

# Political Accommodation for Democratic Stability in the Ethnically Divided and Post-Soviet Georgia

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## Abstract

*The prospected case study attempts to investigate causal relationship between democratic stability and political accommodation in a multiethnic post-Soviet country. For this aim, the major focus of the thesis is to explore those conflict resolution approaches that can ensure better political accommodation leading to more democratic stability in post-Soviet Georgia. By focusing mostly on the last twenty-five-year Georgia's post-Soviet political dynamics, conclusions drawn from the preliminary analysis demonstrate that compared to centralizing and majoritarian tactics employed thus far by the Georgia's state since the restoration of its independence, political accommodation through consensual approaches have a better promising potential for stabilizing democracy in Georgia as a result of better accommodating diversities and resolve peacefully the existing ethno-territorial disputes.*

**Key-words:** Georgia, political accommodation, democratic stability, consociationalism, integration, majoritarianism

## Introduction

### 1.1. Establishing Context

There is a widespread belief among many scholars and politicians around the world that for those countries with plural societies and deep internal divides the perspective to achieve democratic stability looks more like mission impossible and rather resorting to the authoritarian, centralizing or assimilative measures it is possible to somehow maintain unity within borders of a state and avoid secession and separatism that often are associated with highly destructive violence and bloody wars (Dahl, 2015, p. 150; Lijphart, 2004, p. 75).

However, observing carefully and closely past and recent experiences of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Syria, it can be seen clearly that despite enormous resources often added with vicious totalitarian and authoritarian approaches dispatched by the central governments of these states, in the long range period these mega, moderate or small states with highly diverse ethnic, religious, language and racial minorities, disintegrated and failed to maintain unity and stability within their borders sometimes leading even to civil or ethno-territorial wars.

On the other hand, by observing especially from the beginning of the twentieth century the experiences of the states or entities adopting more or less democratic approaches, it can be seen quite vividly that, though with various degrees and qualities, the entities or states such as the European Union, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, India, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and many others, up until today, successfully stabilized their political systems and institutions by not only ensuring security to their people but also providing them with major political rights, economic prosperity and civil liberties.

However, as many recent studies mostly in comparative politics point out is also that just like nondemocratic, authoritarian or autocratic tactics, the democratic approaches and models across countries vary significantly in their features and outcomes specifically with regard to inclusion and accommodation of minority groups. For example, as was already mentioned above, roughly two models of democracy can

be observed, one is pluralistic or majoritarian with its further diversions, and another one consensus or proportional type of democracy with its own varieties, among which convocational model to be one of the most prevalent.

By selecting the case of Georgia, as a post-Soviet multicultural state that experiences unresolved ethnic conflicts on its territory, in this thesis, the case study intends to examine potential of those democratic approaches intended to ensure better accommodation of diversities and resolving peacefully and democratically the major cleavages and conflicts.

## **1.2. Problem Statement**

Unlike the case of Yugoslavia's bloody and violent breakup, after rather peaceful demise of the Soviet Union, the transformation path of the small South Caucasian country towards democratic state-building, similar to the Balkan case, turned out to be extremely chaotic and violent. Such negative outcome was largely substantiated due to some emerging exogenous and endogenous obstructive circumstances specific not only to Georgia, but if closely observed possibly peculiar also with various degrees to other small post-Soviet or post-communist states.

Considering this scale of dramatic turns of events for Georgia appeared to challenge Francis Fukuyama's famous claim on the end of history in a way that in this case the thesis about ultimate victory of western liberal democracy was not sounded as triumphal in Georgia as elsewhere in the western part of world since briefly after the Soviet Union's downfall the newly independent country rapidly descended into political violence and chaos.

