts on the significance and function of research activities in academic institutions. The questionnaire was completed

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[2] Vessuri, H. The Role of Research in Higher Education: Implications and Challenges for an Active Contribution to Human and Social Development in book Higher Education in the World 3, 2008. Pp.119-114.

by a total of 15 respondents from 10 universities/teaching universities. The questionnaire was filled out online by the participants.

2. Literature review

2.1 What is the role of research in higher education

According to various studies and expert opinions, the higher education system needs to respond to global concerns and actively contribute to the development of mankind and society. It is important to reevaluate the importance of research and integrate knowledge into social processes. When scientists and experts from other sectors get together in order to create approaches that contribute to the growth of the higher education vision, it is important to find ways that contribute to the development of the vision of higher education. It is also crucial to consider how these visions should be applied and connected in practice. Only the intersection of science and different fields allows the development of new knowledge.

When it comes to research, it should be noted that the primary function of the university is teaching and research activities should contribute to enhancing the standard of instruction and creating a team of new professionals.

The university community became involved in academic research around a century ago, when Columbia University pioneered a center (1928) where teaching, research and patient care were all housed in one space. Later, in 1945, the University of Cambridge started conducting research activities. Teaching and a desire for knowledge have always been the two fundamental drivers behind the incorporation of research into institutions.

Throughout history, university activities have always been noteworthy. For example, Hammerstein reminds us that "European universities are the oldest European universities excluding the Catholic Church".

Researcher William Henry Perkin says that the emergence of universities is a special stage in the world history of higher education. However, it is worth noting that European higher education was constantly influenced by various cultures, including the influence of countries such as Egypt, China, India, Islamic countries and others.

The research process itself does not imply the discovery of something brand-new or previously undiscovered. The knowledge that already exists about a certain event or phenomena is updated and expanded during the study process. The most crucial aspect of research is finding answers to questions.[3]

The quality of instruction is enhanced by qualitative research. Based on the fact that universities not only disseminate, but also produce new knowledge through research, it is crucial that the research process promotes excellent instruction. Is it interesting to discuss the role of the university in the 21st century? A university in the modern sense is a space where academic staff, administrative staff, and students work together to foster the production of new knowledge and new platforms for growth.[4]

Taking into account the modern understanding of the university, the role of a teacher in a university is entirely different from the role of a school teacher. First of all, the lecturer should be a friend, mentor and guide for the students, sharing his life experience with them. He or she should also assist the students in beginning their professional lives[5].

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[3] Lakhotia, S. Research and Innovation in Universities: Why and How These Should Promoted in book Quality Mandate for Higher Education Institutions in India. University Grants Commission, 2021, pp.89-114.
[4] cf. Footnote 3. s. 89-114.
[5] cf. Footnote 3. s. 89-114.

2.2. The future of universities and research

The document prepared by the of European University Association - "Universities without walls: a vision for 2030" presents in detail the future priorities, needs and values that universities will have to fulfill by 2030, which will be both the main challenge for them and the perspective of future development[6].

Universities should first construct a clear vision for their future development, including the direction they want to go in, the goals they aim to achieve, and the way they will respond to modern challenges. To accomplish these tasks, they will need more openness to various circles of society or sectors.

According to the document of the Association of European Universities, in the future, the structure of universities will become increasingly hybrid[7].

As for the process of internationalization in universities, European universities will be significantly more transnational and multinational in the future laying the foundation for research and innovation. Moreover, for higher-quality teaching. The implementation of combined teaching and research projects, as well as the development of pro-European attitudes on a local and global scale, can be considered the future missions of universities.

The future mission of universities can be considered to be the implementation of joint projects on teaching and research, the formation of a positive attitude towards Europeanism at the global and local level. [8]

According to this document, universities in Europe will have greater autonomy by 2030, to be able to make strategic decisions on organizational, financial and other issues independently.

More research and researchers will be included in the teaching process. Universities will be more actively involved in research, in the direction of both fundamental and applied sciences. In addition, university-based interdisciplinary research projects and publishing systems will be more developed. Naturally, universities will continue to implement doctoral programs ensuring the formation of highly qualified researchers.

The future mission of universities can be considered that they will be involved in the process of dealing with world challenges together with various partner organizations. Therefore, universities will play a leading role in the development of the innovative ecosystem, bringing together stakeholders with a similar vision from the academic, business, civil or start-up sectors.

For the future development of universities, it will be necessary to make more financial investments in order to develop science, create new knowledge and improve technologies. In the future, it would be ideal to increase universities' financial independence so that they can choose their own strategic priorities[9].

Let's discuss a few studies that relate to the challenges the university system faces, as well as the function and role of research activities. According to one study, it was found that the qualitative measurement of research achievements in universities is difficult for the following reasons: universities are simultaneously engaged in different types of activities (teaching, research, knowledge transfer or creation). As a result of these activities, different results are obtained, so the qualitative or quantitative component of the results may even change.

The research works published by the university's academic staff, their citation index, and then patents are the most commonly used indicators when analyzing research results. The multi-productivity nature of universities should be taken into consideration when evaluating the outcomes of university research rather

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[6] Universities without walls - A vision for 2030 European University Association, February, 2021.
[7] cf. Footnote, 6.
[8] cf. Footnote 6.
[9] cf. Footnote 6.

than relying solely on one indication, such as publication or patent. Some universities are more specialized in the social sciences, others in the humanities, where the main result of research is a publication, and in other more practical fields, for example, in technology, a patent[10].

The term "knowledge-based economy" comes from the recognition of the importance of knowledge and technology in advanced economies. These societies are characterized by the greater dependence on knowledge in all spheres of activity. Almost every field of activity relies on the use of knowledge and knowledge management. There is no doubt that knowledge is a key driver of economic empowerment[11]. Universities have evolved from highly regulated institutions to more collaborative decision-making organizations and become more interactive in the direction of social development.

The paper reviews the research, where the target group is university's administration, including the vice-rector, dean, and heads of departments. The research interviewed leading experts in the field, who see the issues of higher education and research in Sweden from different perspectives. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of academic leaders in creating a successful research environment[12].

In the process of creating new knowledge, it is crucial and important for universities to realize that the interest of young people, students in research activities is crucial for the development of science. The participation of students and young people in research activities is crucial to the advancement of science in order to effectively create new knowledge.[13]

According to one of the studies conducted in 2013, 2015 and 2017, students of all three levels of education were interviewed using the focus group method. Within the framework of the research, it was revealed that in order to develop research activities, a special emphasis should be placed on the doctoral level, because during this period students are already engaged in their own research. Doctoral programs have a special load, which determines the prerequisite for the development of the university in the research direction. The main conclusion of the conducted research is that the development of a modern university, the high level and quality of education and training are related to the encouragement of research and scientific activities, therefore, the creation of new knowledge, which is carried out on the basis of the university. In this process, the lecturers and students of the university should be actively involved together. [14]

It should also be emphasized that graduate students are involved in research work, which is denoted by the English term – "undergraduate research". It happens that students graduate from university without ever having interacted with research professors and the research process. To improve the standard of the educational process, research universities should make sure that the graduate students in their programs are actively engaged in research activities.

It is rather difficult to give a precise definition of what the research of the final course is. This is postgraduate research level where research skills are developed.

The research objective was to reveal the interest in science among college and university students, how they use academic knowledge gained after graduation in practice, how motivated they are to create new knowledge and participate in research activities. The obtained results have shown that students do not analyze the academic knowledge they have acquired and use it less in practice.[15]

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[10] Serrano, L., Manuel, P. J., The Research Output of Universities and its Determinants: Quality, Intangible Investments, Specialization and Inefficiencies. 2016.
[11] cf. Footnote 10.
[12] Carlsson, H, K., Söderholm, Anders, A. Research Quality and the Role of the University Leadership, 2014.
[13] Valentin, R., Pavel. I. A. The Purpose of Research in Universities. 2012.
[14] Manov, B., Milenkova, V. Students' research activity as a contribution to modern university, Scientific journal Anthropological Researches and Studies, 2018.
[15] Al–Hassanieh, S. University Students' Role in Improving Scientific Research Systems. Higher Institute of Administration Development (HIAD), Damascus University, 2006.

The purpose of the following study is to study the views of representatives from different faculties of the university on significant issues that arise at the institution. The study included a variety of topics, including research management, research quality concerns, the process of raising funding, prerequisites for doing research, obstacles and mechanisms for enhancing research.[16]

The research revealed that the faculties in the university lack suitable financial and technical conditions for research, and in order to improve the quality of research, it is necessary to simplify the sources of funding for research, to allocate adequate time for research to academic staff, so that they are actively involved in the research process.

The study has shown that the university faculties lack suitable financial and technical conditions for research. In order to improve the quality of research, it is necessary to simplify the sources of funding and give academic staff enough time to participate fully in the research process.

3. Results

As mentioned above, in qualitative research as respondents had participated the research department heads and specialists (in sum - 15 respondents) from 10 Georgian Universities/Teaching universities, they are the field experts in higher education system.

According to the majority of the respondents, scientific-research activity is crucial and important in the activities of the university, because through the research process it is possible to maintain the continuity of knowledge, to create new knowledge or scientific literature. Additionally, research activity is significant for universities, because fosters the growth of both their academic staff and students. Besides this, the respondents noted that as universities are where science is developed, it is critical that institutions support the process of developing new knowledge Also, it was found that research activity develops logical and critical thinking, and it is important both for the development of various areas, as well as for the formation of professionals in these fields.

It was emphasized that research activities should contribute to the development of students, the growth of the university authority, the solution of social problems, economic progress. The smallest number of respondents' answers referred to the employment of students.

The majority of respondents believed that scientific research should be based on the following values - academic honesty, validity and reliability of information, followed by academic independence and innovativeness/modernity of research.

The respondents state that Georgia is more or less actively engaged in scientific research in the humanities, natural sciences and medicine, social and political sciences, and technical sciences. However, this opinion is not based on any precise evidence, and it is only the respondents' reflection and observation. Also, based on their observations, it was revealed that scientific research in Georgia needs to be developed in the following areas - economics and business, humanities, natural sciences, modern technologies, art.

The lack of material and financial resources for the implementation of research projects at the local and international level, as well as the problem of finance, pose the biggest challenges to research activities in Georgia.

Additionally, academic staff has less time and money for research and it is difficult to recruit enough human resources for those activities. There aren't many journals in Georgia with an impact factor, which results in a shortage of scientific literature and globalization of research is rare. The respondents claimed

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[16] Al-Sulaiman, A., Al-muhanna, A., Abumadin, M. Research and Research Activities in a University in Eastern Saudi Arabia, Scientific Journal Saudi Medical Journal, 2002.

that it is rare in Georgia to use research results and recommendations. Universities lack clearly defined research priorities, which respondents also listed as one of the issues on the list of challenges facing research in Georgia. A challenge has also been recognized with regard to academic honesty, which involves awareness of plagiarism and overall academic diligence.

According to the majority of respondents, depending on the subject of the research, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary, which ensures the validity and reliability of the conclusions. Also, interdisciplinary research increases the scope of research and promotes the internationalization of research. According to the respondents, an interdisciplinary approach in the research process is necessary, because it determines the high quality of the research and provides very diverse information.

According to the majority of the respondents, it is necessary to promote and cover the processes of ongoing or completed research activities at the university, to introduce them to a wide audience. In the process of popularizing research, the respondents named the following media tools, the use of which can be most effective in the process of popularizing research - social networks, international online media platforms, website, and finally, traditional media tools: television, radio, magazine, etc. Most respondents agreed that an interdisciplinary approach is required, depending on the research topic, to guarantee the validity and dependability of the conclusions. Interdisciplinary research also broadens the research's scope and encourages it to become more global. According to the respondents, an interdisciplinary approach is essential for the research process because it establishes the high quality of the research and provides a wide range of data.

The majority of respondents said that in order to maintain the continuity in creating of new knowledge, it was important to engage young people in research activities. The respondents named joint collaborative student-teacher projects as a way to do this. It is desirable to have an incentive fund for young scientists, where students will be involved in scientific activities. Creation, accumulation and transfer of new knowledge to future generations are perceived as the university's main objectives by the respondents. It was also stated that the universities should train qualified professionals, contribute to the growth and development of an educated society, formation of a citizen. According to the respondents, currently, the university is facing various challenges. These challenges include the widespread devaluation of scientific activity, less interest of young people in scientific activity; researches are focused on quantity rather than quality.

The study's participants believed that the university should uphold the following essential values: knowledge and access to it, mutual respect among colleagues, evaluation and encouragement of work, academic freedom, student-centered learning, professionalism and integrity, education and development. The following values were mentioned by respondents when asked what fundamental principles a university should uphold: academic honesty and freedom, respect for knowledge, growth, openness to new knowledge, respect between faculty and students, respect for work, humanism and social responsibility, student-oriented teaching, use of personal resources, and an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach to teaching and research.

The study identified some important challenges in the field of higher education, which can be presented as recommendations in the article. The question of funding scientific research in the sphere of higher education in Georgia continues to be the most significant issue. Also, the globalization of researches in the process of development of the field of higher education is relevant, which implies the increase of opportunities at the scientific-research level, the implementation of local and international research projects and activities. The study's findings also suggest that Georgia should have more peer-reviewed scientific journals with an impact factor. Georgia also suffers from a lack of scientific publications as a result of university academics' reduced time and financial resources for study, which continues to be one of the major issues in this field.

It is significant to note that the problematic point is the issue of using the results and recommendations of studies that have already been carried out, which should contribute to the development of various areas. Finally, there is a lack of possibilities for young scientists that would encourage and advance the process of creating new scientific knowledge in our country, so it is desirable to engage the next generation in research activities.

In addition to the challenges facing higher education, the research has demonstrated that the primary function of the university in modern world is to accumulate new scientific knowledge and transfer it to future generations. It is worth noting that the results of a small survey conducted reveal that the purpose of the university is perceived to be accumulation of new knowledge, formation of professional staff for the market and promotion of civic awareness.

Conclusion

Based on the purpose of the study, it can be summarized that research activities play a very important role in higher education and mainly perform the function of creating new knowledge. Research activities contribute to the development of staff and students, the formation of a modern citizen and create a solid foundation for the development of various areas. It should be highlighted that young people are generally less interested in research activities, both locally and globally, which should become a leading priority for universities.

Also, it is critically important to use in practice the findings of previous studies for the advancement of different fields and popularize them too. The internationalization of research still remains as a challenge for many universities. It is recommended to support academic personnel in Georgia to present their scientific work at international level, e. g. in high impact factor scientific journals and international conferences.

It is worth to mention that the studies conducted at universities are integrated into study processes and new scientific and educational literature is produced as a result, that ensures the development and professional advancement of staff. Therefore it is crucial that universities encourage researchers to create new Georgian scientific literature and present it to wide audience.

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SOCIAL WORK

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CURRENT MECHANISM FOR DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC ABUSE UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN GEORGIA AND SWITZERLAND

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Abstract

Majority of the countries around the world declared a state of emergency to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, including Georgia and Switzerland. Although each nation adopted an individual method of fighting the pandemic, resulting in full or partial as well as short-term and long-term states of emergency, the pandemic has certainly become the main factor hindering social, economic and political activities around the globe.

A great number of citizens are finding themselves to have gone either into self-isolation or quarantine in order to prevent themselves from contracting the virus. These processes, on the one hand, are related to the prevention of the spread of the virus, but on the other, to confining many people in common space with potential abusers.

Correspondingly, the authors of the present study found it interesting to observe the patterns of reaction adopted by Georgia and Switzerland to face the actual challenges, whether or not the methods of fighting against women and domestic violence have changed, and what specific problems have been identified. The study serves to outline the problems, to assess the increased risks of violence and to ultimately evaluate the measures implemented to prevent the increase of violence in the two countries mentioned above. Finally, the article will evaluate and summarize the required measures and develop the recommendations that could possibly be applied in times of crisis.

The study given in the article was conducted under the Swiss international mobility project MOVETIA as well as with the support of Georgian National University SEU and Eastern Switzerland University through the involvement of their professors, experts and students. In addition to the authors of the article, professor: Ina Shanava and students: Mariam Esaiashvili, Anna Tsirekidze, Nina Malan, David Zanitti, Nikolai Laib and Kristina Paskov were involved in the research as well. The made experience showed perfectly the importance of international cooperation.

Keywords: COVID-19, Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse, Prevention.

Introduction

In general, in times of crises, including epidemics, violence against women tends to increase.[1] The number of female victims of violence has also virtually climbed in all countries.[2] Various circumstances lead to increased risk of violence in similar cases, such as fear caused by the pandemic, stress and deteriorating economic situation, serving as a kind of trigger for the abuser to engage in violent activities.[3] Furthermore, the victim is forced to spend more time with the abusive family member, making it difficult to escape from their clutches, as the victim may not be able to isolate itself and contact the law enforcement authorities.

Statistics show that both during and before the pandemic domestic conflict, including violence against women, is a universal reality all societies face, being a complex problem widespread throughout the world, which, given its specific nature and social dangers, has devastating consequences not only for the victim, but for the society as a whole.

It is important to note that the strict so-called "lockdown" in two to-be-compared countries of Georgia and Switzerland experienced two different durations. While strict measures of isolation lasted only 2-3 months in Switzerland, it was almost 3 times longer in Georgia. Moreover, the research process had to consider the pre-COVID-19 situation, namely service delivery in both Georgia and Switzerland. Due to different circumstances, the comparative analysis cannot be completely accurate, however, based on the situational (Covid-19 pandemic) analysis, the comparison is relevant and its results are interesting for the interested expert circles and the general public as well.

1. **Research Methodology**

The purpose of the research was to examine the challenges faced by the delivery of services against domestic conflict and violence against women both in Georgia and Switzerland, the adaptation process of the mentioned nations under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to compare the results. Depending on the purpose of the research, quantitative and qualitative research methods had been applied.

77 respondents took part in the quantitative survey of the Georgian case. The target audience of the research included the individuals, whose sphere of occupation had been related to issues of domestic violence and violence against women, namely employees of public and private shelters, crisis centers and organizations, working with victims of violence (psychologists, social workers and lawyers) across the nation. A questionnaire was developed for the direct survey and the data was processed, using the SPSS 23. As part of the qualitative research, semi-structured qualitative key informational interviews were used, namely the in-depth interviews conducted with four experts. Qualitative data analysis was carried out, involving the content analysis method.

Targeted sampling was used in the qualitative research, while available sampling was used in the quantitative research.

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[1] World Health Organization, COVID-19 and violence against women, March 26, 2020; UN Women, COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.
[2] United Nations, UN chief calls for domestic violence 'ceasefire' amid 'horrifying global surge', April 6, 2020.
[3] COVID-19: Pandemics and Violence against Women: A Gender Lens on COVID-19: Pandemics and Violence against Women and Children | Center for Global Development | Ideas to Action (cgdev.org) [L.s. 21.12.2022].

The Swiss part of the survey was methodically based on an online questionnaire in all 54 (N=54) support facilities in Switzerland dealing with issues in domestic violence, both in shelters and crisis centers as well as advice centers. The questionnaire contained both closed questions as well as partially open questions with scaling options. Together with a covering letter, the link to the online questionnaire was sent by email on June 2nd to the chosen facilities, followed by the two short reminders within 10 days. We asked for answers until June 17th 2022. The given answers were completely anonymous with no option of identifying the answering facility. The evaluation explored both quantitative aspects such as statistical numbers and figures, while qualitative aspects were concluded by content analysis.

