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Russia and the West: Struggle for Normative Hegemony

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## **Abstract**

In the spring of 2012 Vladimir Putin was elected as the President of Russia for the third time. With his return as the head of the state, new conservative discourse, with normative dimension, started to emerge in the Russian politics. Cases of the Pussy Riot, the gay propaganda law or anti-blasphemy law, are examples of this conservative turn. This discourse also implies portrayal of the West as deviant and perverted, while Russia stands as the last bastion in defense of traditional values. Such articulation is widely supported and enhanced by the Russian Orthodox Church. As it will be argued in the present study, this discourse serves not only domestic political purposes, but also provides important bases for the Russian normative hegemony to be projected outwards. Hegemony will be defined from the Neo-Gramscian understanding and it will be illustrated how the civil society institutions inside Georgia help to articulate, project and maintain the Russian discourse to the Georgian society and subsequently counter an alternative, the Western discourse, expressed within the Association Agreement with the EU.

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## **Introduction**

With Vladimir Putin being elected as the president of the Russian Federation for the third time in 2012, new discourse started to appear in the Russian politics. Aim of new, more conservative approach was to further legitimize his power and project influence outside its borders. As it will be illustrated in the present study, in the major speeches delivered by the President normative dimension started to appear. The discourse of the need of the “defense of traditional values,” “traditional families” from the attack of “Godless” and “perverted West” has started to occupy a considerable part in the speeches delivered by the heads of the Russian political elite.

Study of this normative discourse is especially important nowadays, since the signature of the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, further illustrated challenges, societies in those countries face and how the Russian normative hegemony can dwell on these developments. As it will be argued in the following study, articulation and projection of this discourse domestically or abroad is supported and maintained by the institutions of the civil society, key of which is the Russian Orthodox Church.

As a theoretical framework, to define hegemony and its projection, Critical theory and more concretely Neo-Gramscian approach will be referred. Neo-Gramscian approach to hegemony differs from the classical understanding that is suggested by the traditional theories of the International Relations. Unlike them, Neo-Gramscianism shifts emphasis from the material and military capabilities to the articulation and justification of the particular set of interests as general interests. It appears in the general acceptance of ideas without the threats or the use of force, and is supported by material resources and institutions created by the dominant social class. Despite this domination being within the scope of the concrete state, it starts growing outwards and is projected on a world scale.

The Western normative hegemony, would also be defined in Neo-Gramscian terms, but unlike the one, articulated by the Kremlin, it is expressed in the reforms the AA requires from the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The case of Georgia will be

discussed to show how the political elite in Georgia tries to stay within the Western normative discourse by supporting minority rights and their protection, while the society still struggles to accept those values and feels associated with the Russian discourse. The projection of which, is supported by the civil society institutions, mostly the Georgian Orthodox Church.

The following research questions will be addressed within the scope of this study: How is normative discourse articulated by the Russian political elite and projected domestically? What are the effects of the Russian political discourse against the hegemony of the western value systems in the societies of the EaP countries? (Case of Georgia). What is the role of the civil society, in particular the Russian Orthodox Church, the Georgian Orthodox Church and NGOs associated with them, within this discourse?

The main task of the research is to describe current political discourse among the Russian political elite and analyze its possible effects on the societies in the EaP countries, with a focus on Georgia. Georgia is getting closer to the EU and the society is split or torn between two value systems. Mostly qualitative research will be conducted, with the focus on the discourse analysis of the speeches and interviews of the president of the Russian Federation. Recent opinion poll results will be analyzed as well, in order to have a picture of how society itself feels about certain value systems, the Russian political elite is trying to build and how successful it might be on the way to becoming a counter-hegemonic ideology from the neo-gramscian perspective.

The outcome of the research will be one more important contribution to the approach which has not been studied that much. It can serve as the basis for further researches on the issues such as Russian soft power, cultural hegemony or the influence of the Russian media channels on the Russian speaking population outside the Russian Federation.

## **Theoretical framework**

### Neo-Gramscian concept of hegemony

“Theory is always for someone and for some purpose” (Cox, 1981, p. 128) – says Cox. According to him, every theory has a certain perspective which derives from the position in time and space, specifically political time and space. Therefore, there can be no theory in itself detached from the context. It should be studied as an ideology to “lay bare its concealed perspective” (Cox, 1981, p.128). If reality, theory is trying to comprehend, is changing, old concepts have to be adjusted, rejected or if necessary new concepts to be elaborated within the new reality.

Based on what has been argued above, Cox suggests division of theories as problem solving and critical. Former, claims to be a guide in order to solve problems within the particular perspective that was taken as a point of departure. In contrast, critical theory focuses on the process of theorizing itself. It also tries to open up the possibility of choosing different perspective from where an alternative world can be developed. If problem solving theories take world as it finds together with its institutions and social and power relations as the given framework for action, critical theory tries to analyze how this whole world order itself came about. Cox points out that meanwhile general aim of the so called problem solving theories is to make this prevailing world order function and works smoothly, critical theory can be characterized as a guide to “strategic action for bringing about an alternative order” (Cox, 1981, p. 131).

Despite both, critical and problem solving theories take a particular sphere of human activity as a point of departure, unlike the latter, which leads to the subdivision and limitation on the issue, the former seeks to give a larger picture. It tries to uncover the processes which involve both, the whole and the part. But what is most important, Cox also gives an answer to the question why Neo-Gramscian approach is most suitable for the following study of the Russian politics on the global or domestic scale. As he writes, according to the situations in different periods of history, one, from these two kinds of theories, gets preferred. For instance, during the cold war, which was a relatively stable

period, problem solving approach was more popular, since the aim of the theory was to solve problems connected with the management of power relations between enduring two superpowers. While unstable historical period, usually favors critical theory as it seeks to understand “opportunities and risks of change” (Cox, 1981, p. 131).

Within the scope of this study, division of Marxism suggested by Cox should be further discussed. According to him, we can speak of two types of Marxism which are historical materialism and structural Marxism. While the latter is mostly preoccupied with the study of the capitalist state and society as static concepts, departing from historical analysis, historical materialism seeks to explain and promote changes in social relations. This type of approach is associated with the writings of Hobsbawm or Gramsci. Historical materialism, which itself is the main source of the critical theory, according to Cox, challenges neo-realism in four aspects. Firstly, with dialectics at the level of logic and at the level of real history. It means that it seeks truth through exploring contradictions. At the same time, potential for development of the alternative order through the clashes between opposing social forces. Secondly, because it focuses on imperialism, historical materialism adds a vertical dimension of power to the horizontal dimension of competing powerful states. Thirdly, historical materialism adds the perspective of state/civil society complexes. Relationship between structure which is economic and super-structure or ethico-political sphere, presents potential for speaking of those complexes as constituent parts of a world order. Finally, unlike neo-realism, historical materialism focuses on the production process, which is the key element of the particular historical form taken by state/society complexes. (Cox, 1981, pp. 133-135).

As the result, Cox formulates five basic premises for critical theory. Those are:

1. Awareness that every action takes place within the framework of action.
2. The realization that not only acts but even theory is not free and is affected by this problem.
3. The main goal of the critical theory is to understand the changes of the framework of actions which happens over time.

4. The framework has form of historical structure which can be described as a combination of ideas, material capabilities and institutions.
5. In terms of reproduction or conflicts which open possibility for change of the structure, should be viewed from the bottom, rather than from the top. (Cox, 1981, p. 135).

Robinson in his article, “Gramsci and Globalization: From Nation-State to Transnational Hegemony” introduces four different concepts of hegemony. First is hegemony as international domination, it is connected with the realist school of IR. It is understood as dominance backed up by the active domination. Second concept is hegemony as encountered in various world-systems approaches in International Relations. It can be characterized as the dominance of one concrete nation-state by imposing rules to allow it to function. Third, understanding of hegemony suggested by Robinson is ideological hegemony. This concept is associated with Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci and his works. It is understood as the mean by which ruling class establishes and maintains its domination. “Hegemony is rule by consent, or the cultural and intellectual leadership achieved by a particular class, class fraction, stratum or social group, as part of a larger project of class rule or domination” (Robinson, 2005, p. 560). In the last concept of hegemony offered by Robinson it is understood as the leadership within the concrete historical bloc within a particular world order. It combines some elements of state power with the construction of ideological leadership within the particular historical project (Robinson, 2005, p. 560).

These last two concepts described above are important for current study and within the scope of this research they will be further elaborated and discussed. Especially, works of Ernesto Laclau will be referred, who took this concept even further by departing from the domination understood from the class division perspective.

Another important author, who contributed to the development of the Neo-Gramscian approach, is Rupert. His work, “Producing Hegemony: State/Society Relations and the Politics of Productivity in the United States” is still considered to be one of the most sophisticated analyses of the U.S hegemony from this perspective. The approach



suggested by Rupert offers relational understanding of the state which differs from abstract and ahistorical concept elaborated by such theories as Neorealism or Wallerstein's critical political economy are. From this perspective, the historical construction of the state and the context within which it took place becomes the central focus of analysis. It departs from seeing the political state as empirical data, it rather tries to study or research those underlying social processes that led to the institutionalization of such form of organization as a state is. "States, state powers, and the social relations in which they are embedded are thus viewed as socially produced and historically mutable." – writes Rupert (Rupert, 1990, p. 431). The power from this perspective is understood as a capacity for social action in a historically specific structural context. Thus, once power is conceptualized as the process, Cox adopts the Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony to the International Relations and it is defined as the domination maintained by consent while coercive elements become secondary (Cox, 1987, pp. 151-210). Domination itself is understood as "an asymmetrical capacity to shape this historical-structural site of social action and ought not to be conflated with the inventories of material resources wielded by individuals or state" (Rupert, 1990, p. 432). The main focus of the study of the hegemonic power thus becomes those socially constructed everyday practices in which people engage. It includes economic, as well as political and ideological aspects.

Another important aspect, why Neo-Gramscian approach of critical theory is important for this study is the fact that conventional International Relations theories make a distinction between civil society and state. This could be logical if were applied to the Europe of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when state on the one hand was occupied with the maintenance of the internal peace and defense, while society consisted of individuals interacting with each other according to market-based relations. Within this distinction, foreign policy was attributed purely to the state interests. But today, according to Cox, the state and civil society are "so interpenetrated, that the concepts have become almost purely analytical... and are only very vaguely and imprecise indicative of distinct spheres of activity" (Cox, 1981, p. 127).

One of the main authors whose definition of hegemony will be used in the following study to demonstrate how the Russian normative discourse is articulated is Ernesto Laclau. He picks up on the classical Marxist division of structure/superstructure and criticizes it, by claiming that there is no objective reality. Reality itself, as such, is mediated and produced through discourses. (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985). Laclau defines hegemony as an articulation, which itself is the practice of “establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, p.105). As the result of this articulation, structured totality is received, which Laclau characterizes as discourse. He departs from Gramsci in understanding of hegemony and goes beyond in two key aspects. Firstly, by rejecting the idea that hegemonic subjects are limited to classes. As Laclau argues, in modern times when “the reproduction of the different social areas takes place in permanently changing conditions which constantly require the construction of new systems of differences” (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, p. 138) area of articulatory practices has become incredibly wide. Secondly, Laclau discards the assumption that every social formation structures itself around one hegemonic discourse. As he argues, hegemony is “political type of relation, a form, if one so wishes, of politics, but not a determinable location within a topography of the social” (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, p.139). Or in other words, in any given social formation, large variety of “hegemonic nodal points” can be found.