2. Quantitative Research Results (Georgia)

Based on the data processed, it was revealed that according to the majority of the respondents (92.2%), victims most often called the police (112) to make a report. A part of the respondents (5.2%) believed that the victims use the violence hotline (116 006) actively, while the opinion of the rest of the respondents about the mechanisms preferred by victims to report violence was equally divided between the hotline of the Ministry of Health (1505) and the non-governmental organizations (1.3% and 1.3%).

In terms of the socioeconomic status of the victims, according to 74% of the research participants, victims in shelters are often holders of the socially disadvantaged status, 14.3% of them maintain that victims with status rarely find themselves in shelters, and according to 11.7%, victims in shelters almost always have a socially disadvantaged status.

Regarding the change in the number of victims with the status of socially disadvantaged under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to 53.2% of the research participants, the referral rate of victims with a low socioeconomic status has increased. By the same token, 11.7% of the respondents believe that the referral rate of victims with a high socioeconomic status has increased, while according to 35.1%, no changes have been detected in this regard.

One of the areas of interest of the research was the dominant nature of violence revealed in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the processing of the received data, it was revealed that 49.4% of the respondents highlighted the form of physical violence, 46.8% centered on psychological violence, and 3.9% focused on the increase in economic violence.

In order to determine the person, the victims of violence frequently identify as the abuser, based on the processing of the results, it was found that according to the experience of the respondents, the victims particularly experienced violence from their partners (68.8%) and ex-partners (15.6%).

Within the quantitative survey, the respondents answered a question about the challenges they had faced in terms of providing services to victims during the pandemic. Based on the analysis of the responses, it was revealed that 68.8% of the respondents believed that no difficulties had been detected in that regard, while 31.2% of the respondents mentioned the following challenges: "transportation problems"; "taking a COVID-19 test to be transferred to a safe place during night hours"; "social isolation (lockdown) during a pandemic"; "contacting with victims, intervention, identification of actual violence"; "an information vacuum"; "spending a 14-day period of isolation in quarantine, before entering a shelter"; "psychological and economic assistance" and "psychologist's counseling".

When asked whether any special measures had been taken to effectively provide services to victims during the COVID-19 pandemic, 55.8% of the respondents gave a negative answer, while 44.2% gave a positive answer. The respondents mainly identified the following activities: "an application was created, through which the victim could request help with a voice signal"; "transportation had been

provided"; "COVID-19 treatment, health services"; "psychological assistance, inclusion in the crisis program".

In order to determine the extent to which coordinated cooperation among agencies involved in the process of providing services to victims of domestic violence was ensured under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the processing and analysis of the collected data, it was revealed that according to 46.8% of the respondents (often), 39.0% (almost always), 13.0% (rarely) and 1.3% (almost never), coordinated cooperation between various agencies was noted in the process of providing services to victims of domestic violence.

To determine whether there had been any gaps in victim resource empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey found that 68.8% reported no gaps, while 31.2% identified some. The following was named as the major difficulty by the respondents: "in the case of not having the status of socially disadvantaged, due to the distance working mode, the delay in the process of granting the status, particularly the one in effective response to the reference"; "disruption of movement, excess in asylum service"; "in terms of employment, due to the non-functionality of employment places under the pandemic"; "vocational training and employment involving the empowerment of the victim"; "less effectiveness of psychologist's online services".

As part of a quantitative study, the respondents assessed the handling of domestic violence cases in remote court settings. Based on the analysis of the obtained data, it was determined that the evaluation of 27.3% of the respondents was positive, while 26% was negative. It should be noted that 46.8% of the respondents chose the answer: "I find it difficult to respond".

The research participants also assessed the difficulties encountered in their employment conditions under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to 55.8% of the respondents, no difficulties had been identified in their employment conditions. 44.2% of the research participants gave a positive answer, and the answers to the open questions revealed the following difficulties on the part of the participants: "troubled working relationships with abusers, difficulty in accessing technical means"; "difficulties in addressing needs of the beneficiary, including the fear of make an appeal"; "lack of opportunity to meet in person"; "risk of movement, contracting with the disease"; "online consultations and meetings with minors, dependent persons"; "setting up a face-to-face meeting, including due to lack of transportation"; "evaluation procedures having gone more complicated"; "working was even more stressful, accompanied by worries about health, both for themselves and for the beneficiaries"; "it served also as a barrier in terms of monitoring"; "there was difficulty in transportation"; "during the pandemic, they did not want to welcome a stranger to their home just to shield their own safety";

3. Qualitative Research Results (Georgia)

Experts, involved in the services related to domestic conflict and violence against women, answered questions about the challenges and difficulties encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both public and private sector representatives participated in the qualitative research. The respondents singled out communication difficulties as the main problem, according to which the alleged victims faced obstacles in contacting the police for help. The lockdown had become a significant challenge in terms of movement as well. In particular, alleged victims of violence could not go to the police to report their problems due to traffic ground to a halt. The respondents named 112 (police), 116 006 (victim connect resource center), social networking sites (Facebook page) as the main means of communication, and noted that since the alleged victims were unable to make a call due to being in the same space with the abuser, they often communicated through neighbors and outsiders, reaching out to the police and shelters as well as the crisis centers. According to a representative of the private sector, this prompted

them to create an application that would allow women to send a message to the police without actually calling them. It should be noted that a similar type of application was created on the basis of both non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

As indicated by the respondents, initial difficulties were also encountered in the case of COVID-19 positive victims. Due to the fact that there was no relevant experience, the medical examination was delayed. The remote survey was also ineffective, which in turn significantly complicated the timely response to the case.

The representative of the public sector singled out the lack of technical equipment as the main problem in the institution (shelter). Due to the number of dependents of the victim, minors in particular, the shelter had a hard time ensuring the inclusion of students into the distance learning process. There were also cases when the employees of the institution lent their personal computers and telephones to students to use. According to the lawyer of one non-governmental organization, in the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, difficulties related to movement were identified as well. Transportation was allowed only with a special pass, which hindered their professional activities. However, after this problem was identified, lawyers were allowed to freely move based on a warrant of attorney and a certificate presenting to the patrol police.

According to the respondents, despite the fact that significant differences in the forms of violence against women were not identified in the mentioned period, psychological and physical violence may still be more prominent.

Residents housed in a public sector facility, who had to report to work, were provided with transportation, conditioned by the safety measures to avoid the risk of getting infected on public transportation. The Crisis Center for the Victims of Violence of Tbilisi has actively started working processes since February 2020, and in the month of April, it launched a hotline, which was also equipped with the possibility of providing psychological and legal services on an online platform. In addition, if desired, it was possible to receive face-to-face consultations in compliance with all COVID-19 regulations. On the basis of active cooperation with the public and private sector, precisely in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to add a new shelter in Tbilisi was identified.

According to the opinion of the research participants, the issue of employment presented itself in the COVID-19 situation. In keeping with the experts, some of the beneficiaries who had been employed before the pandemic lost their jobs, since a number of organizations stopped their activities due to the regulations. The representative of the non-governmental sector points to the state's inaction in this regard and notes that the state's involvement in this very direction has not been identified. However, the state institutions still managed to keep the beneficiaries employed and to provide their financial security.

The respondents indicate the existence of a number of problems in terms of inter-agency coordinated action at the beginning of the pandemic. However, after a certain period of time, they shift their focus on the gradual elimination of almost all issues. Due to the fact that the chancellery was out of service and movement was limited, it was not possible to submit a complaint or referral. After a short time, special emails were created, where complaints, applications or petitions could be sent. Additional strain was caused by the hybrid mode the prosecutors had to adopt, in particular working two weeks from the prosecutor's office and two weeks remotely. During the remote working period, they failed to be in touch with the relevant documentation, leading them to actually take more than two weeks to provide a decision on a specific case for which 48 hours is defined as a maximum by law (circumstances might have significantly changed during this waiting period in a criminal case). All these processes were later made clearer, as documents were sent to a specific prosecutor by email, which notified the lawyer of

their receipt as a confirmation. In case of emergencies, the capacity to quickly prepare the warrant electronically had also been adopted.

According to the respondents, during the pandemic, finding alternative housing for the beneficiaries presented itself as well. In some cases, beds were added to the shelter itself, however, there had also been cases when victims were transferred to shelters formed by certain private individuals. Quarantine regulations also proved to be an issue, due to the large number of beneficiaries, institutions had to control the number of service recipients directly in the yard to prevent them from getting concentrated in a single space in order to avoid infection. Such regulations proved particularly uncomfortable for children.

According to the research participants, the COVID-19 positive beneficiaries were immediately transferred to medical facilities and COVID-19 hotels as needed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, not a single alleged victim of violence was refused help (both in the public and private sectors).

The research participants identified certain issues faced during the pandemic to be improved, such as considerable amount of financial support, increased number of human resources, additional shelters, boosting up the preventive measures against violence and actively using the media as well as social networking sites both to raise awareness and to make a report, especially if the victim found it impossible to otherwise make a referral.

4. Research Results (Switzerland)

All in all 32 (59%) of the asked 54 facilities answered the online questionnaire completely, and 22 (40%) partially, the results can therefore be seen as reliable. The facilities were: 18 women's shelters, one men's shelter, 11 victim advice centers and two other facilities. 11 of them (around 35%) are crisis centers, 32 % offer shelter services, while around 26% offer both services. 93% of these facilities (also) address women and women with children, 46% (also) address men and men with children (a lot of victim advice centers address their offers to all genders, while women's and men's shelters adress their offers gender specific). 5 facilities also deal with teenagers and trans women respectively, including "persons of all genders and sexual orientation" as well as "all victims of violence".
A good one third of all clients are Swiss citizens, just under 29% come from EU/EFTA states, also just under 30% are related to third countries. Here we see clear differences between shelters and crisis centers: Help seekers with a Swiss background make 25% in women's shelters, but more than 40% in victim advice centers. 25 facilities reported on the socio-economic status of their clients: around 75% state that their clients mostly come from a socially disadvantaged group, while in women's shelters this number stands at around 85%, in victim advice centers it is a little less with 78%.

4.1. Help Seekers: Ways of Contact, Numbers of Help Seekers and Numbers of Counsultations and Accomodations

Getting in contact with the help facility is mostly done by telephone and in the most cases by the victim her-/himself, followed by police reports transmitting the data of victims, accompanied by reports from the specialists. That hasn't changed during Covid-19 in two-thirds of the facilities. Changes are likely due to restricted numbers of personal contact and contact possibilities (less mobility, stressed families). 22 facilites, involving 64% of all facilitates that answered, report a growing number of help seekers during Covid-19, based on a higher presence of domestic violence as a public topic. This lead to extremely high loads and overloads of women's shelters, especially after the reopening of schools in June 2020, consequently new rooms had to be found and women had to be relocated. Longer waiting times are reported by 45% of the shelter facilities.

More than 50% report more or way more numbers of consultations and accompanies. In case of accommodations, the numbers are ambivalent: 8 facilities report more resp. way more, 3 report less and 8 report no changes in accommodations during Covid-19.

4.2. Forms of Domestic Violence, Abusers

Not one facility reports changes in the forms of domestic violence before or during Covid-19 (First: psychological violence, followed by physical violence, less often economical violence. Sexual and social violence are seen a little less often.) Reported changes concern the severity of violence, also stalking has grown. Due to closed courts, limited options on the rental market and a lack of responsible specialists clients had to stay longer in accommodations.

Partners are, not surprisingly, named in 91% and ex-partners in 68% of all cases as abusers. Two times their own children and five times other family members were reported as abusers.

4.3. Necessary changes and special measurements in facilitites due to Covid-19

Covid-19 forced – besides one – all facilities to experience adjustments and changes, sometimes dramatic ones as well. Those adjustments concern hygienical, spatial and temporal measurements. New technical infrastructure was needed, more employees were (urgently) needed, more financial support was needed. To sum up, dealing with all these necessary changes is reported as a sometimes tough and also exhausting task. The necessary money needed for these adjustments came mostly from the state, sometimes the institutions themselves had to finance (parts of) it or more donations were needed.

Concerning the cooperation with state authorities during Covid-19 the services answered inconsistently. Half of these facilities (N=22) reported no differences compared to the past, the other half had additional effort to make the cooperation work.

4.4. General Impression on Covid-19 / Innovations for the future?

Most answers on the question concerning necessary work changes during Covid-19 are between 5 and 9 on a scale of ten. To the question of whether the state measurements to fight Covid-19 had led to a general increase of domestic violence in Switzerland only 7 facilitites answered yes, 5 say no, the rest failed to answer this question. Most of them agree that domestic violence was a bigger media (also social media) topic, which 60% see a connection between that and the growing number of help seekers and higher accommodation numbers. Some report of broad solidarity, more public and media awareness and partly more donations.

Changes like hygienical measurements and technological modernization will be kept for the future by around 75% of all facilities, as they see themself well or very well prepared for future challenges.

Help seekers, as well as authorities and media show a high recognition for the work done by the facilities, on a scale of 10 the numbers are between 7 and 10. As for the wishes for the future, the following is expressed: Sustainable implementation of the Istanbul Convention, more (protected) spaces for victims of violence, an appropriate financial equipment for basic needs, more public awareness and campaigning, more prevention measures in whole Switzerland. To sum it up: Ther's still a lot to do.

5. Assessment of the research results

The Swiss part of the survey shows significant differences concerning shelters and advice centers:

Origin of help seekers: More Swiss citizens are reached by advice centers, more EU/EFTA or third state member citizens by shelters.

Information: Shelters see a higher demand on information during Covid-19, crisis centers see the same demand on information as before Covid-19.

Recognition: Advice centers do not see a difference in recognition of their work, shelters employees see a more of recognition during Covid-19.

Changes of work settings: Advice centers report less adjustment pressure, the one that can be explained by the different settings of their work compared to shelters.

Estimations on challenges in the future: Looking to the challenges in the future, consulting advice centers see themselves better prepared than shelters. There is possibly a direct link with unsatisfying financial situations of shelters service providers.

Estimations on the changes during Covid-19 in general: Clearly noticeable changes and adjustments had to be made by almost all service providers, but shelters seem to be much more affected than advice center services, mainly by the need of specific measurements and additional expenses for extra staff.

In summary, it can be stated that service providers in the field of domestic violence during the two years of Covid-19 and under partly very restrictive governmental measurements experienced both challenges and heavy loads in their daily activities. All in all, to offer shelter and support to concerned persons during Covid-19, they adapted very well, at the expense of enormous extra efforts.

Although the additional expenses could have been carried during Covid-19, there are open questions in financing these services in a long-term perspective, resources are (often too) scarce.

After now two years of experiences living in the pandemic it is desirable that political pressure leads soon to the full and swift implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Switzerland.

6. Comparative Analysis of the Results of the Two Countries

Based on the studies conducted both in Georgia and Switzerland, several similarities and differences have been identified.

As it was revealed, physical and psychological violence proved to prevail during the COVID-19 pandemic both in Georgia and Switzerland. However, the mentioned types of violence were almost identical in pre-pandemic times in both countries. Also, based on the studies conducted in Georgia and Switzerland, the victims often referred to violent activities done by their partners or ex-partners, remaining almost the same in pre-pandemic periods as indicated by the data.

In terms of the challenges identified during the pandemic, several similarities have been found between the two countries, in particular both Georgia and Switzerland had faced human resource-related issues, especially with COVID-19 positive personnel. The facilities responsible for providing services to the victims of violence in both countries had found it difficult to comply with the COVID-19 regulations, and to offer complete services to the beneficiaries due to the lack of staff. Additionally, adjusting the existing infrastructure to the needs of the COVID-19 positive patients, arranging isolated compartments, adhering to the quarantine regulations also proved to be an issue, in the face of increased number of the beneficiaries. The facilities responsible for providing services in both countries also found it difficult to maintain a high level of hygiene standards, timely equipping the facility with necessary items such as face masks, disinfectants, medical smocks, etc. The participants of the studies conducted in Georgia and Switzerland name the stressful work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the important challenges.

Based on the research carried out in two countries, it was found that the delivery of services had shifted online, and the victims could receive various types of necessary counseling by phone, email, etc.

The inter-agency coordinated action proved effective in both countries, as indicated by the research conducted in the case of Switzerland, and in the case of Georgia, in addition to the research, it is confirmed by the communication strategy document developed by the inter-agency commission working on the issues of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence of the Human Rights Council, which addresses issues of domestic violence and violence against women during the COVID-19 crisis.

One of the significant common features that emerged on the basis of the research conducted between the two countries is that in the case of neither country there is evidence of a sharp increase in cases of violence directly under the conditions of the pandemic, which may be due to various factors.

In terms of differences between the two countries, the research revealed several significant factors. In order to receive services in Switzerland, the alleged victim does not need any kind of official document that gives them the status of a victim, which is a necessary condition for receiving state services in Georgia at this stage. The victims of violence can benefit from a full range of services based on police restraining order, a protective order issued by a court, or a victim recognition decree issued by the prosecutor's office. The mentioned documentation is usually issued in the process of administrative or criminal proceedings, which distinguishes Georgia from Switzerland. As it turned out, according to the Swiss approach, in cases of domestic violence, priority is given to civil proceedings, incorporating disputes arising from divorce, alimony and custody, while in Georgia, when the state becomes aware of alleged violence, more emphasis is placed on criminal proceedings and at the same time, a person who violates the law is identified and prosecuted, while the alleged victim is made eligible to enjoy the necessary services.

The research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that the litigation process in Switzerland took longer than in Georgia, as the courts were closed for longer period due to the COVID-19 regulations, while virtual trials were quickly initiated in Georgia. However, Switzerland had not been in full lockdown during the pandemic, allowing victims to move freely without public transportation being restricted, while in Georgia, stricter quarantine regulations were in effect for several months, restricting movement, which made it difficult for victims to both report and have access to the necessary services.

In all shelters in Switzerland, there was a quarantine space for the beneficiaries, and in Georgia, only the Tbilisi shelter provided a space for isolation, and only after the quarantine period was over in Tbilisi, the victims were directed to different institutions. Also, there was a need to use shelters provided by private individuals in Georgia, which was not needed by the Swiss service providing organizations. Also, in Switzerland, institutions were equipped with the necessary technologies in a shorter time than in Georgia.

Conclusion

Based on the studies conducted in Georgia and Switzerland, certain types of recommendations have been developed that will assist the states to better deal with the issues of domestic violence and violence against women in times of crisis.

It is necessary to actively implement preventive measures, using modern platforms (social networks). The pandemic has shown that social networking sites are capable of serving as a good ally in the fight against violence against women and domestic conflict. During the period of COVID-19, many victims

turned to various organizations through social networking sites, since they were unable to make a report in person due to being in isolation with the abuser. Various activities should be carried out through social networking sites to raise awareness of domestic violence and violence against women, so that as many victims as possible know who to turn to and what they can do to get help. This, in turn, will be a preventive measure to detect and prevent violence.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for financial stability in both countries. Financial preparedness in advance for a critical situation can be vital for those seeking help in order to meet any need in time, whether it is hygiene essentials or technological equipment for online education.

The Georgian experience revealed the need to add new shelters in Tbilisi. Also, the positive aspects of online services were revealed in both countries, which gives grounds for continuing to offer alternative (online) services to beneficiaries, who find it more comfortable receiving various types of assistance in this format even after the pandemic.

In the case of Georgia, besides the Covid-19 pandemic, 3 issues are of particular urgency: **First**, the need of more shelter funding; **Second**, the termination of care for victims of violence after leaving the shelter; and **Third**, the inadequacy of rehabilitation programs available to abusers.

Furthermore, on November 17, 2022, GREVIO Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence published a baseline assessment report on Georgia's implementation of the Istanbul Convention on November 22.

The report lists the following recommendations:

- More efforts should be made on women, experiencing intersectional discrimination. This includes raising awareness about such groups as well as their rights and available services.
- Certain legislative changes are to be initiated, including to define rape more clearly in the Criminal Code of Georgia in line with the resolution found in the Istanbul Convention.
- The report requires increased involvement of non-governmental organizations in all stages of preparation, coordination and implementation of laws, state policies and programs to prevent violence against women.
- There is a need to fight more with the existing gender stereotypes and their propaganda in the media. The private sector also needs to be encouraged to introduce self-regulatory standards on violence against women.

There still remains a lot of work to be done regarding the importance of raising awareness on expert and society level. Gender equality, equal and stable society and changing power structures enable participation.

Working with victims during the Covid-19 pandemic proved quite challenging. Adjustments due to the Covid-19 pandemic offers a good chance for innovation both in the shelters and crisis centers.

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POLITICAL SCIENCES

THE U.S. ENERGY DIPLOMACY IN THE CONDITION OF WORLD ENERGY MARKETS TRANSFORMATION (SOUTH CAUCASUS VECTOR)[1]

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Abstract

The article considers the key aspects of the US external energy diplomacy in the context of the transformation of the global energy market at the present stage. The features of American energy strategy are revealed. The main strategic documents of the U.S., affecting the problems of energy security and energy strategy, are studied. The features of the concepts of "energy dominance" (Trump) and "energy independence" (Nixon) are presented from the point of view of their implementation in the context of modern political and economic challenges. The structure of the U.S. energy balance is considered, which made it possible to determine the level of dependence on external supplies of hydrocarbon raw materials, especially oil. The priorities of the U.S. in the hydrocarbon market (both natural gas and oil) and renewable energy are studied through the prism of the climate agenda (in particular, the 2015 Paris climate agreement). Special attention is paid to the issues of liquefied natural gas (LNG) export from the U.S., especially towards European markets. The key risks and challenges of US energy diplomacy in the context of the conflict in Ukraine as well as geopolitical confrontation with Russia are identified. The US energy strategy in the South Caucasus is considered. The main features of the U.S. energy cooperation with Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in the context of geopolitical challenges are revealed.

Keywords: U.S., energy, diplomacy, security, climate change, South Caucasus.

Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, the United States has paid more attention to securing untrammeled access to world energy resources in terms of ensuring national security and stable functioning of economy. The emergence of new world centers of military and economic power has shaken the U.S. leadership in many strategic areas. In contemporary realities, the U.S. is working on revitalization of its fundamental advantages in political, economic, military and other areas globally. However, the global economic situation characterized by increased competition for the access to scarce energy resources, large-scale structural changes, new crises and price instability on global energy markets imposes the development of resilient national energy policies worldwide. The U.S. energy policy has undergone considerable changes over the past decades, driven by such factors as the transformations in the global energy system,

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the shale revolution, significant changes in the U.S. energy balance, the international climate agenda, intensive development of renewable energy sources (RES) and the aggravation of geopolitical confrontation with Russia and China. Today, the key challenge for U.S. energy diplomacy is to diversify its external energy strategy. In this sense, the South Caucasus is of particular importance as a transit zone for oil and gas supplies from Central Asia to Europe, where the US seeks to reduce dependence on supplies from Russia. The paper is structured according to the deductive principle. In particular, the first part deals with the issues of U.S. energy diplomacy at the present stage in the face of risks and challenges of global energy security. The second part of the paper is devoted directly to U.S. energy diplomacy in the South Caucasus.

The main research goals of the paper are: analysis of the external energy strategy of the U.S. by studying the main strategic documents relating to foreign policy, international economic relations, etc.; identification of the level of significance of energy markets and infrastructure energy systems of the South Caucasus in the U.S. energy strategy in the Caspian-Black Sea mega-region; and analysis of energy development programs of South Caucasus states in order to identify their external guidelines in the energy sector.

1.   US energy diplomacy in the context of new geopolitical transformations

Today, traditional fuels as well as nuclear power take a key place in the U.S. energy balance. This dictates to focus on the development of renewable energy and support for the global policy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere under the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. The U.S. is the second-largest producer and consumer of energy in the world, behind China. Due to the shale boom, the U.S. has become the world's leading net exporter of most forms of energy. New technologies for the extraction of natural resources have contributed to a significant increase in the production of oil and natural gas. Currently, the U.S. is a net exporter of LNG. The rapid growth in the U.S. oil and gas production brought a collapse in fuel prices in 2014, and led to an alliance between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia to manage production in order to stabilize world oil prices.

Coal, used primarily for electricity generation in the U.S., supplied 23% of electricity generation in 2019, while overall consumption declined by 48% since 2007, in the face of increasing competition from natural gas and renewable energy[2]. RES have faced a rapid growth in the U.S. over recent years driven by policy support, while nuclear energy is facing significant challenges as more reactors are being decommissioned.

With a population of less than 5% of the world, the US produces more than 20% of the world's GDP and consumes about 24% of all oil produced in the world (own proven oil reserves in the U.S. are 2.5% of the world's, 11th in the world), 22% of natural gas (proven reserves - 3% of world, 6th in the world) and almost 20% of coal (proven reserves - 27% of world, 1st place in the world). In total, the U.S. accounts for almost 22% of the consumption of all primary energy produced in the world[3]. During B. Obama's presidency, the main focus of the state energy policy was on the renewable energy development. On the other hand, the development of shale deposits was perceived mainly in a negative way. After D. Trump was elected president, the logic of U.S. energy policy underwent basic changes. It is enough to look at the "America First Energy Plan" to make sure that the U.S. energy strategy is

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[2] U.S. Energy in the 21st Century: A Primer. Congressional Research Service. March 16, 2021. URL:
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based exclusively on traditional sources, namely, shale reserves and coal. And in this sense, the US withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement testifies to the deep conviction of the American president in the correctness of his strategy. U.S. shale reserves are estimated at $50 billion, and Trump associated the restoration of roads, schools and public infrastructures with shale energy development. The "Energy Plan" assumed maximum use of available resources to reduce imports, improve export and, consequently, to have low domestic prices. Under G. Biden, the U.S. "energy course" has undergone significant changes: Washington returned to the Paris climate agreement, and the president announced comprehensive support for "green energy" to ensure sustainable and decarbonized energy development.

The shale revolution and the abundance of resources in the U.S. may create a delusion that the country may be isolated in the global energy market due to the self-sufficiency of the American economy. However, energy markets and the prices have a significant impact on the U.S. economy. The OPEC plays a decisive role in setting prices for oil products, which creates serious problems for the U.S. energy sector and dictates the U.S. authorities to develop mechanisms to keep oil prices at an acceptable level for the world economy. Today, in a condition of a sharp increase in oil prices due to the conflict in Ukraine, the U.S. proposes to develop a mechanism to determine the limit for the growth of prices for Russian oil (about $60 per barrel). Taking into account the conjuncture of the modern oil market, the development of such a mechanism may face many problems. The main problem is the OPEC+ deal concluded in 2016 to allocate quotas to oil-producing countries in order to keep prices high.

Energy diplomacy plays a central role in the U.S. foreign policy. As a major exporter of oil and gas products, U.S. has changed the main approaches to its energy policy - from a scarcity to maximization of the benefits of energy abundance[4]. However, energy security and energy independence remain of prior importance. The Trump administration adopted the concept of "energy dominance", reflected in the "National Security Strategy", released in 2017[5]. The "energy dominance" is the logical extension of a much older and enduring concept of «energy independence», first announced by President Nixon[6]. The "energy dominance" positions the U.S. in the global energy system as a leading producer, consumer, and innovator in the energy sector. It aims to promote American prosperity through reducing barriers for the safe development of energy resources, promoting exports, ensuring energy security by the diversification of energy sources, supplies, and routes, attaining universal energy access and furthering America's technological edge in energy.

However, under the Trump administration, the U.S., while being the world's second-largest greenhouse gas emitter, announced withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in 2020 - signifying a return to traditional energy policy. The traditional energy policy putting "America First" was intended to revitalize fossil fuels and the nuclear energy industry, to strengthen energy independence and encourage energy exports while reducing support for renewable energy[7]. Notwithstanding that the complete U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement could have taken several years, it significantly affected the global confidence in low-carbon investments. Obviously, the climate agenda has become a case for permanent political confrontations between Republicans and Democrats.

Thus, right on the first day as a president, Biden announced about rejoining the Paris Agreement. The Biden-Harris Administration announced the climate agenda an immediate priority for the U.S., aiming

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to achieve net zero emissions in 2050. In the "Interim National Security Strategy Guidance" (2021), the clean energy transformation is considered a central pillar for the U.S. economic recovery efforts, generating both domestic prosperity and international credibility of the U.S. as a leader of the global climate change agenda[8]. Thus, the current state energy policy is around climate change and aims at promoting the global climate agenda in the international arena by the implementation of renewable energy development programs and investments in climate-friendly infrastructure.

The ecological priority in the U.S. energy policy is also reflected in the "The Long-Term Strategy of the United States". The U.S. committed to an ambitious goal to reduce net GHG emissions 50-52% below 2005 levels in 2030 and to achieve a net-zero economy no later than in 2050[9]. At the same time, the current energy policy is in accordance with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and corresponds to the seventh global goal of ensuring access to affordable, reliable, environmentally sustainable energy sources. Positioning itself as a global leader of climate agenda, the U.S. propels the adoption of Paris Agreement 2030 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) by other major economies to accelerate the global climate progress to ensure 1.5°C target. Thus, the U.S. intends to consolidate unconditional world supremacy in the formation of new environmental norms and rules corresponding to American national interests. Apparently, the climate agenda will remain the main topic and instrument of the U.S. foreign policy in the coming years and possibly even decades.

The promotion of climate agenda globally by the U.S. has considerable geopolitical significance for increasing the energy sovereignty of partner countries. Energy generally plays a notable role for the expansion of American spheres of influence in target countries and weakening the positions of geopolitical competitors. In conformity, weakening the leverages of Russian or Chinese energy diplomacy abroad is one of the priorities of American energy diplomacy.

On the global level, the American energy diplomacy takes place at various levels of government, with active involvement of private and public sectors. The international energy policy of the U.S. is executed by the Bureau of Energy Resources (ENR) of the State Department through diplomatic and programmatic engagement. Originally labeled as Global Shale Gas Initiative, it was designed as a shale gas promotion initiative[10]. The agenda of the initiative broadened over time, and it became a central governmental structure of the American energy diplomacy. The aim of the ENR is the promotion of the U.S. leadership on global energy issues such as climate agenda and energy security for the U.S. and its allies and partners. The ENR operates in various regions, ensuring sustainable and safe development of energy systems of partner countries and energy access in developing countries, as well as protecting America's geopolitical interests in global energy economy through diplomatic efforts.

The Department of Energy (DOE) that manages nuclear infrastructure of the U.S. and forms policy ensuring energy security, also coordinates foreign energy policy through its Office of International Affairs. The Office of International Affairs coordinates international energy objectives with national energy policies and manages cooperation with other states and international organizations. At the same time, the IA Office aims at increasing U.S. energy exports and promoting the competitiveness of the U.S. energy industry globally.

To a large extent, the U.S. foreign energy policy is shaped under the influence of energy companies seeking to expand access to oil and gas fields worldwide that significantly can strengthen their leading

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[9] The Long-Term Strategy of the United States. Pathways To Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions By 2050. November 2021. URL: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/US-Long-Term-Strategy.pdf [L. s. 10.12.2022].

[10] Boersma T., Johnson C. U.S. Energy Diplomacy (2018). Columbia SIPA. Center On Global Energy Policy. URL: https://energypolicy.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/pictures/CGEPUSEnergyDiplomacy218.pdf [L. s. 10.12.2022].

positions in terms of resource security. The engagement of the U.S. in international organizations, such as International Energy Agency (IEA), International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and in inter-governmental political forums, such as Group of Seven (G7), also plays a significant role in creating possibility for the advancement of U.S. interests in the international arena.

In turn, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is also actively involved in promoting American energy priorities around the world. USAID has a number of renewable energy programs promoting deployment, financing, and grid integration of renewable energy generation. In 2010-2019, USAID's energy programs contributed to the installation of more than 162,000 MW of renewable capacity in 20 countries[11].

According to the USAID Climate Strategy 2022-2030, the organization plans to work in at least 80 countries in the direction of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving a 45% reduction in emissions relative to 2010 levels by 2030[12]. In the energy sector, USAID will continue to support integration of RES and deployment of renewable energy technologies. Apart from this, USAID is engaged in many programs in improving energy sector utility performance, energy efficiency and regulatory practices in the energy sector worldwide.

The promotion of the climate agenda by the U.S. is also used as an instrument for geopolitical competition with Russia and China. According to the climate manifesto of Biden during his election campaign, the climate agenda will be used to undermine strategic energy projects of the U.S. global competitors by imposing carbon adjustment fees or quotas on carbon-intensive goods from polluter countries[13]. Particularly, efforts will be directed against the Chinese massive project "Belt and Road Initiative" – a general tool for the Chinese soft power, through financing for lower-carbon energy investments in countries involved in "Belt and Road Initiative" to make their energy systems more diversified, independent and flexible to energy demand. At the same time, while the U.S. puts efforts to be the world leader in ecology-friendly innovations, China has doubled down on new technologies, ranging from solar panels to electric vehicles, and claims to become a leader in the products essential for transitioning to a low-carbon world[14].

The U.S. positions itself as a key partner for the sustainable diversification of gas supplies to the European region and other acutely impacted European Union (EU) member states, including by supporting demand reduction and accelerating clean technologies[15]. Thus, according to the European Energy Security and Diversification Act of 2019, the U.S. foreign policy seeks to assist "European countries to reduce their dependence on energy resources from countries that use energy dependence for undue political influence, such as the Russian Federation, which has used natural gas to coerce, intimidate, and influence other countries"[16].

The LNG market is currently developing at a rapid pace (annual demand growth is 3-4%), one of the aims of the U.S is to fill a niche in it. The U.S. became the world's largest LNG exporter in the first half

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[11] Renewable Energy // USAID. URL: https://www.usaid.gov/climate/renewable-energy [L. s. 10.12.2022].

[12]USAID Climate Strategy 2022-2030. April 2022. URL: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USAID-Climate-Strategy-2022-2030.pdf [L. s. 10.12.2022].

[13] The Biden Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice. URL: https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/ [L. s. 10.12.2022].

[14] Ladislaw, S., Tsafos, N., Energy Spheres of Influence. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019. URL: https://www.csis.org/analysis/energy-spheres-influence [L. s. 10.12.2022].

[15] Joint Statement by President Biden and President von der Leyen on European Energy Security. June 27, 2022. URL: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/27/joint-statement-by-president-biden-and-president-von-der-leyen-on-european-energy-security/ [L. s. 10.12.2022].

[16] H.R.1453-European Energy Security and Diversification Act of 2019. URL: https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1453?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22H.+R.+83%22%5D%7D [L. s. 10.12.2022].

of 2022. As of July 2022, US LNG liquefaction capacity averaged 322.8 mcm/d, with a short-term peak capacity of 393.6 mcm/d.

This trend especially began to form under D. Trump, who at the very beginning of his presidency announced the beginning of the "golden era" of American energy dominance. Obviously, this dominance can be achieved, first, by activating the export of American LNG, because Washington is quite sober in its assessment of the growing demand for gas, which obviously will become the most demanded type of fuel in the world by about 2050. Therefore, it is important to take a stable niche in this market both for purely economic and geopolitical purposes, forming instruments of competition with the main suppliers. This is primarily about Russia, which, being a key supplier of pipeline gas, after the launch of "Yamal LNG", also claims to increase its share in the LNG market. This competition will be conducted mainly for dominance in two important markets - European and Chinese. At the first one, the policy of reducing the volume of domestic gas production continues, at the second - a wild increase in the consumption of gas, including liquefied fuel (by 2030, in China, demand will reach 800 billion cubic meters).

However, both in the European and Chinese markets, American LNG will not be able to be competitive in the short and medium term. The reasons for this are objective and come down not so much to the high cost of American LNG as to the transport and logistics component: freight rates in the structure of the price of American LNG in the European market is approximately 30%. Taking into account this problem, Washington is forced to use two methods to continue the struggle for markets: 1. dumping and 2. promotion of its interests through its satellites. However, if dumping is too expensive and can only be applied selectively, mainly in relation to small economies (as was done in the case of Poland in 2017), then the use of satellites is quite promising. And not only geopolitically, but also commercially. Qatar's exit from OPEC in December 2018 and Doha's accompanying statements of intention to concentrate on LNG production and export, as well as plans to invest $20 billion in American infrastructure, indicated that Qatar and the U.S. may essentially form "LNG cartel". By promoting Qatar in the European market, Washington immediately solves two problems: firstly, create a counterbalance to Moscow (today, Russian "Gazprom" covers up to 40% of total demand in Europe); secondly, Washington emphasizes that it will be very grateful to Doha for the promised investments, which, by the way, are now urgently needed by the U.S., taking into account the depreciation of infrastructures, especially energy ones. Thus, the combination is traditional and largely repeats the one that was carried out in 1985, when, in order to strike at the Soviet economy, Washington persuaded Saudi Arabia to almost double oil production, which automatically led to a drop in prices: from $30 a barrel it fell to $10. As a result, the Soviet oil industry found itself in an extremely difficult situation, and the U.S. got the opportunity to import cheaper oil.

Against the backdrop of Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the EU reluctance to continue the importation of Russian gas, the United States announced that they will ensure additional LNG volumes to the EU market of at least 15 bcm in 2022. For the first three months in 2022, over 60% of U.S. LNG exports were delivered to Europe, compared to only 37% over the last three months of 2021[17]. The U.S. considers the LNG export to Europe as leverage in negotiations with Russia that allows undermining Russia's position in the European market. Thus, on the background of Ukrainian crisis, the processes of creating an «energy umbrella» for the EU, as well as weakening the position of Russia's energy diplomacy, have actively accelerated. Another practice to affect the economies of U.S. rival countries is expansive sanction regimes against major oil and gas producers, including Iran, Russia, and Venezuela.

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[17] Ravikumar, A.P., Bazilian, M., Webber, M.E. The US role in securing the European Union's near-term natural gas supply. Nat Energy, 7, 2022. 465–467. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-022-01054-1.