### Moment of hegemony

In the writings of Gramsci, we encounter concept of the integral state developed by him. This idea stands in contrast to the liberal understanding of the separation of power. Especially, in contrast to the notion of the state apparatus being outside the involvement in the economy. Gramsci rather saw the state as a historically determined combination which embodies different cultures bound together by coercion and moral consent. Therefore, it was seen as a substitute for private-enterprise in the economy by manufacturing it through the privileges and protectionism. Even such concept as *lassiez-faire* was understood by

Gramsci as another state regulation, supported and maintained by legislative or coercive means (Morton, 2007). Based on his works, state can be characterized as a social relation, rather than distinct institutional category or thing in itself. Following formula can be formulated, describing definition of the state for the Gramscian perspective: State = political society + civil society, or in other words, “hegemony protected by the armor of coercion” (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Morton, 2007, p. 120). This combination of the civil and political society is what Gramsci refers to in his works as an integral state and through which ruling class organizes intellectual and moral sides of the struggle for hegemony.

This concept of the integral state is important for further understanding of the idea of the moment of hegemony. As Gramsci argued, intellectuals play major role in forming and maintaining current hegemony or forming counter-hegemonic consciousness (Gramsci, 1971, 1999). Therefore, such material resources as publishing houses, educational institutions or even street names can be seen as the elements of the struggle over hegemony, which is transmitted through the so called capillary power. Therefore the moment of hegemony can be defined as something that involves “both the consensual diffusion of a particular cultural and moral view throughout society and its interconnection with coercive functions of power; or when there is a corresponding equilibrium between ethico-political ideas and prevailing socioeconomic conditions fortified by coercion” (Morton, 2007, p. 95)

Gramsci also introduces the concept of historical bloc. It can be seen as the combination of classical Marxist structure/superstructure elements. But Italian scholar, according to Morton, was innovative by suggesting the idea that once an economic structure reaches its limits or becomes regressive, it's still maintained, because it is supported by respective ideology. It is also understood by Gramsci as concrete relations of social forces or in other words, historical bloc integrates variety of different class interests. Therefore, successful and fully developed historical bloc can only be formed, once hegemony has been achieved by the concrete social group over the state-civil society relations (Morton, 2007).

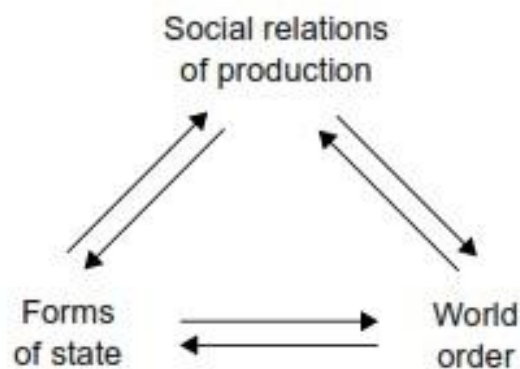
## Hegemony and world order

Neo-Gramscian approach to hegemony differs from the classical understanding that can be observed in the traditional theories of the International Relations. Unlike the latter, former shifts emphasis from material and military capabilities to the articulation and justification of the particular set of interests as general interests. It appears in the general acceptance of ideas, which are supported by material resources and institutions created by the dominant social class. Despite this domination is within the scope of the concrete state, it starts growing outwards and is projected on a world scale. Therefore, within the world order, hegemony will appear as a “configuration of material power, the prevalent collective image of world order (including certain norms) and set of institutions which administer order with a certain semblance of universality” (Cox, 1981, p. 139, as cited in Morton, 2007, p. 113). It can be concluded that the existence of the powerful state can be necessary but not sufficient for the articulation of hegemony. Therefore, if it is perceived as something connected with the images and opinions rather than just brute force and economic capabilities, it is important to study such issues as how the hegemonic world order is based on values and understandings are. Hence it should be analyzed how intersubjective meanings can form an understanding of reality. ““Reality” is not only the physical environment of human action but also the institutional, moral and ideological context that shapes thoughts and actions” (Cox, 1997, p. 252, as cited in Morton, 2007, p. 114). Hegemony touches such topics as gender, ideology, culture, etc. Are, dimensions which stay outside the traditional IR theories, for which hegemony is understood in the context of the state dominance.

According to Morton, hegemony within the historical structure rests on three spheres of activity. These are: a) the social relations of production, which doesn't only include actual manufacturing process in economic terms, but also encompasses institutional and discursive forms of production. b) Forms of state, which consists of state-civil society complexes and c) World orders, which not only represents the current phase of stability and conflict, but also indicates how alternative world orders could emerge (Morton, 2007). For a better illustration of this structure we can refer to the figure from Robert Cox's article,

Social Forces, States and World Orders published in 1981 (Cox, 1981, p. 138). It should also be noted, that those three spheres of activity are interrelated which means that changes into the social relations of production affects forms of states which also brings changes in the existing world order.

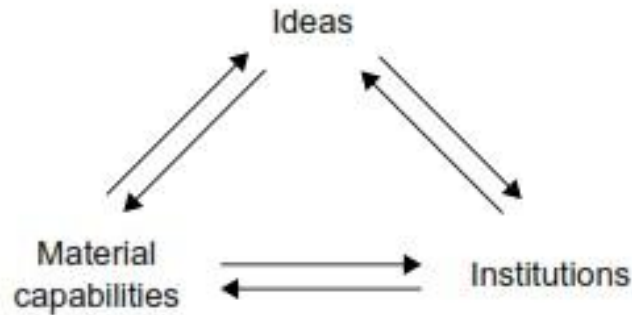
Table 1: Hegemony within historical structure



(Cox, 1981, p. 138).

It should also be noted that there is no unilinear relationship between spheres of activity, therefore the point of departure for explaining the historical process doesn't necessarily have to be social relations of production, it can be forms of state as well as world order. Morton farther introduces three additional elements which within each main sphere of activity constitute the historical structure. Those elements are ideas which can be described as intersubjective meanings and collective image of the world order; material capabilities and institutions (Morton, 2007). To get better illustration, Cox once again can be referred here: (Cox, 1981, p. 136).

Table 2: Historical structure



(Cox, 1981, p. 136).

Historical structure or framework of action represents a particular combination of forces. But this configuration shouldn't be understood as the direct determinant of actions, but rather as imposer of constraints and pressures. Individuals or groups, according to Cox, may move along with the pressure or may oppose it, but they cannot ignore it. If they are successful in resistance, then it can be used as a basis for an alternative configuration of forces, which might emerge as an alternative structure.

As a result a framework can be seen, how changes in the modes of the relations of social production can lead to the emergence of the certain social class in power. These social forces themselves can become the bases of power in the form of the state, while the state itself might shape world order. It follows, that hegemony should not be understood as a hierarchy of states. It's rather the rule of the certain social class. But class identity itself emerges through the struggle and economic exploitation within the particular historical context. It should also be noted, that focus on the exploitation cannot be reduced to the pure material aspects. It also includes other identities as well, such as national, ethnic, religious, gender or sexual, for instance, are. They are not set aside, but rather such "non-class" issues

are defined in terms of the social realities shaped by the production process. From what has been argued above, state can be characterized as a social relation, rather than a thing in itself. Following formula can be formulated, describing definition of the state from the Gramscian perspective: State = political society + civil society, or in other words, “hegemony protected by the armor of coercion” (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Morton, 2007, p.120). Civil society in this equation, can be defined as an internalized form of domination, which is different from the direct domination achieved by the political society through the direct use of force. Therefore, civil society becomes a space, within which state maintains its hegemony, “in which one concept of reality is dominant informing with its spirit all modes of thoughts and behavior” (Femia, 1981, p.24). According to Buttigieg, Gramsci’s civil society “is best described not as the sphere of freedom but of hegemony” (Buttigieg, 1995, p.6). Consent, which is the main tool of normative hegemony, is manufactured within the civil society. It is present in various forms of social interaction and in this way elite leads the society in a certain direction. Those social institutions, hegemony operates through, are Church, the educational institutions, press etc. From this perspective will be civil society understood within the scope of this study, and as it will be argued in the second part, these civil society institutions help to create certain modes of behavior within the hegemonic social order and with the creation of expectations, play a key role in projecting and maintaining hegemony.

According to Morton, “struggle for hegemony involves translating particular interests from a particular form of state into the forms of expansion that have universal applicability across a variety of different states” (Morton, 2007, p. 123). Usually it is within the national context hegemony is constructed and only after that it begins to expand outwards.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Analysis**

As the specifics of the topic and the theory selected, which is Russia and the West: Struggle for Normative Hegemony, requires, following study will rely on qualitative methods of research. This is especially the case of discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis can be defined as the practice of analyzing “empirical raw materials and information as discursive forms” (Howarth, Norval, Stravrakakis, 2000, p. 4). It means that from this perspective, as a text can be understood such large variety of data as speeches, interviews, policies and even institutions and organizations are.

It is an interesting peculiarity of the discourse analysis that instead of applying pre-existing theoretical frameworks on the set of empirical data, it tries to articulate a particular concept for each individual case. Therefore, theoretical framework should be flexible enough to be easily transformed, adjusted and even deformed as the research progresses. It will be conducted on the macro level as the aim of the research is to analyze how concrete texts, which include speeches, institutions, and organizations, reflect upon the perceptions of the society.

There are many various types of discourse analysis, but for the following study, discourse theory associated with works of Laclau will be employed (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985). His theory reflects upon the concept of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci and therefore can be useful within the scope of this particular research.

Discourse theory picks up on Marxism and starts criticizing the classical division of structure being economic and means of production and superstructure as the other meaning-producing institutions, such as political or educational organizations. Laclau and Mouffe try to discard such approach by claiming that there is no objective reality that can divide people into classes (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985). It is more of a result of political discourse, or processes that produce this “reality.” It means that our understanding of reality itself is mediated and produced through discourses (Rear, 2013, p. 4).



As a result, it can be argued that the aim of discourse analysis is to describe those discursive struggles that construct reality in a way that it appears natural and neutral (Rear, 2013, p. 5).

One of the key analytical concepts that will be borrowed from Laclau and applied to this particular research is the notion of nodal points. It can be described as the departing or reference point around which discourse starts to organize. It creates the system which gives meanings to other concepts that might be differently defined within the alternative discourses. As an example of such nodal point, David Rear gives communism, which completely changes the meaning of democracy or freedom articulated in the alternative discourse (Rear, 2013, p. 7). This process itself, process of other notions acquiring meanings by being projected to the nodal points, happens through articulation, which is the practice of establishing “a relations among elements which such that their identity is modified” (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, p.105). The nodal points of the present study are Orthodox Christianity and traditional values, since, as it will be illustrated below, meanings of democracy, freedom of expression or human rights, changes, once are applied to those nodal points in the discourse of the Russian political elite.