Thus, the U.S. foreign energy policy as an important part of American foreign policy is aimed at maintaining the leading position of the U.S. in global energy markets which, in turn, helps to preserve the international liberal order facing challenges by state and non-state actors. Like other global actors and major energy producers, the U.S. is willing to get certain geopolitical advantages with the help of its newly tapped energy resources and flexible energy diplomacy combining efforts of governmental, public and private sectors. The American energy diplomacy is aimed at weakening positions of its main competitors in energy markets wishing to exert influence over energy markets and technologies and ensuring energy security and energy independence for partner countries. The promotion of the international climate agenda by the U.S. becomes an effective instrument of American soft power - positioning the U.S. as an international leader coordinating the global political agenda.

However, today, the U.S. energy diplomacy faces significant obstacles, primarily related to the war in Ukraine, which entails profound changes in the global energy market. In particular, the limitation of Russian energy supplies to Europe dictates the need to diversify the European energy system through the development of its own production capacities, as well as the search for new supply routes. This creates opportunities for the US to consolidate its position in the European market as an important supplier of LNG, the demand for which in the world is growing by 4% every year. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that such a scenario was also taken into account by Moscow: The doctrine of Russia's energy security notes the need to integrate into the global LNG market, creating the necessary production capacities (Yamal LNG, Sakhalin-1, etc.)[18]. For the development of this direction, the so-called Northern Sea Route in the Arctic, where competition between the U.S. and Russia will continue, has particular importance. Obviously, such a policy affects the functioning of the world energy markets and geopolitics as well. In this context, the OPEC+ deal continues to be a key challenge for the U.S. energy strategy.

2. South Caucasus vector of the U.S. energy diplomacy

A key priority of the U.S. foreign energy policy is the promotion, coordination and implementation of energy policies in particular states and regions aligned with the US interests. The South Caucasian region has a special place in the U.S. foreign energy policy due to several factors. Firstly, taking into account the strategic geographical setting, the South Caucasian region is located at the crossroads of leading regional powers and acts as a "bridge" for connecting important international trade routes and energy infrastructures. In fact, all the states of the region have become countries-gateways by serving as "bridges between realms, regions, or states" and "linking different parts of the world by facilitating the exchange of peoples, goods, and ideas", according to the geopolitical concept of S.B. Cohen[19]. The South Caucasus is a potential springboard for countering the geopolitical competitors of the U.S. - primarily Russia, Iran and China. For this purpose, since the early 1990s, with the independence of three South Caucasian states - Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, the U.S. has paid special attention to the development of political, economic and military cooperation with the South Caucasian states. An important part of American foreign policy in this area has been the promotion of democratic values and protection of human rights through political, diplomatic and humanitarian levers. Energy diplomacy as a valuable tool has been actively used by the U.S. in South Caucasus over last decades. It helped to diversify energy supply sources, to develop new energy markets and create new export opportunities for the Caspian energy resources which became an important income source for the South Caucasian countries.

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[18] Energy Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation. Approved by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 13, 2019 No. 216. URL: http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/economic/energy_doc/ [L. s. 10.12.2022].
[19] Cohen S. B. Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations. Third Edition. Rowman & Littlefield. 2015. 37-54.

The heightened interest of the U.S. in the Caspian-Black Sea mega-region is primarily due to its oil and gas potential, so Washington seeks to get access to its hydrocarbon resources and ways of their transportation. By developing cooperation with the South Caucasian states, the U.S. tries to solve problems of ensuring its energy security and strengthening its geopolitical and economic standing in the South Caucasus and in the Caspian region.

The corresponding approach to the Caspian region is reflected in the U.S. strategic documents. In "A National Security Strategy for a New Century", released in 1998 by the Clinton administration, the significance of The Caspian Basin in terms of its potential oil reserves is emphasized "for meeting rising world energy demands in coming decades". A priority in this region was admitted the development of multiple pipeline ventures and East-West oil and gas export routes across the Caspian Sea and through the Transcaucasia and Turkey[20]. According to the "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" of 2002, one of the priorities of the comprehensive strategy for international economic growth is the enhancement of energy security by cooperation with global energy producers and, in particular, with the Caspian region, to expand the sources and types of global energy supplied[21]. However, the amount and importance of the Caspian energy resources for the region and global energy market had been exaggerated and created unrealistic expectations at these times.

Structural changes in the American and global energy system over the last decades such as the shale revolution, the growing supply of LNG, the development of renewable energy sources - have become more important sources of world energy supply than the Caspian Basin. They have overshadowed the importance of the contribution of Caspian energy resources to the development of global energy markets and, specifically, to the American energy system. In the subsequent U.S. national security strategies, the importance of the Caspian region and South Caucasus in terms of energy resources is not emphasized anymore.

The current foreign policy of the U.S. considers important security and economic interests in the South Caucasus, but none of them is vitally important for the American strategy. At the same time, an important direction of the U.S. foreign policy in the region is undermining Russia's dominant position and making favorable conditions for the EU[22].

Through its energy diplomacy efforts, the U.S. diversify national energy systems of the South Caucasian states and promote the building of new and reliable transportation routes for the hydrocarbons from the Caspian region to Europe outside Russian control. The transportation projects are aimed at avoiding the monopoly of one country on the transportation routes or pipelines. The U.S. support for the development of regional infrastructures may help to build regional cooperation and creating institutions and interest groups with pro-Western orientation, thus, strengthening the American soft power[23]. Moreover, from the point of view of American interests, one of the most ambitious prospects for Caspian energy resources is their role in reducing the European dependence on Russian gas imports, as well as ensuring participation of American companies in oil and gas sectors in the region by creating maximum economic preferences for them.

The geostrategic significance of the region for the United States and other global players is due to the growing competition for the development of transit commodity flows, providing economic and political

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[20] A National Security Strategy For a New Century. The White House. October. 1998.
[21] The National Security Strategy of the United States. The White House. September. 2002.
[22] Rumer E., Sokolsky R., Stronski P. U.S. Policy toward the South Caucasus: Take Three. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2017. p. 3-4.
[23] Blank S. What the Biden Administration Can and Should do in the South Caucasus. February 8, 2021. // The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. URL: https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13661-what-the-biden-administration-canand-should-do-in-the-south-caucasus.html [L. s. 10.12.2022].

dividends. The Caspian region as a whole has become a point of intersection of the main Eurasian trade routes: «East-West» and «North-South». The American diplomacy actively lobbies the diversification of energy transportation routes, by actively working to form an «East-West» (TRACECA) corridor bypassing Russia from Central Asia and the Caspian Basin through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey to Western Europe. This project appears to be in direct contradiction with the «North-South» international transport corridor initiated by Russia and designed to diversify the routes connecting Northern Europe with Asia, passing through the Caucasus and the Persian Gulf.

The U.S. is also worried about the growing presence of China in the region and the implementation of the Chinese plans to enter the Caucasian and Caspian-Black Sea regions, as China is viewed as one of the main economic and foreign policy competitors by the United States. One of the main land routes of the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative approximates to the old Silk Road and is planned to pass through Central Asia, Iran and Turkey to Europe. An alternative way of the route is through the South Caucasus over the Caspian Sea to Turkey and Europe. Notwithstanding the project correspondence with the "East-West" (TRACECA) corridor, Washington is cautious about the Chinese economic penetration into the South Caucasus and the Caspian-Black Sea region. The East-West direction, especially through the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, is more relevant to Georgia and Azerbaijan. For Armenia, due to its tense relationship with Azerbaijan and Turkey, limited options are available under the Belt and Road Initiative. Such an option may be the North-South transport corridor connecting the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea through Iran, Armenia and Georgia. So, the Meghri-Yerevan-Bavra highway linking Armenian borders with Iran and Georgia can be a part of the project[24]. The U.S. fears about the growing Chinese influence in the region are justified by the deepening of Sino-Iranian relations, which were affirmed by the China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership program of 27 March 2021. The situation may become more complicated for the U.S. by the possible strategic partnership between Russia and Iran. These processes will not only help Russia to bypass the sanctions, but also will foster the creation of a strong regional counterweight to Washington. In such conditions, the importance of South Caucasian countries, situated at the crossroads of global powers, is growing.

Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan have different vectors of foreign policy that creates certain barriers to effective U.S. energy diplomacy in the region and to cooperation between the three Caucasian countries. South Caucasus is experiencing an internal division into two blocs, the boundaries of which become clearer after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and the 2022 War in Ukraine. The first block is represented by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and the second - by Russia, Armenia and Iran[25]. The bloc parties collaborate in military, economic and other strategic areas, while each of them tries to pursue own interests and gain certain economic benefits from grand energy projects passing through the region. The ambiguous and complex geopolitical processes in the region dictate the need to revise the significance of the South Caucasus for the American foreign policy and to increase the U.S. support, mainly in tandem with the EU, to regional energy projects and infrastructures builds. However, in contemporary realities, a prior foreign policy issue for Washington is its participation in conflict prevention in South Caucasus[26].

Historically, Armenia has pursued a strategy of striking a balance between the need for a partnership with Russia in terms of security issues and the need to deepen economic and trade ties with Western countries, as well as cooperating with other centers of global power. Meanwhile, Armenia is a strategic partner of Russia, closely cooperating with it in military, economic, energy and other spheres. Yerevan

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[24] Zabakhidze, M., Gabriadze I., Beradze R., Khishtovani, G., Connectivity, Trade and Financial Integration of the South Caucasus Via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Caucasus Analytical Digest No. 111, October 2019. 3-9.

[25] Boltuc, S. Gli interessi dell'Iran nel Caucaso. SpecialEurasia. 2022. p. 25-26.

[26] Rumer, E., Sokolsky, R., Stronski, P. U.S. Policy toward the South Caucasus: Take Three. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2017.

has a positive attitude towards democratic reforms in the country, actively cooperating with the European and American organizations. Because of the transport blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey, as a consequence of the Karabakh conflict, and the lack of its own hydrocarbon resources, Armenia is the most vulnerable in the region in terms of security and reliability of fuel supplies and the diversification of supply routes. The country is highly dependent on imports of energy resource from Russia delivered through the territory of Georgia. Armenia also imports a limited quantity of natural gas from Iran in an electricity-for-gas swap conditions.

Although Georgia does not have significant oil or gas reserves, Tbilisi is viewed by Washington primarily as a country with alternative infrastructure for transporting energy carriers bypassing Russia and a crucial geographical point for the "East-West" international transport corridor. The cooperation between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan in energy sector creates new prospects and provides certain benefits for Georgia, while at the same time contributing to the growth of pan-Turkish influence in the region and dominance of Turkish capital in the Georgian economy. Georgia intensively cooperates with the EU in the energy sector in the framework of Association Agreement of 2014, signed between Georgia and EU. The country has succeeded in the diversification of its energy production by actively developing RES, such as hydropower, and, thus, in meeting the main challenges of climate agenda.

The US support in Georgia is focused primarily on financing the energy sector. The U.S. is interested in the diversification of the Georgian energy system, which will help to avoid rendering Georgia dependent on Chinese, Russian or other capital. According to this reasoning, together with the EU and with the assistance of the World Bank, USAID and USEA (United States Energy Association) Tbilisi considers the construction of an underwater electric power transmission cable across the bottom of the Black Sea to Romania in order to increase the reliability diversification and independence of both countries' networks.

Azerbaijan has a potential of becoming both energy and transport hub in the region and beyond it due to its abundance of hydrocarbon resources and convenient geographic disposition. The U.S. mainly considers Azerbaijan in the context of its oil and gas reserves, its participation in regional energy and logistics projects and as a key partner in providing hydrocarbon resources to Europe without Russian participation. The significance of Azerbaijan's oil and gas reserves were seen in Washington as a one-stop answer to all the region's problems, generating revenues for the country's reconstruction with multiplier effects rippling beyond its borders[27]. The U.S. and the EU significantly helped Azerbaijan to formalize a so-called "Contract of the Century" in 1994 between the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and a consortium of 11 foreign oil companies (including BP, Amoco, Unocal, Statoil, Ramco, Exxon Mobil, and others) that allowed to integrate the Caspian energy resources to the global energy market.

The U.S. actively took part in the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline in order to transport Azerbaijani hydrocarbons to the global market. It not only helps to diversify the supply of energy resources in the Caspian-Black Sea mega-region while holding Russia out of the process, but also furthers luring Georgia and Azerbaijan out of the Russian influence. It is worth noting that within the framework of the logic of regional geopolitical processes, Armenia remained outside the realization of pipeline projects.

In terms of wider geographic coverage, South Caucasus serves as a transportation corridor for the trans-Caspian pipelines delivering vast quantities of gas and oil from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan through subsea pipelines to Europe through the territories of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey while

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[27] Rumer, E., Sokolsky R., Stronski P. U.S. Policy toward the South Caucasus: Take Three. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2017, p. 13.

circumventing Russia and Iran. It would enhance the possibilities for Georgia and Azerbaijan as transport hubs and emphasize the strategic importance of Turkey in the Caspian-Black Sea mega-region and in Europe. The project of construction of trans-Caspian pipeline is the eastern extension of Southern Gas Corridor, initiated by the EU. The Southern Gas Corridor has a purpose of reducing Europe's dependency on Russian gas and creating alternative sources of energy supply. The construction of trans-Caspian pipelines transporting oil and gas from the Caucasus to European and global energy markets is the core issue of the U.S. energy policy in the region. It corresponds to the Washington's main goal of assisting the building of sovereign economies and energy systems across the South Caucasus and Europe.

Conclusion

The US energy policy is aimed at diversifying energy imports from various regions of the world, as well as at promoting its energy interests. In particular, currently the most promising markets for the supply of hydrocarbons and, in particular, LNG from the United States are Europe and Southeast Asia. At the same time, US interests are also obvious in the Central Asian region, for the promotion of which the South Caucasus is becoming very important for the US for the transit of Caspian hydrocarbons to Europe. Predictable oil prices today act as an important precondition for ensuring energy security and socioeconomic stability of the U.S. as a leading oil and petroleum product consuming country. Turbulence in the world energy market creates numerous risks for the US, also affecting domestic prices, which dictates U.S. to look for ways to diversify its energy diplomacy.

The growth of deepening contradictions between global powers and complication of the terms for economic interactions globally reveals the greater significance of the South Caucasian region in terms of its energy markets and infrastructure energy systems for the American foreign energy strategy. It is foreseeable that under Biden administration the U.S. energy policy will continue to be engaged in diversification of national energy systems in the South Caucasian region and in the promotion of construction of international energy and transport corridors in the Caspian region aimed at weakening Russia's dominant position over regional energy markets and, at the same time, bypassing Iran and Russia. Meanwhile, the EU continues to be the main U.S. partner in advancement of mutual energy interests in the region. The active promotion of global climate agenda by the U.S. will have certain impact on the South Caucasian states by supporting the development and enhancement of the use of RES through the engagement of American private and public sectors. The increase in renewable energy capacity in these countries will contribute to the diversification and sovereignization of their economies, apart from bringing environmental benefits. However, the unresolved regional conflicts create certain difficulties and risks for the implementation of grand regional energy projects. This is one more causal factor for the formation of current main vector of the U.S. foreign policy - to take primacy in conflict resolution and prevention in South Caucasus.

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RUSSIA-UKRAINIAN WAR IMPACT ON RUSSIA-SYRIA RELATIONS

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Abstract

The current Russia-Ukrainian war had a great impact not only on the mentioned states but also went beyond their territorial scope. The political chaos has particularly affected Russia's strategic partner, in particular Syria. The states of the Middle East are characterized by a politically unstable environment, which is facilitated by the unfavorable economic situation within the country, on the basis of which a large part of the population is impoverished. That is why the political representatives of the states of the mentioned region are looking for an important strategic partner/partners to rely on and thus maintain a dominant position in their country. Syria is no exception, in this case, its ally in the region is Iran, and the position of an external actor has been occupied by the Russian state in recent years. Of course, all three states have their own interests, on the basis of which they establish relations, for example, the presence of Assad in power and the neutralization of his opponents in the country depends on the power of Iran and the Russians. At the same time, Syria imports food products from Russia. In 2021, Russia undertook to supply wheat to Syria, however, the Russian-Ukrainian war stopped this process, because the area of its attention became Ukraine as a whole, therefore it tries to use all the resources produced by it to help this war. Against the background of the ongoing war, the supply of food resources in Syria slowed down and almost fell to a minimum from Russia, which contributed to further impoverishment of the population and, of course, an increase in prices was inevitable. According to experts in the field, Iran has been given the greatest chance to take full power in Syria in its own hands, due to the fact that the epicenter of Russia's attention is another state. It is important to note that Russia's influence has not weakened from a political point of view.

Key words: political chaos, economic factor, relations, strategic partner, own interests.

Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 had a major impact on world politics, with a number of countries stepping in to help Ukraine, both in terms of providing humanitarian and military resources and equipment. The current war had a great impact on the international system, especially the tense environment that was created for the European states. Of course, the mentioned war will have an impact from the political-economic point of view, because it has already created a threat to the operation of the international market. Additionally, warring states' strategic partners or nations with whom they had economic trade would suffer.

The results of the current war have had a clear impact on the economic policy of Syria. The war has worsened the already dire humanitarian situation for the low-income population, bringing Syria to the brink of an economic crisis, as the cutoff in wheat supplies exacerbated bread shortages. Although the Syrian economy is not completely dependent on Russian imports, it still has a significant impact on the economic factor, as wheat resources are very important for the impoverished country. In addition, overcoming Covid-19 was a fundamental challenge for the country, especially for a country on the brink of war, it was very difficult to maintain certain sanitary norms, which contributed to the spread of the

pandemic. Accordingly, in the current background, the Syrian economy is impoverished, which is facilitated by the economic collapse within the country.

The long-term war between Russia and Ukraine may lead to a change in the dynamics of the political conflict in Syria, which is manifested by the following factors[1]:

- Iran's attempt to become a completely dominant state;

- possible increased pressure from Turkey and the Syrian opposition on the Syrian government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF);

- It is possible that due to the social background, the Syrian opposition forces will try to remove the supporters of the Assad government and bring the issue of poverty to the fore;

- If Syria left without a supporter, may again become a victim of attacks by "Islamic State" units.

At the beginning of the Russia-Ukrainian war, Russia announced that it would not fulfill its December 2021 commitment, which meant bringing wheat resources into Syrian regime-controlled territory, which in turn meant providing new resources and replenishing some stocks. Northwestern Syria is particularly short, having been directly dependent on buying wheat from Russia and Ukraine, while also importing little from Turkey, where drought has hit production. Consequently, the Syrian government has to cut back on vital food aid, despite the regime taking strict measures such as price controls, rationing, and export restrictions, but it is very difficult for a low-ranking state to adopt and implement measures in the face of ongoing economic challenges.

1. Russia-Syria relations

Relations between Syria and Russia date back to the time of the Soviet Union, in particular, in the 1970s, when the Soviet Union gained influence on the territory of Syria, provided humanitarian aid and military equipment, and in return received the only Russian military base in the Middle East. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian-Syrian relations did not develop at such a favorable pace, due to the economic, social, and political problems existing within Russia. Since the 2000s, when Vladimir Putin came to power, the situation has changed radically. In Russia's geostrategy, the Middle East moved to the forefront, and Syria, with which it had a long friendship, became one of the main partners.

After the start of the Arab Spring in 2011, Russia's interests in the Middle East grew even more. Apart from Syria, Russia saw Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi as a strategic partner, and killing Gaddafi was unprofitable for Russia. Based on the above, Syria took a central place in Russia's geopolitical interests, it received full support from Russia, both in terms of military infrastructure, and Russian soldiers appeared on the territory of Syria, aiming to maintain/strengthen Assad's government.

On September 30, 2015, the Russian Federation officially entered the Syrian Arab Republic and became involved in the civil war to keep President Bashar al-Assad in power. Intense fighting and acts of terrorism since 2011 have greatly weakened the Syrian army. Even the Syrian regular army, Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, Russian military units, and mercenaries were not enough to stop the advance of the opposition and radical groups at the beginning of the war.

In March 2015, the Syrian government lost its second provincial capital, Idlib, when Jaish al-Fatah, along with a coalition of various armed groups, launched a successful attack on the city in the northwest of the country. A year earlier, they captured the provincial capital of Raqqa, with its strategic oil and water resources, which had become the main stronghold of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

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[1] Rahman-Jones, I., Why does Russia support Syria and President Assad? https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-39554171[L. s. 7.11.2022];

(ISIL). In addition, the Syrian government has lost control of several provinces - Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Hasakeh, Deraa, and large parts of Quneitra - and has struggled to control Hama, Homs, and rural Damascus.

With the support of Russia and Iran, the Assad government was able to stop the intervention of the opposition forces. Having strengthened their strategic military positions, and gaining full influence and control over the territory of Syria, both states have placed their own military bases on the territory of Syria, which they will use at any time if necessary.

By 2022, it must be said that the Syrian opposition army is no longer the same force as it was at the beginning of the Arab Spring. Assad's government is in almost complete control of the territory of Syria, and the strategic partnership between Russia and Syria is at its zenith. Putin's government constantly reminds Assad that he would not be able to maintain power without him, and grateful Assad, on the other hand, supports Russia on the diplomatic front, imports food products and military infrastructure from Russia, and deploys Russian soldiers to his territory "to ensure peace".

2. Food insecurity in Syria

Today, Syria remains one of the most urgent cases of the World Food Program, requiring more resources/assistance than any other country. In addition, a quarter of the world's refugees are Syrian, and they are seeking refuge, or a safe environment, in 130 countries[2]. The Russia-Ukrainian war had a certain impact on humanitarian aid and put the already impoverished state in a more extreme situation.

Through strict US and EU sanctions, Syria is heavily dependent on Russian wheat imports. Ukraine is an important supplier of wheat to the global market, but in this particular case, it cannot export its grain, which is why the global supply is reduced, which is actually reflected in the increase in prices and the shortage of wheat, which is directly related to the production of bread. Other states in the Middle East turned to other major wheat exporters, such as India, for insurance during the outbreak of war. It was initially speculated that there would be some steps taken by India to help alleviate Syria's food shortages of wheat and rice, but due to drought, Syria has lost an exporting nation in that direction for the time being. I would like to point out here that if the Russia-Ukrainian conflict continues for a long time, Syria will face a more severe food shortage, which will ultimately affect the political agenda.

Wheat is one of the essential food resources for the Syrian population. Syria's annual wheat supply needs are estimated at around 4.3 million tons. In 2021[3], Syria imported about 1.2 million tons from Russia and produced only 1.05 tons, causing bread lines in regime-held areas and unprecedented price increases.

The worsening of Syria's food shortages is not the direct fault of Russia's annexation of Ukraine, although it is certainly directly related, as access to Russian food products has been cut off to this day.

In addition, finding alternative food supplies for Syria is not really easy, as imports from countries are compromised by sanctions, making it difficult for it to establish economic relations with states.

The prices of basic imported goods also increased. Access to nearby markets has also become more difficult as several countries, including Turkey, have begun imposing bans on the export of grain, cooking oil and other agricultural products to Syria.

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[2] Hatahet, S., What the Russian Invasion Means for Syria. https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/what-russian-invasion-means-syria [L. s. 13.11.2022];
[3] Hatahet, S., What the Russian Invasion Means for Syria. https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/what-russian-invasion-means-syria [L. s. 13.11.2022];

2.1 Availability problem

The increase in product prices also affected humanitarian aid. In March, the national average value of the World Food Program's standard basket increased by about 24 percent over the course of the month. In addition, the situation in the health sector is dire. A number of medical facilities in the opposition-controlled territory are completely dependent on international funding to provide essential services and medicines.

In addition to supply chain disruptions and increased costs, funding for the sector has fallen by more than 40 percent in the past ten months, forcing hospitals and vital services to close.

The current war did not cause the crisis of the mentioned issues, although it certainly contributed to its aggravation. In the future, the duration of the war will further complicate the political negotiations on the transition, which will actually worsen the humanitarian conditions in the country.

According to experts in the field, in order to avoid the impending disaster of food security, humanitarian and donor countries and non-governmental organizations should ensure the continuous flow of humanitarian aid to Syria.

3. Geopolitical dynamics

Bashar al-Assad's main goal is to gain complete control over Syria, which actually depends on the allies he supports, namely Russia and Iran. Against the backdrop of US and EU sanctions and seriously damaged infrastructure, Syria is constantly threatened with the collapse of state institutions, therefore it is vital for Syria to have the support of Iran and especially Russia on its side.

In general, Iran ensures the supply of certain funds of oil and gas to Syria, at the same time its bases are planted in the territory of Syria, and Russia ensures the export of food resources to Syria. Therefore, the Russia-Ukrainian war will have a certain impact on the security of Syria, since the main responsible person for this, from a strategic point of view, is Russia.

Despite the fact that Russia is trying as much as possible to lose its influence on Syria, its focus is still on the war in Ukraine. Accordingly, based on this, Turkey and Iran will try to influence Syria regionally, especially Iran, and do this as much as possible with the help of its proxy forces.

The political process is hampered by the difficult economic situation. According to the Carter Center/ACLED, Russia's military activity in Syria has decreased sharply, despite the fact that it remains the most reliable partner to this day. At the start of the Russia-Ukrainian war, there were some unconfirmed facts about Russia withdrawing its troops from southern Syria, but things went back to normal in April. According to researchers in the field, Russia is certainly focused entirely on Ukraine, although it does not spare efforts in relation to Syria.[4]

Although Russia is not giving up its positions in Syria, and this is of course due to its interest to have the main base in Syria, according to recent reports, Iran is gaining more foothold in the border region, which actually complicates the approaches of Jordan and Israel against Iran. In Syria, the conflict between the opposition and the Assad government is still going on, in many cases, it was able to de-escalate it together with Russia, however, in the background of the ongoing Russia-Ukrainian war, Russia is less involved in the domestic politics of the country.

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[4] Prasad H., Blog | Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Complicates the Situation in Syria.
https://www.cartercenter.org/news/features/blogs/2022/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-complicates-the-situation-in-syria.html
[L. s. 14.11.2022].

Jordan's relations with the Syrian government are strained day by day, and this is due to the sponsorship of drugs and smugglers. In particular, Jordan is trying to crack down on the border region, as it directly accuses the Syrian government and Iran of sponsoring the amphetamine trade. Russia was once a mediator in Jordan and Syria to solve the security issues of the government movement, and at this stage, Russia's positions have been reduced, on the basis of which the Jordanian government has been activated to ensure the solution of the said problem alone.

In addition to the situation in southern Syria, the issue of northern Syria is important. In particular, discussion of the position of the Kurds and Turkey. Based on this, it is important for Syria to maintain the border of northern Syria in the background that most of the Kurds are settled in the said part. Russia is active in this direction and appears as a conflict-solving party, it can be said that Russia is active in this direction because Turkey is also one of the involved parties.

Russia, also domestically, is the main moderating force between the opposition and the Syrian government, which presented itself as one of the guarantors of the cease-fire in March 2020. Accordingly, we can say that Russia appears to be one of the issues of regulating the security of the country's domestic policy, but it is relatively less involved in this direction because as we have already mentioned, Ukraine appears to be the main source of its focus.

Against the background of the current war, Russia is sanctioned from an economic point of view, which actually hinders the financial and diplomatic support of the Syrian government. At the same time as the war, Syria cut off trade relations with Ukraine, although Ukraine was one of the exporters of food for Syria.

As mentioned earlier, Russia has a strategic interest in maintaining its air and naval bases in Syria. Accordingly, Assad also has a certain interest in leaving Russia in his own territory, in particular, he is trying to strengthen his position with the help of Russia. Based on a report published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Russia's ground forces will number around 4,000 in 2022, so Russia is concentrating on its aerospace defense forces in Syria. It is because of this that he has the opportunity to change the political influence on Syria to a lesser extent.[5]

I would also like to point out that a particularly tense background is being created in terms of humanitarian aid. Syria needs humanitarian assistance more and more every day. The US is one of the major aid powers in this direction, therefore, humanitarian aid to Syria should be stable depending on the poverty line of the population, although the lack of international funding may be reflected in the scale of the response to the crisis in Ukraine.

If we consider Turkey's politics, its involvement in the current war is less, however, due to the fact that Russia and Turkey have economic cooperation, the Russia-Ukrainian war would have a certain impact on their relations. Turkey is one of the largest trading partners in terms of imports and one of the main suppliers of gas. Even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Turkey's deepening economic crisis made it difficult to sustain the economic costs of its Syria policy. Moreover, the humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine will add to Turkey's economic burden in northwestern Syria. Thus, continued cross-border aid is an urgent priority for Turkey, now more than ever.

Iran, on the other hand, has made a significant contribution to the survival of the Assad regime. In Syria, the two powerful allies share influence with each other and try their best to strengthen their positions. Therefore, Russia and Iran had to balance territorial control through political interaction in order to maintain Assad's rule. However, it should be noted that Russia was still promoted because, in addition

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[5] Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. The War in Ukraine and Its Impact on Syria. https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/the-war-in-ukraine-and-its-impact-on-syria [L. s. 11.11.2022].

to political affairs, it was also led by the economic factor. The Russia-Ukrainian war, it can be said, changed some dynamics, on the basis of which Iran was given some opportunity to increase its influence in Syria. A clear example of this is its expansion in North-Eastern Syria, against the background that the said part was mostly controlled by Russia. According to the military balance of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Iran's troops in the region this year numbered 1,500. Accordingly, they have increased their presence in Al-Hasakah by this figure. Before the Russia-Ukrainian war, Russia restricted Iran's activities in Al-Hasakah. Of particular note is the fact that al-Hassaq is close to territory controlled by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

According to experts in the field, Iran has always wanted to put pressure on Washington, and it can be said that it has a chance to do so through Syria. Additionally, Iran has equipped its proxy forces in various areas of Syria with weapons, including anti-armor machine guns. Iran justifies this behavior by saying that they have to answer in the future in order to combat the renewed activities of ISIS. In addition, Iran did not rely only on the territory of Al-hasakah but also intensified its efforts by using proxy forces in the provinces of Homs and Deir Ez-Zor. Finally, in early April, Iranian forces, along with Lebanese Hezbollah and the pro-Iranian Fourth Division of the Syrian army, stepped up their presence at the Mahin military depot in eastern Homs following the withdrawal of Russian-backed forces.

Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine war had a severe impact on Syria. The already existing poverty, hunger, and economic crisis further encouraged it. Until today, actors outside the region have tried their best to avoid all the negative effects caused by the Ukraine-Russia war for Syria, but to no avail. Due to the fact that Russian exports play a big role in the economy of Syria, it was not possible to avoid the negative impact. It should be noted here that for the West, the reduction of Russia's influence in Syria did not necessarily bring positive results. Along with the decline of Russian influence, the influence and role of Iran have increased. The growth of Iran's influence has caused serious concern in Israel, which, due to such a situation, feels a direct threat from the Iranian military bases located on the territory of Syria.

It is very important for the European Union and partner countries such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Norway to play their role in reducing regional conflicts. They must be able to contribute to long-term humanitarian goals, which at the same time can and will guarantee an inclusive system of regional security. From this point of view, it is necessary for them to work in the direction of reducing local conflicts. Their role is also important in balancing the "cold conflicts" between the internal conflicting parties in the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Also in solving the issue of Syrian Kurds and balancing the positions of Turkey.

A healthy investment policy plays an important role in the Syrian economy, it clearly has challenges in this direction. The cost of reconstruction of the existing enterprises in Syria, damaged by the civil war, ranges from 250 to 400 billion US dollars. There is a theoretical possibility on the part of the Arab states, although there are many challenges in this direction. One of the factors is Iran, whose influence in Syria is very large. It is possible that this will have a positive effect, and it is precisely to reduce the growth of Iran's influence that the Arab countries will invest, although the risks of losing the investment are quite large. At the same time, the revival of the economy takes a long time, and Syria, which is still potentially on the brink of civil war, is not considered a very desirable investment country. Another reason is the state of the country itself. A broken-down country, whose political regime is unstable, and allied with two aggressor states, will not create a healthy investment environment for either country.

The Russia-Ukraine war poses an additional potential threat to the Assad regime. The Russian Federation is adding military personnel to the territory of Ukraine day by day, depending on the fact that they do not succeed and require more military assistance, there is a possibility that the military units in Syria will be sent to Ukraine. It is also possible that Russia will ask Assad to send Syrian troops as a sign of friendship. Such a situation is definitely not desirable for the Assad regime. The sending of Syrian troops will not happen in a wide range by itself, even a small number is a threat substitute for Assad due to the strengthening of ISIS and the activation of opposition forces, and in case of withdrawal of Russian troops, Assad will need more support from Iran, which is the main ally and supporter after Russia. Such a move, in turn, would anger Israel, which would increase Israel's future attacks on Syria. For Israel, the Russian-Syrian alliance is undesirable, but even more undesirable, of course, is its main supporter, Iran, which openly threatens Israel with destruction.

In December 2021, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations warned Syria that due to the impending drought, the wheat harvest would decline and the risk of famine would be high. As a result of the war, Syria, already damaged, destroyed and below the poverty line, this information would not be useful. Added to this are the consequences of the war in Ukraine, which has further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Syria, which is already below the poverty line. Even before the war, 90% of the Syrian population lived in poverty, 2/3 depended on humanitarian aid, and 55% were food insecure. The Syrian crisis was compounded by sanctions imposed as a result of bad governance, and the covid pandemic and all these factors put Syria in an unprecedented crisis as of today.

At the very beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia announced that it was not going to fulfill the commitment made in early December 2021, which was related to the supply of wheat to the territories controlled by the Assad regime. Northwestern Syria is also experiencing shortages at the same time, due to the fact that it buys wheat from Ukraine and Russia, and/or Turkey, which has also been affected by the drought. In addition to all this, the world food program, which is largely dependent on production in Ukraine, is not in a very favorable position due to the loss of suppliers, rising food prices, and the increased number of people in global poverty. From May 2022, the program will have to cut life support to 1.35 million people in northwestern Syria. Although the Syrian regime has taken strict measures, such as rationing, price controls, and export restrictions, it is still not enough to stabilize the situation.

Finally, to summarize Russia's position in relation to Syria, the main trajectory will be highlighted, which will have an impact if the Russia-Ukrainian war continues for a long time. First, it certainly refers to the loss of Russia's positions, which is manifested by the loss of its military presence or directly focusing a large force on Ukraine. Therefore, it is possible that Russia will no longer block the expansion of Iran's influence. Because of this, Iran has a chance to turn Syria into its sphere of influence, which in turn will not be very favorable for Western countries. On the other hand, the situation in Syria will become more and more difficult in terms of the need for humanitarian aid, in particular, if Syria does not find a state that provides food resources in the near term, it will ultimately make it difficult to provide minimum food resources to the population.

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JOURNALISM

HIDDEN MEANINGS OF OPEN POLITICAL ADVERTISING (ON THE EXAMPLE OF GEORGIAN TV POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS FOR 2014-2021)

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Abstract

The development of modern technologies has given rise to the era of visual culture, in which visual information is more important than verbal information, because in most respects, it is more comprehensive with implicit messages. Therefore, we decided to study open political advertisements on Georgian TV, in which visual information often has much more meaning than verbal information.

In general, advertising producers, and especially the creators of political advertising, should skillfully use the visual component in order to be able to increase the degree of impact on the consumers by increasing the media space. In order to measure the trends observed in Georgian political marketing in this regard, we analyzed advertisements used for different types of elections from 2014 to 2021.

The research period was determined by the following fact: since 2014, Georgian Dream has added a new model - the multi-sided positioning of a candidate - to the variety of open political advertisements created by Georgian political parties - counter-advertisement, propaganda. Our goal was to observe the transformation of open political advertising from 2014 to the municipal elections in 2021.

Our research is a novelty from the point of view of methodology, because, despite the fact that, as a rule, open or hidden political advertising has been studied by specialists in different contexts, there has so far been no precedent for the presentation of implicit meanings of Georgian open political advertising based on semiotic analysis and theories of media effects. We believe that it is possible to decipher the hidden meanings of open political advertising based on these two areas - semiotics and theories of media effects.

The conducted research has shown that in the process of perception of the message by the recipient, the visual code intervenes and gives direction. The examples studied by us prove that frames are mostly created by visual elements that dictate to the addressee how to perceive the message. Based on the theory of 'agenda setting', political marketing professionals offer potential voters the questions to think about before making a final decision and, accordingly, the ways of solving these problems are shown to the audience.

Since 2014, Georgian TV open political advertising has been improving, there is a tendency of increasing creative approach, which makes this important part of the election campaign diverse. 'Falling into negativism' also decreases and its place is occupied by the type of advertising, which is focused on creative presentation of the candidate and his / her action plan.

Keywords: political advertising, semiotics, framing, agenda setting.

Introduction

The development of modern technologies has given rise to the era of visual culture, in which visual information is more important than verbal information, because in most respects, it is more comprehensive with implicit messages. In general, the purpose of advertising and especially political advertising is to change the behavior of viewers. We were interested to find out what kind of coded message is included in open political advertisements, which fills verbal code with additional information and as a result, increases the degree of influence on the recipient. We focused on the open political advertisements covered by Georgian TV media, as it should be noted that the majority of voters, unfortunately, the percentage of the young generation is very low, get acquainted with the advertisements of candidates and political parties on TV.

We formulated the research hypothesis as follows: in general, advertising producers, moreover, political advertisers, should skillfully use visual component in order to increase the degree of impact on the customers by increasing the information field.

Our research is a novelty in terms of methodology, as despite the fact that generally open or hidden political advertising has been studied in different contexts by field specialists, until now there has been no precedent for presenting implicit meanings of Georgian open political advertisements on the basis of semiotic analysis and media effect theories.

Therefore, our goal is to study the visual side of open political advertising, based on semiotic analysis of Georgian TV political advertisements for 2014-2021, in order to decode connotative meanings, which in turn will allow us to present those 'frames' according to the theory of media effects – 'frames', by which political marketing specialists dictate to voters how to see and perceive a candidate.

The study period was defined by the following fact: since 2014, the 'Georgian Dream' has added a new model - multilateral positioning of the candidate - to the variety of open political advertisements established by Georgian political parties - counter-advertisement, propaganda. Our goal was to observe the transformation of open TV political advertising including the municipal elections in 2021.