This understanding of discourse theory touches upon the topic of hegemony from Neo-Gramscian perspective, which is of particular importance for following research. As the Italian thinker defined hegemony, it is something that achieves desired results without the use of material force, or to say it with the discourse analysis terms, it is obtained and maintained through articulation (Gramsci, 1971, 1999). It is the “expansion of a discourse, or set of discourses, into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action by means of articulating unfixed elements into partially fixed moments in a context crisscrossed by antagonistic forces” (Torfing, 1999, p. 101 as cited in Rear, pp. 7-8). But it is also important to note that the notion of hegemony from discourse theory perspective is perceived not only at the class level but at other levels of social relations. It gives another big advantage to applying discourse analysis for the following study, since it touches upon such issues as religion, traditional values and political organizations are, rather than class understood in economic relations’ terms.

Another method which will be applied within the scope of this study is an interpretation of already existing quantitative data. Data available from the Caucasus Barometer, which is a survey conducted every year in the countries of South Caucasus about political attitudes and economic issues.

### Data Sampling

When it comes to data selection and sampling it is important for the following study to look at speeches and interviews made by representatives of the Russian political elite. Therefore the main focus during the data selection process is on the President Vladimir Putin. Due to the limitation of study, it is impossible to cover everything. Therefore, it would more rational to analyze major speeches delivered by president Putin such as annual address to Federal Assembly are. It is also vital for providing a better picture of discourse articulated by the Russian political elite to look at comments and statements made by him in response to such cases, as Pussy Riot, anti-gay propaganda law, blasphemy banning law. The period, from which those speeches will be selected, is starting from 2012, since he was elected as the President for the third time in this year and as it will be illustrated below, it can also be considered to be decisive turn into more conservative discourse in the Russian politics.

Besides the President, discourse analysis of Russian Patriarch's speeches and interviews should be conducted as well, since, it will be argued in the following study, the Russian Orthodox Church is a vital institution in articulating and maintaining hegemony understood in Neo-Gramscian terms. The same selection method will be applied as in the case above - major addresses and those statements which reflect on the Russia Vs West discourse - will be covered. Timeline starting from the year 2012.

In case of data selection and sampling for Georgia. It's very specific. Since there are no official diplomatic relations between two countries due to the legacy of the August War, politicians in Tbilisi try to avoid the portrayal of Russia in a positive way, or in a way that would let an observer speak of Georgian political elite being attracted by the world order articulated in the Kremlin. Therefore, attention should be shifted to those institutions and

organizations that are influential and popular among members of the society and at the same time reflect to these value systems projected by Russia.

One of the main institutions to be analyzed from this perspective will be the Georgian Orthodox Church. It is closely associated with Russia and most of the speeches and interviews of high hierarchs, which will be analyzed within the scope of this study, will illustrate this connection and reflection on this discourse articulated in the Kremlin. At the same time, since trust in the Church still remains to be extremely high, it can be assumed that it can be portrayed as one of those institutions which, from Neo-Gramscian perspective, can project and maintain ideological or normative hegemony of Russia in the region. Timeline for the Georgian Orthodox Church's discourse analysis will also be from the year 2012. Those specific interviews and speeches will be selected, which reflect upon the Russia versus the West discourse. In addition, a couple of NGOs and media publishing will be covered, as according to Gramsci, they are important parts for maintaining hegemony. Erekle II's Society, the Eurasian Institute and Saqinform will be analyzed.

Another important data selection process is sampling qualitative data for interpretation of attitudes and beliefs of the Georgian population. For this purpose, results of opinion polls produced by the Caucasus Barometer will be selected. Results from the year 2011 will be used, which shows the Georgians attitude towards homosexuality and can be considered as an example of how the society feels towards the traditional value discourse of the Russian political elite and also results from 2013, which illustrate trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church among the population. International Republican Institute's opinion poll results from the February of 2014 will also be used, which shows the level of trust in the different institutions among the Georgian population.

## **Normative Discourse in the Russian Politics**

### **The Russian Orthodox Church and the State**

Due to the big number of representatives of different religious groups, Russian Federation is a secular state. But once, politics are closely examined in Russia, it immediately becomes clear to the observer that the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is in far more advantageous position in relation to other religious institutions and plays the vital role in the unification and articulation process of the Russian statehood in Putin's Russia.

As Beth Admiraal writes in "Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia": "Putin has used Orthodoxy as a platform for unifying the Russian state – as opposed to the nation and for solidifying the Russian state position in the near abroad" (Admiraal, 2009, p. 205). A parallel can be drawn to Stalin's policies during the World War II, when he appealed to the Orthodox Christianity and Church for ensuring popular support in the hard times. It served basis for the unification of society and rising up their patriotic consciousness. Contemporary Russian state tells to its citizens who are followers of other religions that it doesn't violate freedom of faith but it would always favor and protect Orthodox Christianity and in particular, the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, it is important institution or a tool in the hands of Kremlin to project influence on neighboring Orthodox societies and construct normative hegemony on this basis. Russian state hints to its bordering countries that their Orthodox history and culture places them on Moscow's side rather than makes them part of the Western civilization, which Russian elite finds perverted and dangerous to traditional values. The Russian Orthodox Church has attained a considerable level of influence on the state policies. It has institutionalized its cooperation with almost every ministry through establishing joint forums, mixed expert commissions and regular meetings (Curanovic, 2012, p.81).

Another important fact which helps Orthodoxy to be the unifying factor of the Russian society is that authorities at every level, from local up to federal, believe that to be Russian means to be Christian Orthodox. And those, who are not religious or don't associate them with any particular faith but are citizens of Russia, are automatically

ascribed to the Russian Orthodox Church. “At many levels of government, federal, regional and local – we can find overwhelming evidence that religious and political leaders believe that the Russian people belong in the ROC” (Admiraal, 2009, p. 208). As Curanovic notes, respondents in Russia when asked “whether they are “Orthodox” give their answer for the most part thinking, “yes, I am Russian” (Curanovic, 2012, p.62).

It also implies that being non-Orthodox might be more costly and can cause unnecessary obstacles to the full membership of the Russian nation, while nominal Orthodoxy is tolerated and more favored since it helps to the unification and the articulation of the normative hegemonic discourse internally. Same applies to ethnically non-Russian being included into this discourse. They are included into the Russian Orthodox society simply because they are close to it by being “non-religious, or by keeping their religion a private matter” (Admiraal, 2009, p. 210).

Putin is quoted to have said: “The strength of Russia is spirituality before everything else. The revival of faith is one of the foundations of Russia’s present revival” (Putin, 2005, as cited in Admiraal, 2009, p. 213). This quote illustrates well how the role of the Orthodox Christianity is articulated and projected in the process of construction of Russian normative hegemony. Admiraal also offers other quotes by Putin, which further reinforces this assumption. “Of course, in our country the church is separated from the state... but in the people’s souls everything is together” (Putin, 2000, as cited in Admiraal, p. 210).

Current Russian foreign minister in one of his interviews claimed that Orthodox Christianity is the main reason why the West has distanced itself from Russia. According to Sergey Lavrov, even the Soviet Union was considered by the Western states to fit within their system of ideas, while contemporary Russia’s return back to Orthodoxy and its traditional values explain her being more distanced from the West. Within the same interview, he also claimed that the West is trying to maintain its domination and impose its system of values on the rest of the world. While, the western system itself is departing from its roots, which are in the Christianity (Lavrov, 2014).

To better illustrate how the interests of the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church correlate, following figure from Curanovic’s book “The Religious Factor in Russia’s Foreign Policy” should be referred:

Table 3: Correlation of goals and ideas of the Kremlin and the ROC

Issue	Kremlin	Russian Orthodox Church
Post-Soviet area	“Near abroad” (the sphere of essential interests of Russia)	Canonical territory (the sphere of essential interests of Russia)
Identity	Eurasian/Russian civilization	Orthodox civilization
Political system	“Severing democracy” (social partnership)	Orthodox democracy (social partnership)
Global order	Geo-political multi-polarism	Multi-polarism of civilizations
Allies	Strategic partnership (China, India)	Alliance of conservative civilizations(China, India, Iran)
Mission	Shaping new, better-balanced global order, overcoming the dominance of the USA, bridging the gap between the West and East	Shaping a more just global order, halting the process of Westernization, promoting interfaith dialogue

(Curanovic, 2012, p.138).

### Conservative Turn in Russian Politics

There are three major points, around which this new normative discourse started to be articulated and the signs of a clear conservative turn in Russian politics started to appear. These are cases of Pussy Riot, laws banning gay propaganda and law against blasphemy. Each of them should be discussed in more details below.

Pussy Riot – as Sharafutdinova writes in her essay, “The Pussy Riot affair and Putin’s demarche from sovereign democracy to sovereign morality,” as Putin came to

power for the third time he was in need of a new niche to claim and strengthen his authority. That's where his image of Russia as a defender or guarantor of traditional, conservative values comes in. Besides domestic purposes, it opened new opportunities and perspectives for Russian foreign policy (Sharafutdinova, 2014, pp. 615-616).

In February of 2012, the feminist rock, punk group staged performance in the main Cathedral in Moscow, Cathedral of Christ the Savior. It was directed against the involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church into politics and its support for Putin. Performance caused concerns among the conservative members of the society in Russia. Three members of the group were arrested and charged with hooliganism motivated by the religious hatred. Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kiril called it "devil's work" and said that "devils laughed at us" (As cited in The Guardian, 2012). At the same time, he said that its heart breaking for him to see that some people who call themselves Orthodox, support lenience for arrested members of the band (The Guardian, 2012).

President Putin's reaction to these developments is also more conservative and goes hand in hand with the position of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. He is quoted to have said: "they got what they asked for." "One must not erode our moral foundations and undermine the country. What would be left then?" (As cited in The Guardian, 2012).

By appealing to the moral and normative issues, Putin's political elite was successful in ignoring the political message of the performance and consolidate its legitimacy around the normative hegemony. It is mostly achieved by dividing society into spoiled Muscovite minority and majority which associates itself with conservatism and traditional values. Putin with his speeches and addresses appeals to this "overwhelming majority" and employs this discourse as a tool against "insignificant minority" which includes his political opposition (Sharafutdinova, 2014, p. 617). This conservative discourse also helps the Russian government in presenting relatively liberal members of the society as "foreign agents" and justifying repressions against them (Morozov, 2015, p.115).

Gay propaganda law – in the June of 2013, Russian parliament adopted changes into the article 5 of the federal law "about the protection children from information damaging

their health and development.” It also introduced some changes in the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offenses and child protection laws. The main change was to add propagating nontraditional sexual orientation as a threat to minors (President of Russia, 2013).

As the member of the St. Petersburg’s legislature, Vitaly Milonov, who is also one of the authors of the law, said in the interview with The Moscow Times “this law is useful for everybody. ... It is a declarative law that expresses what we (Russia) value and what we do not. Unfortunately Europe has forgotten the story of Sodom and Gomorrah” (As cited in The Moscow Times, 2014).

In the upcoming weeks of the winter Olympics in Sochi, the issue of LGBT rights became widely discussed in international media. President Putin, while commenting on this issue, supported gay propaganda law and stayed within the discourse of homosexuals being threat to children. "It has nothing to do with persecuting people for their non-traditional orientation...My personal position is that society must keep children safe" – said President Putin (As cited in the ABC News, 2014).

In the interview with BBC News in the January of 2014, Putin also spoke about gay propaganda law and the Russian society. Once again, he articulated discourse, portraying the West as deviant and perverted. He said: “Read our law carefully and pay attention to its name. It’s called ban on propaganda of pedophilia and homosexuality... There are countries, including in Europe, where they debate the possibility of legalizing pedophilia. Publicly discuss it, in parliaments. They can do whatever they want, but people of Russia have their own cultural code, their traditions” (Putin, 2014).

This discourse is of a special interest for the following study, since the Georgian Orthodox Church and public figures, closely associated with it, often refer to the Russian example of gay propaganda law, as how Georgian legislation should protect children and “traditional” families. It will be discussed in more details in the second part of the research.



Anti-blasphemy law – third key point, around which conservative turn in the Russian politics seems to start articulating, is anti-blasphemy law. It was adopted together with the anti-gay propaganda bill and was an offspring of the developments around pussy riot. It implies that any blasphemy could lead from fines up to three years of imprisonment. It is an interesting peculiarity of the bill, that it only covers those religions that are “an integral part of Russia’s historical inheritance,” leaving religious minority groups outside (BBC, 2013).

For a description of this apparent turn to more conservative dimension since 2012, Morozov borrows the term “paleoconservatism,” which he defines as a tendency to “politicise culture as an instrument of “civilizational struggle”” (Morozov, 2015, p.114). As he argues, the discourse of the Russian civilization being different and standing in contrast to the West actually derives from the Kremlin’s “normative dependency” on the latter. Or, in other words, due to the inability to come up with an alternative ideological platform, it is defined from a Eurocentric perspective, blaming Europe in abandoning true values, while Russia “kept standing as a bulwark of Christian European value” (Morozov, 2015, pp. 117-119).

### Russkiy Mir

In 2007 under Vladimir Putin’s presidency, the Russkiy Mir (Russian world) foundation was established, the objectives of which include promotion of Russian language and culture around the globe, maintaining ties with diasporas and building a positive image of Russia abroad. Since 2009, when the Patriarch Kirill signed cooperation agreement with the foundation’s board, the ROC has become one of the key institutions in further developing and expanding the concept of Russkiy Mir or Russian world. According to Wawrzonek, it can be defined as “a new project integrating post-soviet space based on a civilizational community” (Wawrzonek, 2014, p.760). Already in 2009, on an annual general meeting of the foundation, Patriarch Kirill has outlined core region of the Russkiy mir, which, according to him consists of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, together with two organic parts, Moldova and Kazakhstan (Wawrzonek, 2014, pp. 760-761). According to

this concept, as in this space of shared historical memory, or in “unique civilizational space,” new “common political institutions” are not reproduced, Orthodox Christianity attains special role in the integration process. Orthodoxy itself is understood not only as a religion, but “also as a crucial factor of Russkiy mir’s identity” (Wawrzonek, 2014, p.761).

More detailed discourse analysis of President Putin’s and Patriarch Kirill’s speeches since 2012 will give a better illustration of how this conservative, normative discourse is constructed and, based on the case of Georgia, what are the implications for the EaP countries.

#### Discourse articulated by President Putin

In his first address to the federal assembly, after being elected as a president for the third time in 2012, V. Putin articulated discourse around which Russian normative hegemony is to be constructed. In the opening part of the speech, Putin declares:

“In the world of the XXI century with the background of positioning economic, civilization, military powers, Russia should be sovereign and influential country. We should not only steadily develop, but keep our national and spiritual identity, shouldn’t lose ourselves as a nation. Be and remain to be Russia” (Putin, 2012). He continues, that as the result of two world wars and civil war, Russia had gone through in the twentieth century, “in the beginning of XXI century we have encountered with the real demographic and value disaster, with the real demographic and value crises. But if the nation is not able to protect and reproduce itself, if it is losing life goals and ideals, she doesn’t need external enemy, everything will collapse itself” (Putin, 2012). He specifically speaks of traditional value systems being under threat in Russia and about the importance of projecting or propagating those values among the members of the society. “We should support institutions, which are carriers out traditional values, historically proved their ability to transfer them from generation to generation. ... Unconditional value should be returned to the schools. It means to update the contents of education, but at the same time keeping our traditions and superiority...” (Putin, 2012).

Within the same speech, Putin also touches the issue of democracy and human rights and discourse articulated by him around these topics is an interesting illustration of how the nodal point such as traditional values are, can affect and change understanding and meanings of other notions. The notion of democracy, in this case. Russian President claims: “For Russia there is no and cannot be any other political choice than democracy. But at the same time, I want to say and even underline: we share universal democratic principles, accepted all around the world. But Russian democracy – it is the government of the Russian nation with its own traditions of national self-rule, and not the realizations of standards, imposed on us externally.” (Putin; 2012).

It shows how democracy in the context of discourse articulated by the Russian political elite gains specific, Russian understanding. And it stands in contrast to the standards being “imposed” externally, or Western notion of liberal-democracy. President Putin also used term accepted norms and says democracy to be compliance of those norms, which can be understood as an attempt to introduce conservative and traditional normative aspects in the understanding of democracy. It will be better illustrated as the study progresses and offers discourse analysis of other speeches delivered by the head of the Russian state.

In the following year’s, 2013’s, address to the Federal Assembly, President Putin further articulated this discourse and once again projected his views about traditional values and conservatism.

“Dear colleagues! Upcoming 2014 year is declared the year of the culture in Russia. It is supposed to become the year of the real enlightenment, of returning to our cultural roots, to the issues of patriotism, norms and morals” (Putin, 2013). But at the same time, within the same speech, he articulates the idea that the normative power of Russia should be projected outwards as a guarantor of stability in the region. He claims that in the contemporary world, which is contradictory and dynamic, historical responsibility of Russia increases.

“Today, in many countries, norms of moral and morality are reviewed, national traditions and difference between nations and cultures are being erased. Society has been asked today, not only healthy recognition of each person’s right of freedom of conscience, political views and private life, but also necessary recognition of, strange it might sound, equality of good and bad, which are contradictory notions. This kind of demolition of traditional values from “above” not only implies negative consequences for society, but is also antidemocratic in its roots, since it is applied in practice from abstract, distant ideas, against the will of a majority of nationals, which doesn’t accept ongoing changes and suggested revisions” (Putin, 2013).

This passage shows how President Putin draws the picture of Russia being the key state as a guarantor of stability on the regional or global level, but at the same time, this strong state or pole of international politics, is opposing main or universally accepted understandings and definitions of human rights, liberty etc and suggests that Kremlin will be standing in defense of “traditional values” which are under threat from ideas “imposed” from above. At the same time, this part of his speech is vital for following study, since it demonstrates how within the discourse articulated by the Russian political elite, understanding of democracy or signifier in this case, changes meaning in relations to the nodal point, which is traditional values. He articulates this discourse farther by projecting it on the rest of the world and especially appealing to the societies in near abroad.

“And we know that in the world more people support our position in support of traditional values, which for thousands of years constitute spiritual, moral bases of civilization and every nation: values of the traditional family, real human life, including religious life, not only material but spiritual life, humanity and multicultural world’s values. Of course, this is a conservative position, but speaking with the words of Nicolay Berdyaev, idea of conservatism is not that it halts movement ahead, but it stops moving back and down, to the darkness of chaos, return to the primitive condition. In recent years we have observed how attempts to impose so called more progressive model of development by other countries have in fact turned into regress, barbarism, big blood” (Putin, 2013).

This discourse is further articulated and more broadly projected by Putin's latest annual address to the Federal Assembly i.e. From December 2014. In the very first paragraphs of his speech the head of the Russian state touches Orthodox Christianity and spirituality as important and inseparable from Russian politics. While speaking of annexation of the Crimean peninsula and integrating it into the Russian state, President Putin says:

“For our country, for our nation this event is especially important. Since, in Crimea our people are living, and territory itself is strategically important, as there lays the spiritual beginning of diverse, but monolithic Russian nation and centralized Russian state. Here, in Crimea, in old Chersonese, or as Russian historians called it, Korsun, Prince Vladimir was baptized and later baptized the rest of the Rus. ... Christianity was a strong spiritual uniting force that allowed, including in the formation of the united Russian nation and the emergence of common statehood different tribes and tribal unions of whole East-Slavic world. ... And this gives us bases to say that for Russia, the Crimea, old Korsun, Chersonese, and Sevastopol, have huge civilizational and sacred meaning. Like the temple mount in Jerusalem for those who are followers of Islam or Judaism.” (Putin, 2014).

This opening passage shows how Orthodoxy is introduced in the ongoing discourse articulated by the Russian political elite and how this appeal to conservatism and traditions are brought in as a justification for foreign politics. As it is argued in this study, such articulated appeals and becomes gains popularity among the population not only in Russia but in the near-aboard. Especially, within the countries, the majority of which is Orthodox. Case of Georgia will be discussed in the second part of the study.

In this speech, Putin once again offers a good example of redefining meanings of certain notions, or how concepts can be understood differently once they are defined in relations to the nodal point.

“If for number of European countries national pride is long time forgotten concept, while sovereignty is – too much of a luxury, for Russia national sovereignty is – absolutely necessary condition for its existence.” (Putin, 2014).

Or in other words, while in Europe debates, political as well as scholarly, are differently viewing the concept of nationalism or sovereignty vs. supranationality, President Putin is apparently trying to articulate alternative discourse by portraying European countries as not being really sovereign while Russian Federation stand on the side of protecting and guaranteeing this “national pride.”

President Putin goes even further with the traditional values by equating it with “healthy family” and subsequently with “healthy nation.” “Healthy family and healthy nation, traditional values given by our ancestors in combination with future visions, stability as conditions for development and progress, respect to other nations and states along with guarantees of providing security of Russia and defending its legal interests – these are our priorities” (Putin, 2014).

In order to better illustrate discourse articulated and its consequences, besides last three annual addresses of the president to the Federal Assembly, Putin’s speech on such major occasion, as annexations of Crimea is, should be analyzed. Discourse analysis should provide some insights on how Orthodox Christianity and traditions are employed as the nodal point around which normative hegemony is articulated and how it is projected on audience inside or outside the Russian Federation. Within the first few sentences, speaking about the referendum in Crimea and why people, living on peninsula “chose to live with Russia”, president Putin claims:

“This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus...” he continues “There was a whole series of controlled “color” revolutions. Clearly, the people in those nations, where these events took place, were sick of tyranny and poverty, of their lack of prospects; but these feelings were taken advantage of cynically. Standards were imposed on these nations that did not in any way correspond to their way of life, traditions, or these peoples’ cultures. As a result, instead of democracy and freedom, there was chaos, outbreaks of violence and a series of upheavals” (Putin, 2014).

These passages show how president Putin is trying to appeal to Orthodox Christianity and on the bases of these portray Crimea as a sacred place for Russians. This argument or rather justification was employed and further deepened in his annual address of the same year which was analyzed above. President Putin also tries to alter the existing discourse of so called color revolutions being the success of liberal-democracy and by referring to culture and traditions, offer an alternative narrative of the story. The discourse articulated by Russian president is not only about pure economic or military threats, such as NATO presence in Sevastopol is, but about the notion that it also threatens their culture, identity and system of values.

At the same time he argues that Russia is the only strong and stable sovereign, therefore Crimea, common historical legacy should be part of it. “Otherwise, dear friends, (I’m addressing both Ukraine and Russia), you and we – the Russians and the Ukrainians – could lose Crimea completely, and that could happen in the near historical perspective. Please think about it” (Putin, 2014).