1. Political Marketing

Political marketing is a powerful tool for influencing people. There are two main types of ideological and political influence: persuasion, which implies an honest, direct appeal to people, their awareness and call for critical thinking, and manipulation, that is, covert control of people's political consciousness and behavior. There are two main models of manipulation - psychological and rational. According to the psychological model, a person is considered as a simple mechanism that operates on the following principle: stimulus - reaction. The rational model implies the use of direct deception of people. Within the framework of this model, the following forms of manipulation are distinguished: reduction of the volume of information, its classification, deliberate concealment of information harmful to the candidate, information overload, that is, the supply of information in such excess that an ordinary citizen loses the ability to adequately absorb and correctly comprehend it, as a result, he relies on the 'ready' interpretation of the information that is being provided for him; and finally, the use of propaganda, which involves the provision of partially correct but biased information.

Examples of negative campaigns in political science include: "discrediting an opponent, labeling it as an incompetent and unreliable person ('they did not fulfill their promise') and linking them to the past full of mistakes and an uncertain prospect of the future." [74] As Yasha Lange writes, negative campaigning is

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[74] Lang, Y., "Media and Elections", "Rigtime", 2004.

a common affliction that is more common in countries with two-party majoritarian systems. Image-makers call such a campaign "a fall into negativism". Its regulation measures found difficult to adopt because "overly strict rules can violate freedom of speech, which would be unconstitutional; even the rules, that are too liberal are ineffective"[75]. It should be noted that researchers warn politicians to be careful when conducting negative campaigns. The Italian elections of 1994 are given as an example. The left-wing philosopher Lucio Colletti wrote during the 1994 election campaign: 'Never give in to temptation and do not create an enemy of the people out of your opponent. Slander can come back to you like a boomerang'. The philosopher's words really came true, and Berlusconi, whom his opponents dubbed 'dark night', 'little south American dictator', became the prime minister of Italy.

Jacques Séguéla, French Master of Political Advertising, in the book – 'National peculiarities in the process of hunting for votes' - gives the first advice to politicians: "They vote for a person, not for a party."[76] This emphasizes the leading and most important role of a person's image for winning elections. For the electorate, the versatile positioning of a candidate is an unmistakable guarantee of success, supported also by the French semiologist Roland Barthes, who in one of the chapters of the 'mythology' – 'election photography' - studies election photography in depth and examines the process of its perception from the point of view of the recipient. He proposes a very interesting analysis: if the candidate tries to demonstrate the sustainability of his social situation with a photo - possessing such 'bourgeois benefits as: religious and family norms, Sunday service, family traditions - voters identify themselves in this ideology. The audience sees their own idealized face in the photo of the candidate. "This kind of emphasis defines the photogenic: the voter is both an image and a hero at the same time, as if he is offered to vote for himself, turning the mandate of the MP into a real mental transfer"[77]. 'Positioning' in politics implies the synthesis of a unique political offer and image. Jacques Séguéla also used this method during the election campaign of Francois Mitterrand: in order to get to know the candidate better among voters, he appealed to celebrities, ranging from writer Francoise Sagan to volcanologist Haroun Tazieff, with a request to talk about Mitterrand in a simple and convincing tone. In the formation of public opinion, of course, the opinion of an influential person plays the greatest role.[78]

2. Semiotics

When discovering connotative meanings, we relied on the mythological system of the French semiologist R. Barthes, based on the linguistic model of the Swiss linguist, semiotician and philosopher - Ferdinand de Saussure himself. In the linguo-semiological system, the combination of indication and designation creates a sign with which a new, second semiological system - a myth - begins. From the point of view of myth, R. Barthes calls the indication a form, because, as from a linguistic point of view, it is the same as a thought, that is the result of a single association of a face and a concept. R. Barthes calls the designation a concept, and the sign - a meaning. It should be noted that, according to Ferdinand de Saussure, the meaning, the last member of the linguistic system - the sign - is the result of the interaction of selection and merger. And the understanding of the world conveyed by signs necessarily depends on the culture in which we live. Taking into account the cultural repertoire of the target audience, advertisings are created. To the French semiologist R. Barthes also belongs the first attempt to study advertising as a text containing implicit information. On a red background, from an open, white, food package appears: two boxes of pasta, tomatoes, onions, peppers and other products depicted in yellow-green colors. The main message was clearly visible on the pasta labels and the inscription below the image. The second information, which was conveyed by the layout of the products package, indicated

[75] Lang, Y., "Media and Elections", "Rigtime", 2004.
[76] Segela, J., Editor: Vazha Shuritidze. "National peculiarities of hunting for votes: how they win elections, how they create presidents, 8 commandments necessary for victory", Tbilisi: Innovation, 2010.
[77] Barthes, R., "Mythologies", Agora, 2011.
[78] Segela, J., Editor: Vazha Shuritidze. "National peculiarities of hunting for votes: how they win elections, how they create presidents, 8 commandments necessary for victory", Tbilisi: Innovation, 2010.

'market penetration' by 'Panzani', while the third information was expressed precisely through colors. The colors of the Italian flag assured the recipient that the product was Italian.[79]

While studying the visual code, we followed the opinion of Christian Metz that a visual face does not form a closed and autonomous empire, a kind of closed world within itself. On the contrary, its meaning is determined by the surrounding elements, that is why the non-verbal code will constantly be a victim of the game of words and in general, all the innovations that create the meaning of the sign in a given society.[80] Another proof that the same sign, whether verbal or non-verbal, will be understood and perceived in different ways in different times and spaces, therefore, we must take into account the social and cultural context when studying political advertising on television.

Taking into account aesthetic, connotative, cultural and communicative values, Greimas like Metz, proposes the following definition of the image: "In visual semiotics, the image is considered as a self-sufficient expressive unit, as a whole of meaning, which is subject to analysis. Thus, semiotics of the face refers to the theory of communication, generally considering the image as a message created by iconic signs".[81]

3. Theories of media effects

Since our goal is to decode symbolic messages of open political advertisements based on semiotic analysis and thus to discover the frames by which connotative meanings are created, we considered it appropriate to focus on those two theories of media effects that work in the case of advertising. These are theories of 'agenda' (agenda setting) and 'framing'.

The 'agenda setting' theory studies the relationship between media coverage of an issue and giving importance to an issue covered by individuals. In other words, the media dictates to the public which issue to think about. Political advertisement makers also indicate to voters which issues to think about in relation to the candidate, while using frames, they dictate the viewers how to perceive the message.

Maccoby used to refer to framing as the second level of 'agenda setting', which indicates the recipient how to receive the message. However, Viver, who gives framing a dimension of reasoning structure involving evaluation and causal relationships, points out that framing is less compatible with agenda-setting. This interpretive dimension brings us back to the second field of research that is intertwined with framing research, which is priming. Framing strategies while receiving a message can activate cognitive interpretation schemes. It is on these schemes that the message rests and is based on. This temporary activation and the increased availability of these special considerations is exactly what is defined under the term - priming.

Iyengar, another well-known theorist of media framing, distinguishes between two types of framing, as he himself calls 'thematic' and 'episodic'. 'Episodic framing focuses on particular events and facts, while thematic framing focuses on political themes and events in a general context.'[82] The fundamental difference between these two types of framing is that episodic framing paints specific events, which in turn illustrate and decorate the theme while thematic framing raises abstract issues. Political advertising, of course, is created according to episodic framing.

[79] Barthes, R., "Rhetorique de l'image". Communications, 1964.
[80] Metz, C., "Au-dela de l'analogie, l'image". Communications, 1970.
[81] Greimas A.J., et Courtes, J., "Semiotique, dictionnaire raisonne de la theoris du langages", Paris, Hachette. 1979, გვ.181.
[82] Iyengar, S., „Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues." The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

4. Implicit meanings of open political advertisements on television

While researching Georgian TV political advertisements, we tried to reveal connotative meanings based on semiotic analysis, which were acquired by visual code based on verbal message and, thus, created frames that would dictate to viewers how to receive the message, as well as, based on the theory of 'agenda setting', we observed what issues were voiced in the advertisements, studying them taking into account the socio-political context.

4.1. Negative Ads

A classic example of a negative campaign was the advertisement used by the United National Movement against the Georgian Dream in 2014 – 'the dream does not work'. According to the format, three types of this advertisement are identified. In one, the founder of 'Georgian Dream' B. Ivanishvili's pre-election appeals (2012), or 'Georgian Dream's' pre-election promises are used, which has attached graphics of the percentage of fulfilled/unfulfilled promises; The second focuses on the specific figure of unfulfilled promises, and the third appeals to the difference between the salaries of representatives of the 'government of dream' and pensions, the subsistence minimum, indicators of social assistance.

In order to identify the main ways by which these political advertisements were created, we structurally studied one example of all three types of advertisements and put such types of advertisements in the created model in order to make sure the identity of the handwriting.

Let's review the first type of ads, in which only three frames are used, and the percentage relationship between the duration of the shots is identical, (e. g. the longest is the first shot, then the third and smallest time is devoted to the second shot). When analyzing this type of advertising, the following special effects were highlighted, which should definitely be overlooked, since they play an important role in trying to manipulate public opinion. These include graphics, color, font. Since the advertisement is focused on the schedule (if the first shot takes the place of subtitles, The Last Shot is entirely dedicated to it), it would be advisable to start the research by studying the graphics, which, of course, includes the analysis of colors and fonts.

A static graphic placed on a moving frame begins with a date that denotes date of Bidzina Ivanishvili's address or pre-election promises (e.g.18.07.2012), the date reference has a double contextual meaning: on the one hand, it ensures the reliability of the information, and on the other hand, it implicitly informs the recipient of the message that enough time has passed to fulfill the promise; Then comes the percentages, which are conveyed in five colors: green, yellow, red, white, the latter in the last shot is replaced by blue.

In order to study the impact of these colors on the human psyche, we were guided by the work of Vasil Kandinsky 'on spirituality in art'. According to the author, color has a psychic power that evokes spiritual vibrations.

In addition, we think that local codes of these colors should be taken into account in order to identify the purpose of the creator of the video clip when selecting the colors.: red and white color combination for Georgian voters is associated with the 'United National Movement', and blue and yellow color combination-with 'Georgian Dream'.

'Not fulfilled' is marked in red in the graphic. According to Vasil Kandinsky, red acts excitingly and causes different spiritual vibrations according to associations. The local code is added to this, which is associated with the 'United National Movement' for Georgian voters. Thus, the red-colored symbol leads us to the implicit information of the remark – 'not fulfilled', which implies, on the one hand, the excitement/concern of the recipient, and on the other hand, subconsciously informs us that the number of unfulfilled promises has been discovered by the United National Movement, the subtext of which is the

following: flaws are generally corrected by the one who finds them. So, under this remark is hidden the promise that the 'United National Movement' will fulfill the unfulfilled promises of the 'Georgian Dream'.

'**Fulfilled**' is marked in green. According to Kandinsky, green is the calmest color that does not move and therefore has 'no consonants of feeling'. According to local codes, it has no symbolic meaning. This time it is not carrying any additional information. However, logically, this remark should have been mentioned in blue, because the local code of the mentioned color is 'Georgian Dream', which fulfilled the indicated number of promises. It turned out that green, which seemed at first glance to be devoid of implicit information, has a function: it is the hiding of reality.

'**In process**' is marked with a yellow color. According to Kandinsky, yellow, violently, irritably and bewitchable affects the human soul. '**Fully fulfilled**' is indicated in white in the first shot and in blue in the last shot.

'**Totally fulfilled**' is mentioned in white in the first frame and in blue in the last frame. How to explain this change? Let's first consider the aspects of the impact of the colors themselves. According to Kandinsky, white acts on our psychics like silence, which 'representing materially, looks like a fence leading into insurmountable Infinity'. Thus, the additional information transmitted by the selected color in the first frame, which the viewer subconsciously perceives, are endless promises that remained not fulfilled. As for blue, according to Kandinsky, it is a typical heavenly color, which generates an element of calm, it awakens the striving for the sublime and infinity in man. In order to explain the given interchange of colors, in case of blue, we should take into account the local code by which this color is associated with the 'Georgian Dream'. The implicit information of the last shot is also evident, 'Georgian Dream' gave 'total promise' to the population. The use of different fonts in the texts is intended to focus the attention of the recipient on the selected information, which prevents the recipient to save the information himself. The best example of this is the flashing inscription used in the last shot – 'not fulfilled' - in a bright red color that completely covers the information on this page.

In addition to compositional purposes, the style of distribution of information on the shot is also selected in terms of symbolic load. This time let us consider visual side of information distribution according to symbolic load. In the first shot, graphics take the place of subtitles. The purpose of subtitles in news programs is to identify informers. In the abovementioned video clips the leader of 'Georgian Dream' - B. Ivanishvili is identified by graphically expressed percentage of fulfilled and unfulfilled promises. In the first two shots, in the lower right corner (which is intended for the signature of the compiler in the written document) it is written in very small white letters: 'United National Movement' (which is not read at all). This information, of course, indicates the customer of the video clip. As for the source of information placed in the advertisement (in the first shot on the top of the 'United National Movement' and in the last shot on the first line) the address of the site - dreammeter.ge - is indicated in red. (NGO 'Civil Initiative for the motherland' (pro-patria) has created an internet page - dreammeter.ge - where are collected all the promises made by Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Georgian Dream before the elections. This site monitors these promises).

Another special effect on which we want to stop attention is applied in the second shot: pausing the last part of the moving color shot and turning it into a black and white shot (which lasts 1 second). In addition to the fact that this effect is intended to keep the viewer's attention focused, it has a warning sign reinforced with a red framed inscription 'not fulfilled' ("Some colors are intensified by some shapes and lose their intensity due to other shapes...Vibrant colors with pointed shapes reveal their features more"[83]) and causes an association of approaching danger.

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[83] Kandinsky, Vasyl. "About spirituality in art", Ilyauni publishing house, 2013.

Let's move from visual effects to speech. In both types of advertising, command forms are used. According to Jacobson, the conative function of speech is expressed in a command form. This is a function aimed at the recipient. It is used by the addresser to enable the addressee to act on himself. This function is especially important in advertising. Let's see how the command forms used in our reviewed advertisements affect the recipient of the message. '**Not fulfilled**', '**the Dream does not work**'- spoken in a command tone, contextually linked to the slogan of the United National Movement – 'let's make Tbilisi work' - in the minds of the recipients. This remark carries the following idea: what the 'Georgian Dream' could not fulfill, we - the 'United National Movement' and voters will make work.

In the second type of ads, the above two phrases are added to the third, e.g., '100 factories are being searched for'. According to the Jacobson model of communication, the referential function of speech participates in the understanding of this message. In this case referent B. Ivanishvili's 2012 pre - election promise is - 100 new factories will be created.

In the second type of advertising, the command tone is enhanced by a special musical effect. Electronic music has a special effect of electric shock, which causes fear in the recipient of the message. Their purpose is permanent concentration of the addressee's attention and terrifying warning about approaching danger.

In this type of advertising, only three colors are used: black, white, red. Let's review the relationship of colors and shapes, in particular, changing the color of the 'Georgian Dream' flag - blue - to black.

 As mentioned above, according to Kandinsky, blue is a typical heavenly color that evokes in a person the urge of faith, sincerity, stability, while black evoke emotions such as sadness and anger, 'something extinct, like a burning bonfire, something motionless, like a corpse... It's like the silence of the body after the end of life". Such manipulation of colors implicitly informs the recipient of the message that the 'Georgian Dream' has lost its aspiration to the sublime and has become extinguished, 'motionless as a corpse'.

The same modification of the flag of 'Georgian Dream' is used in the third type of advertisements, where the numbers are applied. On the one hand, they provide information about the salaries of the representatives of the 'Dream government', on the other hand - about pension, petrol price, means of subsistence minimum and social assistance. The recipient of the message must compare the numbers to each other in order to annoy the colossal difference and to have a negative attitude towards the 'Dream government'.

The detailed analysis of the ads shows that they are typical examples of negative campaigns, which, according to the theory of 'agenda setting', directly dictate to voters what issues to think about, before they make a decision.

The structure of negative advertising is almost identical. For example, Clinton's negative ads were built on a documentary basis: quotes from Bush's previous promises were taken, followed by statistics that did

not confirm that. In 2008, the opposition used similar tactics against President Saakashvili without success; in 2014, President Saakashvili's party behaved likewise against 'Georgian Dream', but with no success.

4.2. Psychological model of manipulation

As we have already discussed above, according to the psychological model of manipulation, a person is considered as a simple mechanism that operates on the following principle: stimulus - reaction. Kakha Kaladze, one of the candidates for mayor of Tbilisi in the municipal elections of 2021, turned to this model and at the same time allegedly answered to the 'Not fulfilled' -used in the advertising of opponents eight years ago - with the 'Promise fulfilled'.

The architectonics of these advertisements are identical. On the screen, in different shades of blue, the candidate's number, first and last name, as well as the name of the party are displayed in white, the number is marked in yellow, and the candidate's motto is written in blue on a yellow background: 'More life in every district.' The colors have a calming effect on the recipient's psyche, which is further reinforced by the word - life. Yellow even as a warning sign prepares viewers for the following information. In a parallel video, viewers see the candidate and the state of the territory in 2018, about the rehabilitation of which Kakha Kaladze speaks. In the next shot, the candidate's number, marked in yellow, appears again on blue tones, followed by a red frame on a white background – 'promise fulfilled' and then, the viewer sees on the screen the evidence of what the aforementioned area looks like in 2021. These voiceless shots occupy half the ad time. This time is intended to make voters think and respond to the stimulus with an adequate reaction. In these advertisements, the visual component plays a crucial role. At first glance, the video material provided without comments gives voters a feeling of freedom, as if they are allowed to analyze the information themselves, while one of the methods of media effects theory is involved here - framing. Frames are created with information conveyed by visual component, namely old and new condition. Using these frames, the viewer is dictated how to perceive the message, that he should compare the updated version with the old one and make a conclusion favorable for the candidate.

It should be noted that open political advertisements of various political parties and candidates are mainly built on this model, so we will not dwell on them in detail.

4.3. Multilateral positioning of candidates

A novelty was the advertisement that Georgian Dream used during the 2014 local government elections for its candidate, the current mayor of Tbilisi, Narmania, in which he was characterized by well-known and respected people of Georgian society. This ad is a good example of positioning, as it combines the creation of a candidate's image and a political offer.

The advertisement consists of 8 shots, out of which 7 are dedicated to public figures and the last shot - to the candidate.

Old photos of Tbilisi are used as the background for the first seven shots, dominated by warm colors that do not catch the viewer's eye and positively creates positive attitude in them. The sequence of non-verbal and verbal means of transmitting information is interestingly used. In the verbal part, initially, the emphasis is on the personal qualities of the candidate Narmania. The ad begins with an address by the actor Kakhi Kavsadze, in which 'cleanness' is emphasized not only by raising the tone of voice, but also

by gestures. The rugby player Irakli Abesadze emphasizes Narmania's 'loyalty' and ability to 'play as a team'. A transition is taking place from personal qualities on the main messages of the candidate's election program. 'Development of Tbilisi' sounds twice. In the 3rd shot, the singer Metonidze says and in the 6th shot – the artist Gugushvili repeats. The shot here is also dynamic, which is intended as a context of a rapid development. From the 3rd shot the background also acquires symbolic meaning. 10 seconds (the duration of the first two shots) is enough for the viewer to perceive the background and discover its symbolic load. Old photos of Tbilisi illustrate the confrontation with the city development plan of the 'National Movement', which reflected the loss of the old appearance of the city.