To further uncover discourse articulated in this speech, what Putin argues, is that Crimea, which is sacred, holy place for Orthodox Christians and at the same time common historical legacy of Ukraine and Russia was under threat from the West and the only way to save it, was to integrate it into the Russian Federation. This is not only justification or an excuse, but this message has wider implications. It is mostly appealing to the society in the Russian Federation and countries of so called near abroad. It carries the idea that the West presents a threat to culture and history, while Russia stands as a guarantor and defender of sacred values.

#### Discourse articulated by the Russian Orthodox Church

It is important to look at how the Russian Orthodox Church articulates and repeats the same discourse. But since the Church itself is preoccupied with normative issues it is almost impossible to cover all the addresses and speeches within the scope of one study. Even if the focus is only on Patriarch as a head of the ROC, it is still impossible to limit available data. Therefore, for the purpose of illustrating discourse of the normative

hegemony of the Russia versus the West, being present in the Russian Orthodox Church, randomly, those recent statements and interviews of the Patriarch Kirill and will be analyzed, which reflect upon this discourse.

In the March of 2014, Patriarch Kirill made a comment about new options on Facebook which can allow users to choose its own gender out of fifty available options. He is quoted to have called it a clinical case and said:

“The destruction of traditional values today also affects interpersonal relationships. We know that this challenges the fact that marriage is the relationship between a man and a woman, that gender selection is not an intellectual or volitional choice, but rather God’s choice. ... Yet, today this clinical case is protected by law in many countries. And children are taught this, being told: you can choose yourself whether you are a boy or a girl” (As cited by Pravmir.com, 2014).

This passage shows how the head of the Russian Orthodox Church is repeating the same discourse that in the certain countries, which logically means in the West, values are changing and reviewed, which is viewed as a thread to the traditional system of values. He also redefined understanding of freedom in relations to the nodal point, which is used as a departure point for the following study. Within the same comment about the possibility of choosing gender on Facebook by saying:

“But then, what is freedom like? If freedom ruins the Divine plan of the world and of mankind, then it is not freedom, but slavery. And we know that the devil enslaves a man, because the most dangerous captivity is to be not free from sin, when a person cannot live in accordance with his or her calling” (As cited by Pravoslavie.ru, 2014). It illustrates how meaning and understanding of certain notions, such as freedom in this case, changes and is being rearticulated while applied to the nodal point, which is an Orthodox Christianity for this study.



In July of one year before this statement, in 2013, in his Sunday service, Patriarch Kirill spoke of the West and characterized same sex marriages as the sign of apocalypses. At the same time called Russian political elite to ensure that this never happens in Russia. “This is a very dangerous apocalyptic symptom, and we must do everything in our powers to ensure that sin is never sanctioned in Russia by state law, because that would mean that the nation has embarked on a path of self-destruction” (As cited by Russia Today, 2013). In his address, once again it can be observed how the notions are redefined and reviewed in relations to the nodal points. Patriarch Kirill points out: “Where sin is elected through freedom, there comes death, terror and dictatorship.” He also pointed out that it leads to the “self-destruction of nation” (As cited by Russia Today, 2013).

Patriarch Kirill also shares President Putin’s support of strong state and institutions. While meeting with students in the year 2012, not too long after the scandal with Pussy Riot, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, not only spoke about threats to the institution of the Church, but he proclaimed a strong state to be the guarantor or a defender of the traditional value system from degradations. Something similar to the discourse articulated by the President Putin, can be observed. Patriarch Kirill is quoted to have said:

“The institution of power appeared in the world, in a society prone to sin, to safeguard this society so that people could live together. ... So, clear and very definite support of the Orthodox Church for the institution of state authorities does not amount to an assessment of this or that politician or state figure by every representative of the Church... But it is indispensable to understand that safeguarding the institution of power is a guarantee of a flourishing society” (As cited by the Reuters, 2012).

This discourse is articulated not only for domestic audience, but is projected outside as well. While visiting another Orthodox country and close ally of Russia, Serbia, Patriarch Kirill condemned secularization in Europe and compared it to the apocalypses. He harshly criticized Europe and blamed it in “abandoning its Christian identity,” while same sex marriages and unions, according to the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, became “locomotive of destructive processes,” across the whole Europe. He also called upon the

people of Serbia to “help bring Europe back to Christian values” (As cited by the National Secular Society, 2014). This illustrates how the normative discourse of the West is perceived by the Russian clergy as perverted and deviant and how Russian version, based strictly on conservative values and backed by the Orthodox Christianity is projected as an alternative which can save “Godless” Europe. And calling upon the Serbian people to help to “save” Europe is not a coincidence either. Since Serbia is an Orthodox country, unlike the majority of the Western European countries, therefore, this discourse of the Orthodox civilization versus the West, it is considered on the side of the former.

Under Putin’s presidency, another important event took place, which once again demonstrated link between the Church and the State getting stronger and more visible in the Russian politics. In January of 2015, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill delivered speech in the Russian State Duma. This has been the first time ever in the history of the modern Russian state, head of the Church addresses parliament members from the parliament tribune. But this speech is not interesting for the following study only from this perspective, it is important, since in it, Patriarch Kirill once again touched upon the issue of “traditional value system” being under threat and of necessity to protect them.

Within the opening passage of his speech, Patriarch Kirill says: “The world, in which we live, is often referred as post-Christian, and sometimes post-religious. Behind this term lies the terrible diagnosis of spiritual and moral state in which society has appeared in many countries. ... Because, as a result, the boundaries between good and evil are blurred, and the concept of justice rooted in the moral nature of man, which is universal, is interpreted in accordance with the prevailing philosophy and even political attitudes” (Kirill, 2015).

Similarity between the wording and texts Putin employs in his speeches, which were analyzed above and Patriarch’s address is obvious to any reader. Revision of morality, the boundaries between good and evil being “blurred.” It is exactly the same discourse President Putin is articulating and projecting.

“The idea of the absolute priority of freedom, freedom of choice, and I underline, rejection of priority of a moral norm became a certain type of slow-motion bomb for the Western civilization, destructing effect of which becomes fully obvious only to us, people of XXI century, as our ancestors, being under the spell of the topic of freedom, we're supporting various innovations (новеллы) including legislative, not thinking about the fact that absolutisation of freedom of choice in distance from normative parts is deadly for human and society. Because you can select an evil” (Kirill, 2015).

He further attacked the European system of values, by saying that concept of equality of right and freedom, if it is transferred into from philosophical debates into practice by the legislative system, it has “deplorable” consequences on human society, affecting “the personal and social morality. ... Examples are known. This legalization of so-called same-sex unions, and the legalization of euthanasia, and an introduction to the social life of certain hazardous elements of the juvenile justice system. All these legally binding novels, sometimes contradicting not only moral values, but even and universal common sense and instinct for self-preservation are becoming more and more widespread and recognized by some states” (Kirill, 2015).

In the next part of his speech, Patriarch Kirill divides Russian history into several parts and talks about certain characteristics of each epoch. When it comes to the contemporary Russian statehood, he says: “Finally, the new Russia... We began to focus on human rights, the rights of people to human dignity, liberty. Is it possible to ignore it and say that it's bad? And we have designated this era the word dignity. And it happened: faith, great power, justice, solidarity and dignity” (Kirill, 2015).

This passage illustrates how around nodal points, when the discourse is articulated, certain notions change meaning. Liberty, dignity, understanding of those concepts, from the perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church is different from the Western narrative. And this difference is explained by the fact that once they are contrasted to the nodal point such conservative or traditional values are, they change meanings according to the discourse being articulated.

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church also redefines meaning of pluralism and politics in his speech, by articulating an alternative understanding. “I believe that in a society, traditional for Russia, if you want a compassionate society, political parties must not compete in terms of contrasting different values, such as freedom and justice, statehood and dignity. ... Basic sphere is a sphere of values. And this basis of values shouldn't be destroyed by any party in Russia. Because there will be no Russia. And with gratitude to God testify that the current composition of the Duma practically embodies what I have just said” (Kirill, 2015).

Patriarch also called for referring to conservative discourse, by saying that there is a need of new worldwide synthesis, “the purpose of which is to take all that was best in our past and build on this basis, the foundation of the future. ... Within these walls I would like to say that to a large extent, on the positions of the Russian parliament members will depend the ability of our country to be loyal to its values, its way, its ancient and eternal choice” (Kirill, 2015).

Patriarch Kirill also spoke about the importance of legislation and laws, which should protect family and parents right to educate their children in the spirit of “their own world view and traditional moral values” (Kirill, 2015). He also praised works done by the inter-fractional group created in the State Duma in 2012, which is focused on defense of Christian values and Patriarch welcomed the suggestion of expanding it at the expense of the members of the Federation Council and regional legislatures (Kirill, 2015). This is an interesting point, since it illustrates how Christian values which are associated with conservative and traditional value systems in Russia are getting more and more deeply involved in the politics. Normative discourse is overtaking discourses not only on the regional level, but its reaching top of the Russian political elite.

Within the same speech, Patriarch Kirill also repeated discourse, articulated by the President Putin, by equating national identity with moral values. He said that normative component should be more broadly present in the schools. As Patriarch claims, foundations of religious cultures has only 34 hours, which is “drop in the sea,” while, according to him,

this course won't only raise moral consciousness, but also "national identity, it is aimed at protection of all the values we just have been talking about" (Kirill, 2015).

Discourse analysis of the Patriarch Kirill's speeches and interviews illustrate how the Russian Orthodox Church occupies key place in the Gramscian formula of the state being equal to the political society plus civil society, and how as a civil institution it projects and maintains normative hegemony domestically or abroad.

## **The Russian alternative world order projected on Georgia**

The title of the present study is “The Russia and The West, Struggle for Normative Hegemony.” The normative hegemony constructed by the Russian political elite and it, being projected on to the domestic society has been covered so far. While societies in the neighboring countries of Russia, which try to free themselves from the Kremlin’s influence and get closer to the EU, become the battlefield between the normative hegemonies of the Russian Federation and the West. Particular institutions appear in those societies which project hegemony articulated either by one side or another. Case of Georgia will be analyzed within this research and it will be illustrated how two value systems affect society. An attempt will be made to demonstrate, that despite Georgia has already signed an association agreement with the EU and is trying to implement reforms, so that it gets closer to this alliance, a society within Georgia is struggling to accept certain values embodies within the Western normative discourse. This dilemma is a perfect opportunity for the Russian political elite to project its own discourse on the Georgian society and maintain its normative hegemony, which can be supported by such institution of the civil society, such as the Georgian Orthodox Church, NGOs and media. They share many common values with the Russian counterpart and is more distant from the western European discourse. This will be illustrated below by conducting discourse analysis of the speeches epistles and interviews of the Patriarch Ilia II, who is the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and several online-publishers and NGOs which are closely associated with the Church and at the same time share same discourse which is articulated by the Russian political elite. Within the scope of this research main representatives of the Georgian Political elite will not be covered, since due to the legacy of the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and subsequent occupation and recognition of independence of the two Georgian regions by the Russian Federation. Openly supporting Kremlin or calls for rejecting the Euro-Atlantic future of Georgia equals to political suicide in the Georgian politics. To illustrate this point better, an example should be provided. Nino Burjanadze and her party is strongest and most popular out of the political groups in Georgia that are associated with Russia and openly call for

dialogue with the Kremlin. Nino Burjanadze is quoted to have said that Georgia should decide between “illusionary NATO membership” and possibility of restoring its territorial integrity (As cited by Civil Georgia, 2014). Despite there is not even diplomatic relations between two countries, she has visited Moscow and has personally met Vladimir Putin, while being in opposition. In Russia, Burjanadze has remarked “unfortunately in recent years Russian-Georgian relations have actually dropped to a tragic deadlock. ... I am more than sure, that it is not only in the interests of Georgia to normalize relations between our two peoples. ... Normal relations between Georgia and Russia is needed for peaceful development of the entire region and for our peoples. ... I am absolutely sure, that normal relations with Russia is in the interest of my people, of my state, as well as in the interest of your people and of your state.” (As cited by Civil Georgia, 2010). While Putin, being prime minister at that time, has said: “Life moves forward and I very much hope, that by relying on those people, who want to have normal relations with Russia, we will be able to restore the pre-crisis level of our relations” (As cited by Civil Georgia, 2010).