Among the above-mentioned shots, the plan of taking care of the historical heritage of Tbilisi and creation of ecologically clean and healthy environment in Tbilisi are inserted. Among the above-mentioned images is a plan of how to take care of the historical heritage of Tbilisi and how to create ecologically clean and healthy environment in the city, about which historian G. Otkhmezuri speaks. This message is voiced by the doctor T. Mikeladze. The message, voiced by the artist Matabeli, which is about turning Tbilisi region into a cultural center, is used as a jump from public figures to the candidate. In the last shot, we see the candidate surrounded by people. His gesture - right-hand address - and slogan – 'Our city needs care', while talking to the voters, the coincidence of a smile and a message – 'Let's take care of Tbilisi together' - brings a feeling of common happiness to the addressee. The advertisement uses the word – 'clean' twice -although in different contexts, but it should be noted that the viewer only memorizes the word according to the first context, because it is known, memory begins with receiving an impression, entering information into the mental system. Therefore, the word – 'clean'- the second time mentioned in the 5th shot, in the 'long-term memory' of the addressee, will remain in the context, mentioned for the first time – 'a clean person', because this word, by means of accentuation, impresses the addressee here.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the repetition of the words – 'development, clean' - when building an ad is planned in such a way that the interval between repetitions is the same (repeated once in 3 shots, 12-16 seconds). If not this interval these words could not be imprinted in the 'long-term memory' of the recipient. According to memory psychology, the time of preservation in short memory is determined by 20-30 seconds if it is not repeated. In terms of encoding, information in this form of memory is given in the auditory modality, i.e. acoustic form. The function of short-term memory is to fix the material to be inserted into long-term memory. It should also be noted that the words repeated one after another cause the recipient of the message to feel artificially imposed, which turns into a negative attitude.

According to the 'framing theory', the advertisement indicates to the voter how to perceive the candidate as a person and based on the theory of 'agenda setting' dictates which issues to focus on while thinking about the candidate's action program.

5.4. Self portrait

'Georgian Dream' is trying to create TV portraits of its candidates, in particular, in 2014 for the local elections they paid attention to positioning in the case of David Narmania, but Kakha Kaladze gave preference to the self-portrait. First of all, the purpose of the portrait is to establish personal connection between the candidate and his/her voters. For example, for the 2021 municipal elections, Kakha Kaladze, the mayoral candidate of the capital of Georgia, used ordinary citizens and tourists of Tbilisi to introduce implemented and future projects. The candidate answered their questions and thus informed the society about the action plan. These advertisements were loaded with implicit meanings, while decoding which, without taking into account the existing social and cultural context, the hidden messages could not be revealed. For example, let's consider one of Kakha Kaladze's advertisement, the visual component of which is revealed with connotative codes, and it should be said that compared to the information transmitted through verbal messages, it carries more importance. The priority issue of this advertisement is the problem of legalization of apartments and cooperative housing. A young girl, lying on the bed, has

a book on her knees, asks the candidate a question about homeless people. A room illuminated by a night lamp, the walls of which are covered with posters, creates such cozy environment that not only the homeless, but also a very young person dreams about. The visual code at a connotative level creates the myth that young people will have the opportunity to live in the modern environment. The girl's posture, with her bare feet visible in the foreground, carries the symbolic meaning of an implicit free life.
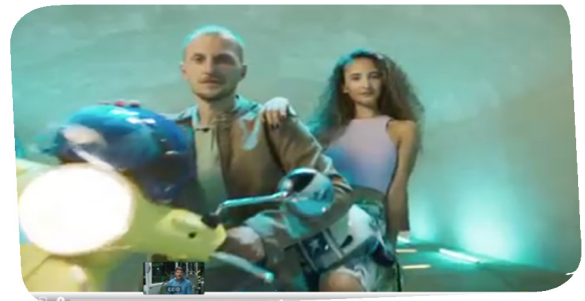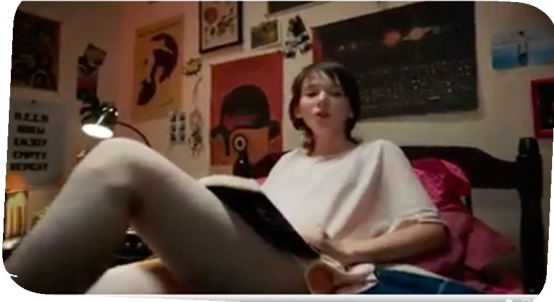
A young couple sitting on a motorbike has the same symbolic meaning, which we see in the advertisement that Kakha Kaladze tries to influence voters by focusing on transport. The shot of a young couple is decided in pastel colors, which does not violently affect the psyche of the recipient, on the contrary, has a calming effect. Through the interaction of visual and verbal code, a mythical meaning is created, that the candidate's action plan promises to live in a peaceful environment for voters, because if we take into account the existing social context, moving to Tbilisi, even because of traffic jam, creates stressful environment for the population.

From the point of view of a self-portrait, Mamuka Khazaradze, candidate of the political party 'Lelo', introduced an interesting novelty in 2021. The advertisement, which at first glance propagates going to the elections, actually introduces the personality of the candidate. It appears in the shot when the viewer is faced with the expectation that the conversation of a young couple should turn into a conflict. With one bell on the door, M. Khazaradze solves the couple's problem-he keeps the baby so that the mother can go to the elections. In the next shot we see the candidate entertains the child and sings quietly: 'the evening of my Tbilisi...'. In the last shot we hear the child laugh and see him happy, with a toy. The visual message interferes with the perception of the verbal text and gives it more persuasiveness, as it creates a mythical meaning according to which the candidate keeps his promise – stays with the baby and does a good job with the assigned duties - the child is happy. According to the theory of 'agenda setting', voters should think about the necessity of participation in elections. The frames, which frame the main message, dictate the voters to perceive the main message as follows: to go to the elections and vote for the candidate who can fulfill the promise. The 'Lelo' candidate turns to another interesting way of creating a self-portrait when sings with street musicians.

Thus, he tried to present his persona to voters from a different perspective. He has also purposefully selected songs: Gogi Tsabadze's – 'the evening of my Tbilisi', 33A's - 'when it is time it snows', Chikhladzes' – 'autumn has come at the door'...In this type of advertising, frames are created by the texts

of songs. For example, 'autumn has come to the door' and 'we have no time to think', and we must vote for the one who sings: 'the star of fate makes me smile'.

Conclusion

We have studied open political advertisements on Georgian TV from 2014 to 2021. Our goal is to show the hidden meanings that the advertisements are full of, because the implicit message expands the area of exposure to the recipient. When decoding connotative meanings, we focused on the visual component of the message, because its interaction with the verbal part creates a myth. We have selected such advertisements, where diverse visual component takes the dominant place.

Our study has revealed that visual code interferes with the recipient's perception of the message and gives direction. The examples studied by us prove that frames are mostly created by visual elements that dictate to the addressee how to perceive the message. Based on the theory of 'agenda setting', political marketing professionals offer potential voters which issues to think about before making a final decision and, accordingly, the ways of solving these problems are shown to the audience.

The research hypothesis has been justified, the detailed analysis of certain advertisements convinced us that the producers of Georgian TV open political advertisements load the visual component with connotative meanings, decoding of which increases the information field while perceiving the message by the addressee and as a result increases the degree of influence on potential voters.

It is noteworthy that since 2014, Georgian TV open political advertising has been improving, there is a tendency of increasing creative approach, which makes this important part of the pre-election campaign diverse. 'Falling into negativism' also decreases and its place is occupied by such a type of advertising, which is oriented towards a creative presentation of the candidate and his/her action plan.

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RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN THE GEORGIAN MEDIA QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Religious conflicts attract special interest of the media. A journalist's responsibility is vital in the process of covering religious crises in order to present to the audience balanced, objective, stereotype-free facts and provide the user with a media product prepared at a professional level, without distortion and/or misinterpretation of facts, and also avoid formation of stereotypical views and attitudes. It should be taken into account that the information spread by the media should not lead to deepening of the conflict among religious groups. Recently, the Georgian media often covers religious issues, because the number of religious conflicts in the country has increased fairly.

Relationship between religious organizations and the state is a particularly important area of interest both in the world and in Georgia, and a country where these relationships are regulated is even considered ideal. According to the annual report of the Public Defender of Georgia, Georgia is unfortunately not considered to be among such ideal countries. According to the report, facts of intolerance on religious basis in Georgia are quite often recorded, and what should be surprising, that media organizations often incite to the situation more than state officials. How are religious events covered in Georgian media? In this regard, a systematic and in-depth research on the coverage of religious issues in the media has not yet been conducted. The presented research is an attempt to improve the above-mentioned condition, and naturally, like all first attempts, it may have some imperfections. Within the framework of the research, the public opinion regarding the coverage of religious issues in the Georgian media is analyzed for the first time.

The presented report provides an opportunity to see a comprehensive picture of the current situation in the Georgian media regarding the coverage of religious issues. I hope that the presented findings will be a significant part of discussions and with their help it will be possible to start a dialogue between the interested parties in order to improve condition of the Georgian media in terms of reporting on religious issues.

Keywords: religion in the media; coverage of religion; religious events; Georgian media.

Introduction

Actuality of the research. It is indisputable today that the media plays a special role in the process of spiritual and cultural development of a person and that television is a quite powerful tool for formation public opinion. Today the reality is that there is no family that does not have at least one TV set, as being informed is a strong human demand. Objectivity of Georgian television is under question, as television fuels formation of stereotype in a society. Georgian television is not an exception in this regard. Therefore, it can be said that the biased statement made by Georgian TV-journalists is a powerful tool for establishing an undesirable stereotype in the society.

Religious conflicts attract special interest of the media. A journalist's responsibility is vital in the process of covering religious crises in order to present to the audience balanced, objective, stereotype-free facts and provide the user with a media product prepared at a professional level, without distortion and/or

misinterpretation of facts, and also avoid formation of stereotypical views and attitudes. It should be taken into account that the information spread by the media should not lead to deepening of the conflict among religious groups. Recently, the Georgian media often covers religious issues, because the number of religious conflicts in the country has increased fairly.

Along with the spread of information, the media should also pay attention to educational function. This means that more media products should be made in Georgia regarding the values of both the religious majority and the minorities in the country, in order to provide more information about their culture and religious values to the society. As the media is a significant tool in the process of formation of public opinion, A journalist while reporting about the religious issues must be guided by internationally recognized standards and ethical norms related to religion, and must also take into account the country's legislation.[1]

Novelty of the research. Relationship between religious organizations and the state is a particularly important area of interest both in the world and in Georgia, and a country where these relationships are regulated is even considered ideal. According to the annual report of the Public Defender of Georgia, Georgia is unfortunately not considered to be among such ideal countries. According to the report, facts of intolerance on religious basis in Georgia are quite often recorded, and what should be surprising, that media organizations often incite to the situation more than state officials. How are religious events covered in Georgian media? In this regard, a systematic and in-depth research on the coverage of religious issues in the media has not yet been conducted. The presented research is an attempt to improve the above-mentioned condition, and naturally, like all first attempts, it may have some imperfections. Within the framework of the research, the public opinion regarding the coverage of religious issues in the Georgian media is analyzed for the first time.

Goal of the research. The purpose of the research is to determine public attitudes and beliefs regarding the coverage of religious issues in the Georgian media. Particularly, the objectives of the research are to study public sentiment and beliefs regarding such issues as:

- How poignant are religious issues for society, whether media product related to religious issues are interesting for the population and what kind of religious programs they would like to see in the Georgian media;
- What means used by the society to get religious information;
- Content and values of the TV channel of Patriarchate of Georgia, what this television broadcast about, determining the pluses and minuses of the broadcasting policy of the above-mentioned television;
- Determining public opinion on whether airtime should be given to programs about Orthodoxy/the Georgian Orthodox Church and/or religious minorities in Georgia/their religion;
- What functions the media actually fulfill and what basic functions it should undertake while covering religious issues in Georgia;
- To what extent the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church, the religious minorities in Georgia, and the Georgian media are oriented on increasing religious awareness in Georgia;
- Regarding the spreading of information on religious topics, what kind of information is provided and how free is the Georgian media (press, television, radio, social and online media) in covering religious issues today;
- Who controls the editorial activities of the Georgian media when reporting religious issues;
- To what extent religious values are protected, as well as freedom of speech and expression in Georgia;
- Public opinion regarding the education of journalists in terms of covering religious issues;

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[1] Lyberty Institute, Human rights, 2005.

- How frequent is the violation of consumers' rights by journalists when covering religious issues?
- To what extent the Georgian consumer is protected from receiving incorrect information about religious issues through the Georgian media;
- How effective the relationship between religious hierarchs and the population (regardless of denomination) is through the media, and whether the clergy, especially a high-ranking clergyman, should make a public statement through the media;
- Patriarchate of Georgian Orthodox Church of and the religious minorities in Georgia should cooperate with the media, or how well the press office of the Patriarchate of Georgia cooperates with the media;
- In your opinion, whether the Georgian media follow ethical standards when covering issues of religious themes (not only about Orthodoxy, but also the religions exiting in Georgia);
- Whether there are any problems regarding the coverage of religious issues in the Georgian media.

The presented report provides an opportunity to see a comprehensive picture of the current situation in the Georgian media regarding the coverage of religious issues. I hope that the presented findings will be a significant part of discussions and with their help it will be possible to start a dialogue between the interested parties in order to improve condition of the Georgian media in terms of reporting on religious issues.

1. Methodology used in the research

Type of research: quantitative sociological research; Quantitative content analysis.

Type of selection: targeted so-called evaluation sampling.

The target audience of the survey was several groups of experts by profession:

• Journalist (media representative / media expert)
• Academic staff
• Student
• Clergyman of the Georgian Orthodox Church
• Clergyman of the religious minority in Georgia
• Representative of the State Agency for Religious Affairs
• Theologian
• Religious scholar
• Historian
• Other
The target audience of the survey was also the group of community according to religious confession:[2]
• Orthodox - 78% of respondents
• Muslim - 8% of respondents
• Representative of the administration of the Latin-Catholic Caucasus - 2% of respondents
• Representative of Tbilisi International Baptist Church - 2% of respondents
• Representative of the Union of Christian Baptist Churches of the Gospel - 2% of respondents
• Evangelical-Protestant Church of Georgia - 2% of respondents
Within the framework of the research 88% of the respondents are confessors, and 12% are not. The research indicated all the religious organizations that function in Georgia. The above-mentioned religions are taken from the website of the State Agency for Religious Affairs

As part of the research, the population of working age - 18 to 65 and 65+ was interviewed. Different age groups were given the opportunity to express their specific views on the research question. According to

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[2] State Agency for Religious Issues. https://religion.gov.ge/religiebi-saqartvelosi [L.s. 09.11.2022].

age, the percentage of respondents looks as follows: 18-25 – 10%; 26-35 – 36%; 36-45 – 26%; 46-65 – 24% and 65+ - 4%.

The research also ensured gender fair representation and the research allowed the problems and attitudes of women and men to be reflected in the research. Finally, within the framework of the research 46% of the respondents are male and 54% are female.

In the context of mass survey, an internet survey was conducted, which was carried out by means of questionnaires sent by e-mail. Although, within the framework of the research, we contacted all religious organizations, as well as the State Agency for Religious Affairs, since their involvement is important because of their activity in order to reflect the broad picture of the religious situation in Georgia, some of them refused to participate in the research. In the end, representatives of 7 religious organizations in Georgia participated in the research. Although it should be in the interest of the State Agency for Religious Affairs to get involved and facilitate such studies, they did not participate in the study.

The subject of the research was to define the public viewpoint regarding the condition of the Georgian media concerning the coverage of religious issues. In particular, the survey addressed the following issues, such as how significant religious issues are for the public and whether population find media product prepared about religion interesting; What means the society uses to get religious information and what kind of religious programs they would like to see in the Georgian media; To what extent the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, the religious minorities in Georgia and the Georgian media are focused on increasing religious awareness in Georgia; How effective the communication between religious hierarchs and the population (regardless of denomination) is through the media and whether the clergy, especially a high-ranking clergyman, should make a public statement through the media.

I used a questionnaire as a research tool, which was used as a general guideline.

2. Quantitative research analysis

Religion is a universal concept that can be found in every civilization. Many archeological data and oral texts testify that religion existed at all stages of human development. The development of religion is closely related to the process of spiritual and intellectual development of a person. Religion is a Latin word and means attention, worship, piety, belief. There are several points of views about the original meaning of religion. Other words are also used to denote the field that we call religion: confession, which is a Latin word and means denomination; cult; faith, but the word religion expresses the content of the field in the most perfect way.

The world religions - Christianity, Judaism and Islam - existing in Georgia since ancient times, are still functioning in our country in their characteristic forms. Historically, Georgia is not only a multi-ethnic, but also a religiously diverse country. Since ancient times, from the period of crossing of Western or Eastern civilizations, caravan routes passed in our country. This situation naturally promoted cultural-religious diversity. Along with local beliefs, rituals and goddesses ("mothers of the place"), Greco-Roman and Eastern polytheism paved its way. Archaeological studies and discoveries have confirmed the existence of eastern and western cults in Kartli.

The religious situation in Georgia is as follows: the religion of the majority is Orthodoxy, while a part of Georgian citizens (a significant part of ethnic minorities) recognizes Islam. Other religious groups, such as the Baha'is and the Krishnaites, have also established small congregations in recent decades. Most part of Georgian culture is based on Christian faith-traditions. It is Orthodoxy that had a great impact on entire civil history of Georgia. It should be noted that Georgian culture is Christian, but despite this, non-Christian religions are also involved in Georgian people's cultural-creative process.

The society is constantly interested in processes stemmed by the relationship between politics and religion, as it is this relationship that determines the development of world history. Religion which is expressed in the form of the Georgian Orthodox Church in our country has played an important role in the formation and further development of Georgian statehood. Today, the formation and enhancement of the developing state of Georgia is unthinkable without consideration of Christian Orthodox Church. There is a religious situation with special characteristics in our country.[3] These characteristics are: internal ethnic diversity of religious associations (for example: Muslim religious association includes Georgian, Kist and Azerbaijani, as well as Muslims of other ethnic groups); also, confessions with different doctrines are united in one religious group in Georgia (for example, the Division of Muslims of Georgia unites Shiite and Sunni Muslims living in Georgia).

Human rights are a universally recognized standard that includes every human being. The above-mentioned rights are confirmed by a number of international documents emphasizing the special importance of protecting human rights for each individual and each state. Freedom of belief and religion is also the fundamental right on which the idea of a democratic state is based on. Since conflicts on religious grounds are increasing day by day in the world, it is a priority obligation and an important area of interest of all states to determine the degree of freedom of religion and ensure its effectiveness.