At the same time, the political party of Nino Burjanadze carries the same discourse about traditional values being under threat from the West, which is articulated by the Russian Political elite. Several quotations from her interview about the developments which took place in Tbilisi on 17th of May of 2013 should illustrate this point. Commenting on the aggressive disruption by the Orthodox Christians of the peaceful rally in memory of the victims of homophobia, she said: “This group tries to introduce propaganda of what is not acceptable not only for our state and faith, but as Patriarch said in his address, for all religions and normal countries is unacceptable. Of course, private life of each individual should be protected, of course man shouldn't be discriminated based on any kind of difference which he/she is characterized by, but that doesn't mean that we should be imposed stranger and unacceptable values, even if it can be called value at all, and propagate what is unacceptable” (As cited by News.ge, 2013).

She tries to appeal to traditional, conservative values and the Orthodox Christianity, sympathies towards which are quite high in the Georgian society, but despite this discourse,

still, Nino Burjanadze's political party was not able to get more than 10% of votes in the latest Presidential elections in the year 2013 (Election Guide, 2013).

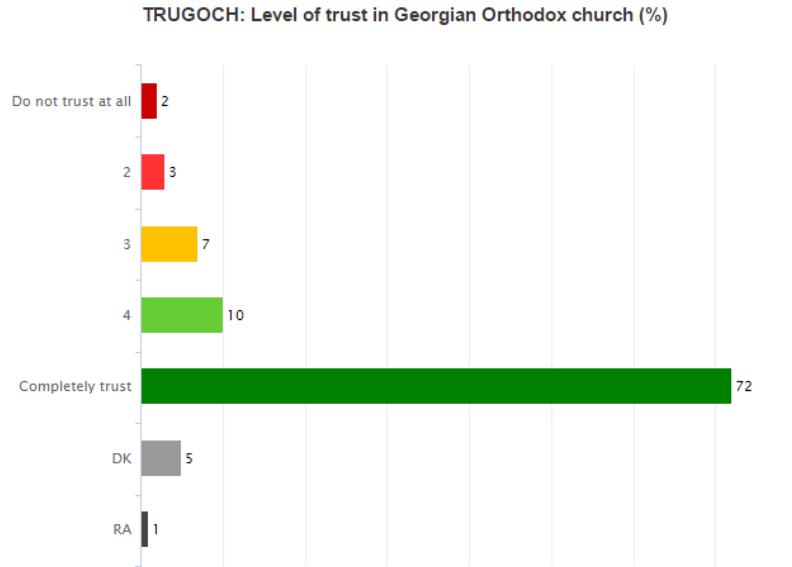
Therefore, the normative hegemony of Russia from Neo-Gramscian perspective is articulated and projected through civil society and institutions which are part of it. In the case of Georgia, the core institution is the Georgian Orthodox Church and NGOs associated with it. Despite, as it will be illustrated below, heads of the GOC have publicly expressed their sympathies towards the Russian political elite, unlike Nino Burjanadze, they still maintain support of the majority of the population. Therefore, it is exactly where Russian normative hegemony can dwell on and compete with the Western normative discourse, which is popular among the Political elite of Georgia and is expressed in publicly declared Euro-Atlantic future of Georgia and in several types of reforms strengthening minority rights and their protection. With the appeal to the traditional values being under danger from the West, civil society can consequently alter political attitudes of the Georgian society and in the long run, challenge the Western normative discourse.

Before going to the discourse analysis, it is important to explain why exactly the Georgian Orthodox Church is considered to be the institution which can maintain the Russian normative hegemony in the region. Why it can be considered as a main link between the Georgian society and an alternative world order articulated within the Russian discourse. For this purpose, it is important to take a look at surveys which shows the level of the trust in the GOC among the citizens of Georgia. The results of the opinion polls known as the Caucasus Barometer should be referred. The Caucasus Barometer is an annual survey conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) in three countries of the South Caucasus. Most recent surveys covering issues important for the present study were conducted in 2013. The following figures are taken from this survey (Caucasus Barometer, 2013).



Table 4: Level of trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church in the Georgian population

Caucasus Barometer 2013 Georgia

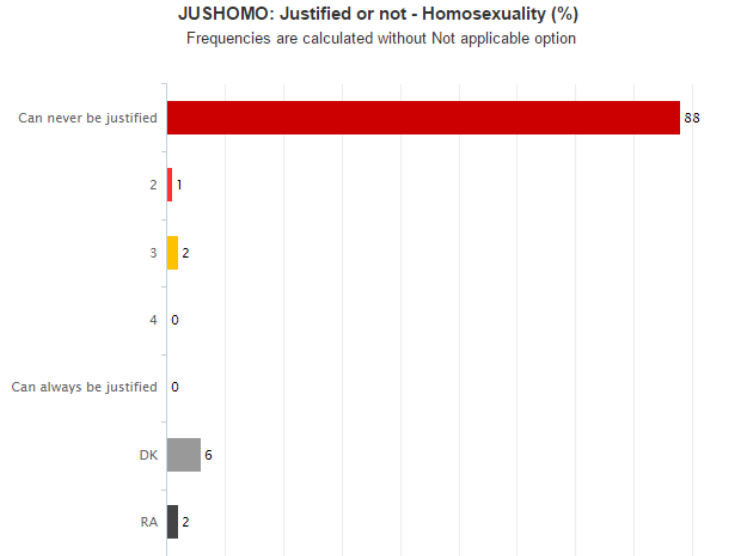


(Caucasus Barometer, 2013).

As it can be seen from the following figure, 72% of respondents completely trust the Georgian Orthodox Church, in addition to 10% of those who trust. This number is significant as it illustrates how influential this institution can be. According to International Republican Institute (IRI) surveys on Georgia from February of 2014, 94% of the population trusts the Georgian Orthodox Church. While the same figure for Parliament is 68%, for prime minister 67% and for the President’s office – 64% (Agenda.ge, 2014). These figures are significant since they illustrate that trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church is way higher than in any state institution. And if former projects same discourse which is articulated by the Russian political elite, then it can become the main link between the Russian alternative world order and the Georgian society against the Western normative hegemony. Especially, considering the fact, that sympathies towards conservative and so called “traditional” values are high among the citizens of the South Caucasian republic. The following figures are taken from the Caucasus Barometer from 2011 which illustrates respondents’ attitudes toward homosexuality in Georgia (Caucasus Barometer, 2011).

Table 5: Georgians opinion whether homosexuality can be justified or not:

Caucasus Barometer 2011 Georgia



(Caucasus Barometer, 2011).

According to these figures, 88% finds homosexuality never justified while 0% is for always justified or justified. This illustrates that the majority of the Georgian society can find appealing discourse of the Russian alternative world order where the West is portrayed as pervert, dangerous and “children have to be protected from gay propaganda.”

LGBT rights are one of the issues, developments around which illustrate the struggle for normative hegemony between the West and Russia taking place in Georgia. Two recent events should be discussed below, in order to demonstrate this claim better. One is disruption of the peaceful rally on the 17th of May of 2013 in Tbilisi and another is developments around bill adopted by the Georgian Parliament against all kinds of discrimination.

17th of May is an international day against homophobia, when people all around the world pay tribute to the victims of the homophobia. The Georgian LGBT group decided to organize peaceful rally in the city center, in connections with this day. Discourse taking

place before and after these developments illustrate how the Church and the political elite of Georgia stand on different sides. The former is close to the Russian world order while latter shares Western discourse. Prime minister of Georgia at that time, Bidzina Ivanishvili, while commenting on upcoming LGBT demonstration, is quoted to have said that sexual minorities have the same rights as other citizens and society will gradually get used to accepting them as equals. He also noted that they will be protected from any attack (As cited by the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2013). While the head of the most influential institution in the country, Patriarch Ilia II called government to prevent this manifestation from happening and not to allow LGBT people to come out in the streets. He called homosexuality “anomaly and disease” and “an insult to Georgian traditions” (As cited by the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2013). Despite hundreds of police officers were present, they were not able to protect LGBT activists from thousands of Orthodox Christians led by priests and high hierarchs of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Police had to evacuate rally participants with special buses. Mottos and proclamations heard from the demonstration led by the clergy exactly repeat the same discourse which is articulated by the Russian political elite domestically and is projected outwards. “Stop homosexual propaganda in Georgia,” “rally that contradicts our Georgian morals and traditions” (As cited by the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2013).

The discourse which followed these developments, once again illustrated diverse positions of the Church and the government. If former obviously shares normative discourse related to the one articulated by the Russian government, the political elite of Georgia, at least officially, falls in the Western normative discourse. Georgian Prime Minister at that time, Bidzina Ivanishvili, while addressing police two days after the rally, said:

“You protect the safety of each and every citizen... and very often you do it at the expense of the safety of your own life. ... A good example of that were developments in Tbilisi’s central square a day before yesterday, when you managed in dignity to provide safe passage for minorities so that they could protect their rights. You stood between majority and minority and when you saw that the need of protection of persons’ safety,

instead of freedom of expression, became number one priority and when, unfortunately, it was not possible to contain agitated majority, you put the entire burden on yourselves at the expense of your own safety and managed to escort the minority out of danger” (As cited by Civil Georgia, 2013).

While the chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, David Usupashvili, went even further by denouncing the statement made by Patriarch Ilia II, just the day before the rally was supposed to take place. ”I do not think that this statement contributed positively in respect of that specific day, because it was in itself already clear at the time [of making the statement] that the authorities could not have banned [the rally], demonstrators who were planning [anti-homophobia] rally would not have dropped their plans and for those people who were watching this rally with suspicion or aggressively this statement, to some extent, served as advice, indication, which empowered their position that ‘if the state does not ban [gay rights rally] then we will do it. ... What is happening in the Church’s life, it is not our business, but when there is a talk about issues of secular life, such as where citizens should walk or not, where they can rally or not, in such situations we should agree that voicing a critical position or disagreeing and analyzing is the right thing to do and it’s necessary and everyone should get used to it, including representatives of the Church.” While asked about what he would say to thousands of people who were protesting against gay rally, he said: “We should get used to such simple facts that there are people with different views, different behavior and different taste and there are people who are simply different from us” (As cited by Civil Georgia, 2013).