The media are particularly interested in religious conflicts. In the process of covering religious crises a journalist's responsibility is vital in order to present to the audience balanced, objective, stereotype-free facts and provide the user with a media product prepared at a professional level, without distortion and/or misinterpretation of the facts, and also avoid formation of stereotypical views and attitudes. It should be taken into account that the information spread by the media should not lead to deepening of the conflict among religious groups. Recently, the Georgian media often covers religious issues, because the number of religious conflicts in the country has increased fairly. In addition to spreading information, the media should also pay attention to educational function. This means that more media products should be made in Georgia regarding the values of both the majority and the religious minorities groups in the country to provide more information to the society about their culture and religious values. Since the media is a powerful tool in the process of forming public opinion, journalists, while covering religious issues, should follow internationally recognized standards and ethical norms related to religion, and the country's legislation should also be taken into consideration.[4]

Hart, Turner and Knupp's research question is the definitions journalists use when reporting about religious events. The above-mentioned specialists note that the media product regarding religion prepared by the media organizations is characterized by stereotypes and they discuss the mentioned issue in a geographical-demographic context.[5] Media researchers conclude that journalists contribute to the formation of stereotypes and lack of qualifications of journalists while cover religious issues is considered as a significant problem. This problem may foster the danger of encouraging discrimination on religious grounds. Researchers consider as a risk factor the thing that the media creates a narrative that may lead the audience to make the wrong conclusion that a member of a particular religious group is harmful to society.[6] Regarding the coverage of issues related to religion, McQueen's research is worth noting, in which the author says that journalists are often influenced by the people who are affected by the media

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[3] Strategy for the development of the religious policy of Georgia, 2015, https://religion.gov.ge [L.s. 09.11.2022].
[4] Lyberty Institute, Human rights, 2005.
[5] Hart, R. P., Turner, K. J., &Knupp, R. E. (1980) - Religion and the Rhetoric of the Mass Media. Review of Religious Research, გვ. 256-275 https://www.jstor.org/stable/3509807?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [L.s. 13.11.2022].
[6] Wright, S., Media Coverage of Unconventional Religion: Any "Good News" for Minority Faiths? Review of Religious Research, Religious Research Association, Inc., 1997, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3512176 [L.s. 13.11.2022].

product they prepare. McQueen mentions that the press is an arena full of symbols, where journalists shape groups as mainstream, religious or non-religious, taking into account the producer's social status.[7]

Most studies on the coverage of religion issues in Georgia are carried out through media monitoring. Researchers only investigate issues such as hate speech from a journalists, objectivity and balance of sources, also violations of professional ethics and problems related to qualifications. Most of the mentioned studies considers how often religious minorities become the addressees of hate speech, how often their rights are violated, etc. However, none of the research deal with the problems of majority religious congregation in Georgia. All studies narrow down to the problems of religious minorities in the country, and there was no assessment of the general religious situation.[8 9 10 11 12]

According to Article 14 of the Constitution of Georgia, "All people are born free and equal before the law, regardless of race, skin color, language, gender, religion, political or other views, national, ethnic and social affiliation, origin, property and rank status, place of residence." However, despite of various regulations, the problem to tolerate the difference is still acute in Georgia. Therefore, it is very important to determine the role of the media in raising public awareness. Traditional media is the main source of information in Georgia. Due to that it is necessary to follow generally recognized standards - respect fundamental human rights, balance and objectivity - in the process of implementing media activities.

The relationship between the state and the church has played significant role in the development process of the country since ancient times. Therefore, it is not surprising that people's interest in religious events is quite high. 39.2% of respondents actively follow current religious events, and 45.1% of respondents watch religious TV programs with great interest.

With the blessing of His Holiness and Beatitude, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II the TV channel of the Patriarchate "Ertsulovneba" was established in November 2008. As we read on the website of the above-mentioned TV company,[13] it is "the most objective, traditional, spiritual, cultural-cognitive and expressing Christian values and broadcasting television in Georgia". However, the research revealed a tendency that there are many problems in the broadcasting policy of the above-mentioned TV company and in the broadcasting network, which hinders the growth of "Ertsulovneba" rating and questions the attempt to reflect the interests of the audience by the above-mentioned media.

Most interviewees believe that the broadcast rhythm of the television is so sluggish that it does not arouse interest in the audience, on the contrary, it scares the audience. The broadcast network of "Ertsulovneba" is so monotonous that, despite the interesting topics, a person has desire to listen to the program. When asked what you would change in the broadcast policy of the Patriarchate TV, the interviewees note that it is necessary to use modern methods of narrative techniques in the preparation of the media product and to bring the broadcast network in line with modern reality in general. Therefore, it would be good to refresh or change staff and employ more young professionals in this process (both journalists and presenters) who will have relevant education in the field of religious coverage. Ther was also an opinion stated clergyman form different dioceses should be invited and programs about their work should be

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[7] McCune, C. A., Framing Reality: Shaping the news coverage of the 1996 Tennessee Debate on Teaching Evolution. Journal of Media and Religion, 2 (1), 2003, pp.5-28.

[8] Media Development Project, Representation of communities with ethnic minorities in the media; 2010, http://eurocommunicator.ge/mdf/uploads//BCG_kvleva.pdf [L.s. 13.11.2022].

[9] BCG Research, Media coverage of ethnic minority issues; 2010, http://eurocommunicator.ge/mdf/uploads//BCG_kvleva.pdf [L.s. 13.11.2022].

[10] Internews – Georgia, coverage of ethnic, religious and sexual minorities in the press; 2012, https://ge.boell.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Media_Monitoring_report_IV_Geo.pdf [L.s. 13.11.2022]

[11] Media Development Fund, monitoring of hate speech and discriminatory expressions in the Georgian media; 2013, http://www.notophobia.ge/uploads/publications/2/file/Monitoring_Hate_Speech_and_Discrimination_in_Georgian_Media._GEO.pdf [L.s. 13.11.2022].

[12] Media Development Foundation, Hate Speech - 2016 Report; 2016, http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/55/file/Hate_Speech_GEO_(1).pdf [L.s. 13.11.2022].

[13] "Ertsulovneba", https://sstv.ge/about [L.s. 12.11.2022].

prepared, so that people would know how dedicated and warm-hearted clerics the Georgian Orthodox Church has. According to the respondents, this would be an important step as other media only cover the opposite and contribute to formation of stereotypes that the majority of the clergy of the Georgian Orthodox Church are only harmful to the society. Coverage of such an idea contributes to the dissemination of discrimination and hate speech, which is unacceptable.

Currently, 15 programs are broadcast on the Patriarchal TV "Ertsulovneba".[14] Most of the respondents (60.7%) of the survey found the patriarch's sermon the most interesting, 35.7-35.7% watch the news program and the morning program. The respondents would like to see more educational programs on the air of "Ertsulovneba" and believe that programs containing more historical and cultural information need to be prepared, which will be interesting and watchable for children, teenagers and young viewers. It was also noted that it is desirable to increase the frequency of news broadcasts and prepare programs related to psychological issues, where psychological issues will be covered and life problems will be explained by a preacher.

To the question - what are the main functions of the media in Georgia in terms of coverage of religious issues? - Research participants stated that "we must distinguish between -"performs" and "must perform." The media must perform the function of a "mirror" during a political crisis. All participants of this or that religious event should see their own face through the media. At the same time, the media should be impartial and objective. However, true independence of the media is depended on its capability to be self-sufficient, that is, the media must be able to maintain itself. Only then will it be able to be free.

Biased coverage of issues related to religion is unacceptable for most respondents. Despite this, according to the interviewees, the impartiality of the news about religion is under threat. Research participants believe that media owners influence the editorial policy when covering religious topics, which is unacceptable for most respondents. Research participants are well aware of the problems in the media. The interviewees express their desire to receive unbiased information on religious matters from the central media and, most importantly, a media product prepared at a professional level.

Majority of the research participants (17.6%) believe that freedom of speech and expression is protected in Georgia, while 7.8% of the respondents believe that that right is not protected at all. It is impossible to form a democratic state and society without protection of freedom of speech and expression. Freedom of speech and expression ensures personal development of a person. Freedom of speech and expression is a legally permissible phenomenon that applies to all individual and is acceptable to be expressed both subjectively and objectively. According to the interviewees, forms of free expression of opinion should not be harmful to one or another person and should not violate legal norms, in no case human rights should be violated. This freedom can be used to impress masses of people. Also, a large part of the interviewees believe that the freedom of speech and expression is the most important right, which should not be aggressive, the free opinion expressed by a person should not be discriminative against another person or a group.

Spread of information and controlling the government, ensuring discussion of important public issues, protecting national values and traditions, as well as promoting the establishment of democratic values - the interviewees unanimously claim that the media, as a rule, should perform almost all these functions, and journalists should play an important role in the process of formation of a democratic Georgia. According to the respondents, journalists should objectively evaluate the current events in the country, especially if this event is related to such a sensitive issue as religion. Journalists should provide the public with timely, stereotype-free, accurate and reliable information especially when the religious topics are discussed, so that it should not cause conflict between religious groups, but will promote their harmonious coexistence. As the media, as the fourth government, shapes public opinion and creates their attitude, its

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[14] "Ertsulovneba", https://sstv.ge/shows [L.s. 12.11.2022].

role is very large both in the process of covering issues related to religion and any other issues, although a large number of journalists do not understand or do not know how important and powerful the media is. According to the respondents, the professional level of Georgian journalists, except some single cases, is very far from professionalism, especially when covering religious issues. Their main interest is to spread a sensation, even completely false one, in order to become a famous face and improve their material situation. Proficiency level of journalism in Georgia is quite low today, because in Georgian reality famous faces work as journalists who are mainly focused on making loud, sensational statements rather than be oriented on facts, the essence and analysis of the events.

When characterizing journalists, focus group participants appreciate their intelligence, courage, ability to ask the questions correctly and convey facts in an understandable manner. A journalist who has his hand on the pulse of public life and reflects everything that is happening, in many cases is an informational bridge between a person and the rest of the world.

According to the respondents, for the development of the media, it is necessary to solve important issues such as: professionalism of journalists, independence, fidelity to principles and immense love for the profession; improvement of the legislation in terms of coverage of religious issues; Loyalty to public interest. Majority of the population demands unbiased, balanced and objective reports from journalists, especially when the event is related to a very sensitive topic - religious issues. At the same time, the public wants to receive professionally prepared high-quality material.

The number of internet users is increasing in Georgia every day. Social media is gradually being taken much more seriously than electronic and/or print media. In terms of reporting information, and the form of conveying facts, and even in terms of reliability and professionalism, social media is more acceptable to a significant part of Georgian users than others. However, in the process of research, it was stated that social media tend to be more biased, since here the author has a greater degree of freedom and sets everything to his "own standard". Georgian society compared to television rarely uses other media, press and radio.

Print media has a more or less degree of credibility because it manages the most to remain independent, although there are often cases when the excessive desire to publish a scandalous article leads to a distortion of reality. Operativeness of televisions, which deserve criticism in terms of objectivity and reliability, is at appropriate level. Social media, which is now emerging, aims to spread information promptly, its income depends mainly on electronic and print media, and they need reliable information about the current facts. Therefore, the degree of reliability is relatively high.

66.7% of the participants note that there are many problems regarding the coverage of religious issues in the Georgian media. All people participating in the research consider rather low level of journalists' education as one of the main problems and note that religious issues are covered in a very unqualified and biased manner. According to the respondents, religion cannot be covered in the same way as politics and religion cannot be attributed to any nation.... The participants of the study claim that the Georgian media continuously insults Orthodoxy, violates the rights of religious believers, and no one reacts to it, the events are covered aggressively. The same attitude can be observed in case of coverage the issues of religious minorities. Some respondents point out that media do not show interest in covering religious issues, or if they are reported information is only based on unreliable sources, without confirmation. According to them, aggression is felt everywhere, which must be eliminated. This attitude is automatically transferred to the viewer. Both sides are constantly working in attack and defense mode, which is very annoying for the respondents.

When asked how focused different agencies are on increasing religious awareness in Georgia, the respondents declared that the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church of Georgia (31.4% of the respondents) and the religious minorities in Georgia are more or less focused (30.6% of the respondents), while 41.2%

of the participants believe that the Georgian media are not focused on improving the quality of religious awareness. The people participating in the study unanimously agree that it would be beneficial if Georgian media' interest in the coverage of religious issues increases and more educational programs or television documentaries are prepared, which will serve to increase education and awareness about religions and which would help people to form the right worldview, values and worth. There was a desire expressed to prepare television documentaries and educational programs related to the history of religion and religious cult buildings, as well as television portraits of clergymen with special merits (regardless of religious confession). According to one of the respondents, "it is necessary to prepare an explanatory media product in the Georgian media, because unfortunately, people do not know even at the elementary level what is the religious doctrine of the faith they believe in (any faith) and are members of this or that religious organization by inertia". Respondents would be happy to see programs prepared even in the format of question-and-answer mode, in which various clerics will be invited to speak about Orthodoxy. The participants of the research note that the program of any format "should be academic but fast-paced, so that the audience does not get tired of listening to it."

The Georgian media should devote time and space to programs that are tailored to children's interests and whose purpose will be to teach children values, to acquire religious knowledge, as well as to talk about how to live with religious values in the 21st century, how big is a role of the church in moral education of a person, and what is the role of religion in modern times. It would be desirable to cover dioceses and their situation. It would be good to prepare educational programs, which will be focused on increasing public awareness about religious associations in Georgia, where it will be oriented on familiarizing the masses. It should also be possible for religious associations to present themselves. It would also be beneficial if the Georgian media provides a healthy debate between representatives of different religions in order to provide substantiated information.

On November 25, 1981, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Freedom of religion is recognized as a fundamental human right in the mentioned document.[15]

The Convention on Children's Rights is the most important document adopted by the international community regarding freedom of religion.[16] Also, a 1993 statement by the United Nations Human Rights Committee noted that Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights "protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief."[17] States signatories to the convention are prohibited from "using physical force or criminal sanctions to compel believers and non-believers" to renounce their beliefs. Despite this, persecution on religious grounds is still taking place in the world.

Georgia is an ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse country. People of different confession lived and coexisted peacefully here for centuries. In Georgia, due to its geopolitical reality, cultures and religions of different content met each other since ancient times. Georgia, which existed at the crossroads of West and East, Christianity and Eastern religions (first Mazdean and then Muslim), always aspired to cultural West. By accepting Christianity, it finally determined its direction and development path. But Georgian people were always hindered on this way. Our nation did not fear that resistance and was looking for ways to the cultural-religious world to which it whom it assigned itself forever. Christianity, specifically Orthodoxy, has been the national religion of Georgians for almost 17 centuries. Fighting for

[15] Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. United Nations, 25.11.1981; https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/religion.pdf. [L.s. 13.11.2022].

[16] Religious Rights – International Legal Instruments, unesco.org, https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-religion-or-belief/international-standards [L.s. 13.11.2022].

[17] Freedom of religion | Religious discrimination, CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion), UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), 30 July 1993, https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fb22.html [L.s. 13.11.2022].

Christianity also meant fighting for Georgian ethnic unity and its survival. But historically other religions had complete freedom and independence in Georgia. No one, not a single religious movement was persecuted and today is still the same condition.

The majority of respondents (17.6%) believe that religious values are protected in Georgia, and 11.8% believe that they are very protected. Only 2% of the research participants believe that religious values are not adequately protected in Georgian reality. The research revealed a tendency that (in the opinion of 53% of the research participants) Georgian media rarely adheres to ethical standards when covering religious issues (not only about Orthodoxy, but also about the religions in Georgia). The respondents believe that the violation of consumer rights by journalists is very common when reporting on religious issues and believe that (33.3% of respondents) the Georgian consumer is not at all protected from receiving incorrect information about religious issues through the Georgian media.

75-78% of the respondents believe that the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church of Georgia and the religious minorities in Georgia must necessarily cooperate with the media and note that people are extremely unknowledgeable in religious matters and if a qualified person does not explain the topics related to religion, then they become easily vulnerable and follow the trend that Media creates, and that stream is mostly very biased. According to 51% of the respondents, the clergy, especially a high-ranking clergyman, must make a public statement through the media in accordance with their education and competence, and they claim that the hierarch is also a member of a society and expressing his position is important. The participants of the study believe that the more often and argumentatively the explanations are made, the better it is for society.

Conclusion

The recommendation No. 1720, 2005 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which is about education and religion, states that the religion of each person, including non-religiousness, is a strictly defined personal right. However, this does not contradict with the idea that a general knowledge of religion and a sense of tolerance are vital factors for a democratic society. The above-mentioned recommendation assigns a decisive role to the family in the process of raising a child, including the choice of religion. Today, religion and the related issues are interesting for many families, due to that a part of young people do not have the necessary knowledge and information about religions, which the Assembly considers as a problem and points out that the media can play a positive role in this regard. In general, politics and religion should be separated from each other. However, democracy and religion should not be incompatible. On the contrary, both of them should work and fight together for common benefit. The government, by solving social problems, can alleviate such situations which may contain the danger of turning into religious extremism. Education related to religion is necessary to eliminate or prevent conflicts, stereotypical reasoning and misunderstandings. The authorities of various countries should do their best to guarantee the freedom of religion and conscience, and also inter-religious dialogues should be encouraged.

The Media always change their shape and take the hue of the social and political structures in which they must function. The degree of media freedom in any system is depended on power distribution in a society, especially when it comes to political and economic redistribution. Commercial mass media in Western countries are more pluralistic because capitalist society implies decentralization of power, but in third-world countries the "market" model of mass media smoothly coexists with dictatorship. According to the media tradition of Eastern European and Asian countries, the ruling political power maintains a significant subsidizing role of mass information. One of the reasons for this is that individual television stations cannot achieve financial profit. The integrated political-economic "elite" imposes a political task on TV companies, instead it guarantees its economic activity. Accordingly, media owners, high-ranking managers care less about achieving financial independence and purposefully serve the financiers.

Nowadays, there is a great demand for real, objective, unbiased and reliable information in Georgia. This can be achieved by strong sense of required journalistic ethics and the responsibility of the media owners before the public. In order to create healthy media environment and improve media condition, public discussions are necessary so that information about the problems and trends in the working environment of journalists could be available to the public. The tendency revealed by media owners to achieve the goal does not coincide with the main function of the media - to provide balanced, unbiased and objective information to consumers, especially when religious issues are on focus. We can think of media as a stage of events that has a large audience and it clearly has a great impact on the viewer, listener or reader. The media has a direct influence on formation of a person's reasoning, vision, and perception. It is an influential part of society. The media can absolutely control the processes if it is independent and reports the truth. The media brings information to the public, therefore a lot depends on it, how the public will accept the mentioned processes, whether there will be panic or more or less calmness.

In terms of coverage of religious issues, there are many problems in the Georgian media today. As the research revealed, one of the main problems is the incompetence of journalists and extremely low level of education. When covering religious issues, the Georgian media does not focus on an in-depth analysis of religious event, but the main orient for journalists is only scandals and ratings. Accordingly, when media product on religious topics is being prepared, the issue is not studied in depth. In general, Georgian media is not interested in preparation of religious-cultural educational programs and unfortunately, religious topics have become the best source of manipulation and scandals for the media, which is, of course, unethical. Nowadays, the media mainly covers only conflicts arisen on religious grounds, the rest are either not covered at all or are covered insufficiently and biasedly, the events are covered aggressively,

the Georgian media constantly insults Orthodoxy, violates the rights of the confessors, and actively carries out a campaign aimed at discrediting the clergy. Hostility and general bias towards religion is felt, it is considered as a residue of darkness and the past and is presented as the enemy of civilization and progress.

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