Patriarch Ilia II also condemned violence, but his position was different from the state authorities and closer to the Russian discourse. He said:

“What happened on May 17 is very regrettable. ... Ideas, which [gay rights activists] wanted to instill there, are completely unacceptable in Georgia. ... In the country, where the absolute majority of the population is a follower of Christianity... and of other traditional religions, such rallies are perceived by the population as propaganda of

homosexuality, which causes their fair protest. ...The country cannot tolerate legalization of a sin” (As cited by Civil Georgia, 2013).

One year after this rally, the presence of the Russian discourse became even more obvious. With the suggestion of the Patriarch of Georgia, 17th of May was announced to be celebrating the strength of family ties and purity. In the special statement issued by the Georgian Orthodox Church it says:

“Destruction of purity of the family and declaration of unnatural and wrong relations as natural condition is unacceptable for majority of Georgian population despite their faith. ... Church reveals sin and fights against sin itself, its public propaganda, because such attitude angers God and causes big punishment from God, therefore our Church tries to protect the nation from legalization of immorality and from spiritual violence” (As cited by Civil Georgia, 2014).

“Propaganda of homosexuality,” “legalizations of sin,” terms and notions which is articulated by the Russian political elite is present in the discourse of Georgian Orthodox Church and nodal points which are departing points (Orthodox Christianity, traditional values) of discourse analysis applied within the scope of following study are present. It will be better illustrated below after more texts are analyzed. It also repeats the idea of traditional family ties being threatened by protecting LGBT people’s right and recognizing their equality.

Anti-discrimination bill – another important event around which struggle for the normative hegemony of the West and Russia revealed itself in Georgia, was developments around the anti-discrimination bill, which the parliament of Georgia adopted in the spring of 2014. Based on the recommendations of the European Commission, as one of the key reform on the way of visa liberalization, Georgian parliament adopted a law against all types of discrimination, including based on sexual orientation or gender identity. This formulation caused concerns of religious groups and even high hierarchs of the Georgian Orthodox Church publicly called the parliament to reject this bill. Patriarch of the GOC, Ilia II is quoted to have said:

“Based on God’s teachings, society of believers fairly think of non-traditional relations as deadly sin, while anti-discrimination bill in current form is thought to be propaganda and legalization of this sin” (As cited by Tabula, 2014). The GOC asked parliament to postpone the hearing and engage with the Church and the wider society in further discussions about the bill.

Archpriest Theodore Gignadze, who is quite popular by appearing in different talk shows and giving public lectures and meetings in various universities, in one of his interviews commented about the above mentioned bill:

“I share Patriarch’s position – this law is dangerous for Georgia’s future. Where there is no Christ, we have nothing to do there. ... On the example of Holland, we can easily see what the problems, this law implies. 50 years ago lifestyle in this country was radically different. Families were patriarchal and traditions were respected. Today propaganda of same-sex marriages and depravity is going on. Pedophilia and incest have almost become the norm. Is it said that the drop can drill a stone. This law will be the beginning of planting poison in humans’ consciousness and these sins will gradually become norms among us” (As cited by Kviris Paltira, 2014).

This shows how discourse articulated by the Kremlin is shared by the Georgian Orthodox Church and projected onto the society. Gay propaganda, pedophilia, the West being pervert, is present in the discourse articulated by the hierarchs of the Georgian Orthodox Church, in the same way, the Russian political elite does.

In the end, Georgian political elite managed to stay within the western normative discourse and the bill was still adopted with the terms “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” remaining in it. Patriarch Ilia II expressed his dissatisfaction with following comment:

“None of the believers will accept such law. How is it possible to legalize illegal. Legalization of illegality is a big sin and that’s what I said and if I haven’t said that it would be surprising and wonder. I had to say it, none of the believers will accept it and I want to

say that as time will pass by, we will be surprised how this law was accepted. God will forgive our sins” (As cited by Liberali, 2014).

In his epistle which was delivered on the Easter holiday in 2012, and was approximately two weeks after the Russian Parliament adopted a law concerning gay propaganda, Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia II raised the issue of gay propaganda in Georgia, “false freedom” and vulgarity. He repeated same discourse, which was articulated by the Russian political elite. Some passages from epistle:

“”New attitudes” towards social life has been expressed in an attempt to make people forget the sense of sin and new principle has been employed: any action is acceptable, if it doesn’t limit somebody else’s freedom. For instance: if somebody’s vulgarity doesn’t harm me, it’s not negative anymore... Followers of secularism have advanced the idea of false freedom and therefore morality has been eradicated and finally presented such principle: whatever I want is natural, permissible and acceptable! ... Absolute truth doesn’t exist anymore, only individual “truths.” ... It is the complete antipode of the absolute truth. This is such supremacy of the sin and the devil, which humanity doesn’t remember! Such reasoning and attitudes are propagated everywhere, including in Georgia. ... Expression of such “new ideology” is ... popularization of “heroes” committing sins of Sodom-Gomorra” (As cited by NetGazeti, 2012).

These passages illustrate how the meanings of certain notions are changed when they are applied to certain nodal points of the following study. The idea of “false freedom” or freedom which is differently understood in the West because they are not Christians enough, or “propaganda” of sins and immoral life going on, with special accent on homosexuality, “sins of Sodom-Gomorra,” this is the exactly same discourse we meet in the Russian political elite currently and it is transferred to the Georgian society through the hierarchs of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

One of the best examples how the Russian normative discourse of the West versus the Russian alternative world order is shared and projected through the Georgian Orthodox

Church in recent years, is epistle delivered by the Patriarch Ilia II on Christmas eve of 2014. Some passages should be mentioned below.

“In every epoch Christianity faced challenges, but contemporary post-modern epoch is exceptional with its mega-challenges... The main idea of post-modernism is that the vision of truth based on certain religions, since, according to them, all, who think that know the truth, are mistaken... Only those who don't judge are right. For such reasons, there is no right or wrong anymore. ... Taboo should be unfastened of everything! Should get rid of past's moral limits, everything is good what I want and I like! But during assessment, one vital rule should be upheld – others', especially minorities' rights shouldn't be violated! That's the law. As the result, the boundary between good and bad behavior, between truth and falsity is lost. ... There is a fundamental difference between “freedom” suggested by pseudo-Liberalism and Christian teachings” (As cited by Tabula, 2014).

Boundaries between good and bad being blurred and erased, it is exactly the same discourse the President Putin and Patriarch Kirill articulate. Within the same epistle, Patriarch blames “secular ideology” responsible for portraying human as an independent from God. He declares it responsible for losing “moral and spiritual orients” by justifying it with individualism. “It is fighting from every direction against traditional values, upbringing and moral” (As cited by Tabula, 2014). He goes further to argue that the main expression of the current crisis is right of sexual minorities to get married and adopt kids. Patriarch also mentions Europe in his epistle by saying that European politicians should take into consideration traditions of certain countries and give that freedom of choice, so that societies within these countries would be more willing to be connected with contemporary Europe (As cited by Tabula, 2014). This passage show how Europe is portrayed as something which might threaten “traditions” and values of the Georgian people and therefore Georgia's European future might be under question as society might not relate to the Western normative discourse and find an alternative more appealing, the Russian world order, in this case.



Besides sharing value systems, Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church has close personal ties with the clergy of the ROC and political elite in the Kremlin. Ilia II, since the August War of 2008, has several times visited Moscow and personally met President Putin. In 2013, while meeting Putin, he is quoted to have said:

“The aim of my visit is to start improving those mistakes, which were made... I had a meeting with Vladimir Putin and we agreed that it cannot go on like this. President of Russia is doing everything so that we can stay brothers. What happened wasn't fault of Russia or Georgia, it was fault of certain persons. ... Love between Georgia and Russia will last forever” (As cited by Tabula, 2013).

In February of 2013, in social media appeared a short video clip, which shows part of Patriarch's speech, supposedly delivered while he was visiting Moscow one month earlier. He speaks of President Putin and Georgia-Russian relations as following:

“I want to say that relations between Russia and Georgia were always, and will be, brotherly and friendly. Russia and Georgia were brothers in the past, but maybe somebody got jealous of our good terms and artificially caused enmity. I had met with his highness the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Vladimir Putin. I had met before as well, but this warmth and this attention which was expressed by the President Putin was special and hope giver. I think that he is the person, the wise person, who will definitely improve the situation in Georgia and Georgia will be united” (Ilia II, 2013).

Later in the same year, (2013), Patriarch Ilia II visited Moscow again, in connection with celebration of 1025<sup>th</sup> anniversary of historic Rus becoming Christian. Within the scope of the visit, he gave an interview to local media, where, some interesting messages for this study were projected. He speaks of the importance of the religious ties between two countries, of pilgrims coming from Russia to Georgia or vice-versa and so on. Then Georgian Patriarch speaks of importance of negotiations between two governments and once again repeats the idea that since both Georgia and Russia are Orthodox Christian countries, they are destined to be in good terms with each other. But he also goes further and claims that culture also unites the two nations. “So, I think that we, as Orthodox

nations, Russians and Georgians, we will find an exit from this difficult situation. I love Russia very much. I received an education there. ... We are united with everything, not only religion, not only Orthodoxy, - our culture. Georgia loves Russian culture.... First of all, we live in a very difficult time – time of Globalization. Russia and Georgia have collected many spiritual values. And therefore we should carefully look after, so that those values aren't lost – our faith, our homeland, our culture” (Caucasus Politics, 2013).

It shows how, according to the most influential and trustworthy public figure in the Georgian society, Orthodox Christianity, traditional and spiritual values, should bring two countries together, despite the war legacy and nonexistence of diplomatic relations. Or in other words, why alternative Russian world order, articulated by the political elite in the Kremlin, should be attractive for the Georgian society.

Besides the Georgian Orthodox Church, other important institutions which can play key role in maintaining and projecting the Russian normative hegemony are non-governmental organizations and media. After the August War of 2008, several NGOs started to appear in Georgia, which are closely associated with the GOC, Russian political elite and discourse. As Gramsci claimed, media and publishing can play important role in maintaining hegemony. Those NGOs which will be mentioned below, either have several online newspapers, or are listed as partners of online newspapers which projects perverted West versus the Orthodox civilization discourse. In order to illustrate how those organizations work within the civil society for producing and maintaining the Russian normative hegemony, some of them should be analyzed in more details.

Erekle II's Society – first of all, it should be noted that the name itself already indicates what this NGO stands for. King Erekle II is the ruler of the Georgian kingdom from the end of XVIII century, when it signed a treaty with the Russian empire asking for protection. Therefore, in the Georgian society's memory, Erekle II's name is associated with foreign policy oriented on Russia. The society itself, according to the information provided on their website was founded in 2008, after the Russo-Georgian war and it claims that founders understand that peace and development in the region cannot be achieved

without consideration of the “Northern” vector or in other words the Russian Federation, which borders Georgia from the North. Among the aims of the organization is listed “propaganda of the Russian culture and art in Georgia.” Giving free Russian language classes for Georgian citizens as well as supporting the enhancement of the political dialogue between two countries (Erekle Second’s Society). At the same time, it publishes newspapers in both Russian and Georgian and maintains internet TV named “Patriot TV.” It broadcasts online talk show hosted by one of the founders, Archil Chkoidze, and projects the same discourse what the Russian political elite has articulated. For example, from the video of February of 08 of 2015, he has a priest, as a guest, and following messages is projected, that there is “direct propaganda” of homosexuality and other sins in the country and “God will never forgive condemnation of the holy spirit” to anyone. Host of the show also blames the government, saying that with the adoption of anti-discrimination bill, government legalizes this sin (Patriot TV, 2015). Or from another video from the 25<sup>th</sup> of February of 2015, one of the guests of the show says that propaganda of depravity is going on from all main TV shows and it should be prosecuted by the criminal code (Patriot TV, 2015). Or in other words, it is exactly what Russian legislation does with banning “gay propaganda.” Archil Chkoidze also publicly, several times expressed his support for Georgia’s membership in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and his close links with representatives of the Russian political elite. During one of his press-conferences from 2013, he is quoted to have said the following:

“I had meetings in the MST (Moscow State University) with those political scientists who are close to the Kremlin. Alexander Dugin, among them. ... They already talk that if Georgia changes its direction and renews strategic partnership with Russia, Russia will definitely support Georgia in resolving conflicts” (As cited by NetGazeti, 2014). He also speaks of the ambassador of the United States to Georgia, as a “governor” of Georgia, appointed by the West, who doesn’t let representatives of the Georgian diaspora in Russia, which has close ties with the Kremlin, to serve their country. Chkoidze, on the same press conference also demanded from the government to conduct a referendum

to determine whether Georgian population supports Russia or Europe (As cited by NetGazeti, 2014).

In the spring of 2014, screenshot from Facebook appeared which was widely discussed in the social media. Alexander Dugin, a political scientist who is closely associated with the Kremlin and is well known for his anti-Western rhetoric, shared a video on his wall from the Erekle Second's Society's event regarding threats from NATO and why Georgia should prefer Russian lead alliance to the Western organizations. Dugin called Chkoidze "Eurasian hero of Georgia" who is "fighting against Atlanticists" in the "most difficult region." Archil Chkoidze commented on the link, thanking Dugin for the warm words, saying that his lectures and works helped him to see the real idea of the Eurasianism and that he hopes his "fellow citizens" (Georgians) will understand it soon as well. He confirmed to the media that it was his real comment made on an official Facebook page of Alexander Dugin (Ambebi.ge, 2014). It should be noted that the main idea of the Dugin's works is that Eurasianism, as an alternative to the Americanism, should be created on the bases of the Orthodox civilization (Curanovic, 2012, p.117).

Another NGO which should be considered as a part of the civil society, on which Russian normative hegemony can be relied, is the Eurasian Institute. It was founded in 2009. It uses monument of the King Erekle II as its logo on the website. There, a full report of their activities can be also found. But due to the limits of the study, only those activities will be mentioned, which are important for following research.

In November of 2012 oppositional politicians, economists and experts from Baltic countries were invited to attend a conference hosted by the Eurasian Institute in Tbilisi, in order to provide Georgian society with the real information about how membership in NATO and EU has "limited their sovereignty." And it's not too different from the Soviet times. As the report says, in order to show to Georgians that "not only provocative live in the Baltics, but objective and well-wishers to Georgia as well" (Eurasian Institute, 2014, p. 9).

The European Union limiting sovereignty of nations is the exact same type of discourse which President Putin uses to portray Russia as a defender of the traditions and the West as a deviant, which has abandoned the real values.

In the February of 2013, the Eurasian Institute organized first public discussion about the Russo-Georgian relations. Representatives of the so called intelligentsia were taking part. As it is noted in the report: “Special assessment was given to the role of the Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II in keeping spiritual ties between two Orthodox nations” (Eurasian Institute, 2014, pp. 10-11).

Especially worth of attention for this study is showing a movie about bombing of Yugoslavia by the NATO forces in two major cities in Georgia, in Batumi and Tbilisi. As it is said in the report, aim of this event was to “remind to the society and give those facts which are connected with the battle of the North-Atlantic Alliance not only against the Yugoslavian state but against the Orthodox civilization” (Eurasian Institute, 2014, p. 19). After the movie, manifestation was held, in support of Serbian people and Serbian monasteries and sacred places which were destroyed by bombing. It caused irritation of “Nationals” (the political party of the former President Mikhail Saakashvili, which is closely associated with the West) and “LGBT groups,” according to the report (Eurasian Institute, 2014, p. 20).

It is a very good example of how the Russian alternative normative world order is transferred to the Georgian society through civil society. Which is NATO, and the West in general, fighting against the Orthodox Civilization and LGBT groups being associated with the West.

In April of 2014, representatives of the Eurasian Institute visited Moscow and had met with the elites of the political scientists of Russia. As it is noted in the report, such meetings give an opportunity to Georgian and Russian politicians to communicate and hold dialogue with people who can actually influence decision makers in the Kremlin (Eurasian Institute, 2014, p. 20).

The Eurasian Institute also initiated a project, titled “Public Movement for Russo-Georgian Dialogue and Cooperation.” As it is claimed in the report, it is an answer from the Georgian public to those political powers, which, from inside or outside, have been artificially tensing or still tense relations between two nations. Besides the economic benefits, as people from Eurasian Institute argue, Georgia and Russia are connected with the shared Orthodox faith (Eurasian Institute, 2014, p. 24).

In addition to these two NGOs, there are several newspapers which are publishing articles online or on paper and articulate the same normative discourse. And as it was mentioned in the beginning, Gramsci argued that newspapers and publishing houses can be considered as one of the key elements in establishing and maintaining hegemony. Due to the limitation of the study, it will be impossible to cover all the online or paper-based media which transmit this discourse. Therefore, one of them, Saqinform will be analyzed and it will give a general idea of what is the role media can play as a link between the Georgian society and the Russian alternative world order. It should also be noted that NGOs which were discussed above as well, almost all the media which fall within the Russian discourse, are listed as partners on their websites and closely cooperate.

Saqinform should be analyzed as an example of how media can transfer the Russian discourse to the Georgian society. According to the website, Saqinform was restored in 2010 as an informative and analytical agency, based on the agency which in 1921 was founded as a Caucasus department of the Russian Telegraph Agency. It is only in Georgian and Russian, no English version available. And in 2011 activities of the agency was blessed by the Patriarch of Georgia. Even quotation of his words is on the top of the website, where the head of the GOC calls activities of Saqinform “really national” and says that the Church will support as much as possible (Saqinform , 2015).

Data available from Saqinform is huge and it is impossible to cover everything. Therefore only those published articles should be touched which illustrate claims made in this study best. On 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 2012, team of Saqinform congratulated Vladimir Putin with being elected as a President of the Russian Federation for the third time. The text itself

is full of the same discourse which the Russian political elite, under him, articulates. Victory was logical as “the victory of good over evil, ” says the text. It also argues that happiness and the blossom of the Russian nation will also mean blossom of the brotherly nation of Georgians. “Georgia has last historic chance – to use Putin’s presidency, - the only man who can save Georgian people’s history, religion and culture. ... Georgian people miss followers of the same faith, Russian people, closer anyone we ever had and will ever have!”(Saqinform, 2012).

Another article, which is published on their website, is a public letter from the editor in chief to the representative of the Georgian Diaspora in Russia. Editor of the Saqinform asks Mikhail Khubutia to pass his program about the popularization of the Russian language and Russian language media to Vladimir Putin. The article itself ends with the following remark: “In Russia they still haven’t realized that – the knight of light Vladimir Putin is sent from God to save Russia and to the whole Orthodox world! And that after Stalin, Russia has never had such a leader and, probably, will never have” (Saqinform , 2014).

These two examples show how the discourse of current Russian government being defender of the Orthodox civilization is transferred to the Georgian society through certain media recourses. Battle between good and evil, while Putin is the leader of the “right” Orthodox civilization.

Saqinform also touches the issue of values and the West is perverted and deviant, imposing its value systems in Georgia. Passages from two articles should be mentioned below to illustrate this trend. In the article written by editor in chief from 2014 which touches the issue of gender equality and women's rights, it says that in the West it has become routine that pedophile parents are raping and killing their kids, or politicians, despite their higher status, are living in same-sex marriages. It also says that “Western Globalists” main aim is “to destroy every national-Georgian tradition, custom and traditional religion – Orthodoxy, the foundation of which is family institute. With husband having main role! Only after this Georgia can be considered not as a state, but amorphous

territory inhabited by the local population of undefined sex. ... Husbands will be servants on NATO military bases, while wives serving bath houses, restaurants, washing houses and hotels” (Saqinform, 2014).

Second example to illustrate this trend, is a public letter to the ambassador of the United States to Georgia from the editor in chief on SaqInform published on the website in 2015. It touches the issue of U.S has imposed standards on the Georgian government it has to be abided by. It also includes normative side. As the article argues, United State decided to make Georgians “free from God,” to make them equal. But it has also inserted NGOs in Georgia, which are telling to the Georgian society that they “shouldn’t be ashamed of their sins.” “Even if you are LGBT or a prostitute, be open, transparent and free – be like you wish! You are Georgian, therefore – European so incest and same-sex marriages for you are normal!” (Saqinform , 2015).

These passages show how the discourse of the Russian political elite of the West being perverted and imposing its stranger for the Orthodox civilization values on other countries is transferred through the media. The Georgian Orthodox Church, NGOs and certain online or paper-based publishing transmit the alternative world order to the Georgian population and therefore forms an important link in supporting and maintaining the Russian normative hegemony.



## **Conclusion**

As it was argued in the present study, since the year 2012, when Vladimir Putin was elected as the President of the Russian Federation for the third time, more conservative and normative discourse emerged in the Russian political elite, which is supported by the Russian Orthodox Church and is projected to the domestic or international audience. The discourse of the deviant West versus conservative Russia, which stands as the last bastion in defense of traditional value systems, can have a significant effect on the societies in the Eastern Partnership countries. As the case of Georgia illustrated in the current study, population is torn between two normative discourses, on the one side it has to accept reforms in strengthening minority rights and their protection, but on the other hand, stills struggles to accept the idea of equal rights for sexual minorities. These contradictions can serve as a good basis around which the Russian normative hegemony, defined by the Neo-Gramscian terms, can penetrate the Georgian society. As Georgians will feel closer to the normative discourse coming from the Kremlin rather than from the West, they will be more willing to consent to the Russian political elite and as the result turn foreign orienteer from the West more to the North. To define it more from the Neo-Gramscian perspective, attractiveness of the Russian normative discourse will lead to the Russian hegemony in the Georgian society and it will let the Kremlin achieve desired foreign policy results without using force or threats.

At the same time, as Gramsci argued, institutions of the civil society play a vital role in projecting and maintaining hegemony. Due to the August War legacy, the political elite in Georgia are more careful about repeating the Russian discourse. As a result, civil society institutions become a vital link between the Kremlin's discourse and the Georgian society. The Georgian Orthodox Church, with higher trust among the population, than any state institution, and which clearly associates itself with the Russian alternative world order, is one of the such institution. Also, several NGOs and media portals, which started appearing after the War of 2008. They are closely cooperating in projecting the West versus the Orthodox civilization discourse to the Georgian society, the majority of which sees itself as Orthodox Christian.

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\_\_\_\_\_Russia and the West: Struggle for Normative Hegemony

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