Despite some positive achievements on the bumpy road to democratic stability namely recent peaceful transfer of powers through relatively free and fair elections and steady moves towards parliamentary multiparty system through constitutional changes, subsequent adverse effects of such tumultuous transformation from *ancient* communist and totalitarian regime into the independent democratic one can be traced in Georgia's unconsolidated, unstable hybrid type of regime marred with unresolved ethno-territorial conflicts such as the disputes with the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

While, speaking of the major exogenous factors and challenges, the Georgia's biggest neighbor bordering from the north, the Russian Federation whose current political elite under leadership of President Putin proclaim the region as the Russia's privileged sphere of influence, uses the hybrid warfare tactics among them, allegedly, the existing separatist regimes on the territory of Georgia in order to undermine Georgia's sovereignty, independence and drive to be integrated in the Euro-Atlantic institutions such as the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In view of the above mentioned highly complex external and internal conditions relating to the post-soviet Georgia, the main goal the research is to find out which democratic approach has better potential to be a trustworthy model for attaining genuine democratic stability and consolidation in Georgia by means of effective political accommodation.

## **1.3. Aim and Scope of the Study**

By considering the scope and research area of the concerned topic mainly related to the comparative politics on the post-Soviet transitions along with political accommodation and democratic consolidation theories, the case study mainly aims to embark on the comparative examination of those democratic models that can offer better prospects for democratic stability in the post-Soviet Georgia through successful political accommodation.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The proposed research paper aspires to contribute meaningfully to the scientific knowledge on political accommodation and democratic stability particularly in a post-Soviet ethnically divided country. Consequently, the thesis intends to achieve this goal by mainly exploring the theory's predictive power for causal process that lead to outcomes (George and Bennett 2005, 217) in a multi-ethnic post-Soviet state such as Georgia.

Specifically, for Georgia, such positive outcome in this study is attributed to the democratic stability through successful political accommodation considering the country's ethnic, religious and language diversity and experience with ethno-territorial conflicts.

Apart from attempting to contribute tangibly for purely scholar and theoretical debates on political accommodation and democratic stabilization, the anticipated case study aspires to be a significant analytical source for those political practitioners and experts not only just from Georgia but elsewhere from other parts of the post-Soviet world, for example Ukraine, Moldova or the countries in Central Asia, who are interested in promoting better democratic stability, accommodation and peaceful resolution of conflicts in their divided societies.

As the projected research seeks to extend the empirical theory on political accommodation by linking an institutional model to the level of democratic stability in a post-Soviet ethnically divided country such as Georgia, it is expected that the ideas and argumentations articulated in the research paper are intended to contribute tangibly to the field of study by advancing knowledge in political accommodation approaches and the applicability of these models to an ethnically divided post-Soviet country.

#### **1.5. Overview of the Study**

Concerning structural organization of the thesis, it will include eight chapters within three major parts. Consequently, the first part will mostly situate the study within relevant literature and present research design and methodology of the study. It will consist of introductory section and two chapters from which chapter II will critically review the pertinent literature emphasizing major theoretical and methodological aspects and shortcomings and present how prospective thesis can fill the gap. Chapter iii will discuss the scope, design and mythology of the intended research work by elaborating on techniques to be employed for collection, presentation and analysis of data.

As for the second part, it will critically review and present the effects of minority policies, employed by the post-Soviet Georgia, on the country's democratization and political stability prospects. Consequently, the second part will be subdivided into the further four chapters in order to devote each chapter by analyzing the post-Soviet minority accommodation politics in Georgia during each subsequent rule up until today. Specific attention in this part will be paid to analyzing those policies related to constitutional amendments, changes in electoral system, education system and center-periphery relations. Consequently, the evaluation of these policies will be conducted in relation with their effects on the Georgia's democratic stabilization and efficient political accommodation of minority groups.

In the final or third part of the study, the thesis aims to present findings, recommendations, argumentations and conclusions of data analysis by offering balanced, logical and argumentative evidence-based statements for the question which democratic approach should stabilize democracy in Georgia by means of more competent political accommodation practices. Consequently, the concluding part will be divided into pair of argumentative chapters with each attempting to analyze which democratic models of political accommodation has better potential for democratic stability in Georgia in terms of ensuring civil rights and security for all citizens.

## **1.6. Conceptualization and Operationalization of Key terms in the Case Study: political accommodation, consociationalism and democratic stability;**

By conceptualizing the term political accommodation for this thesis work, the case study will mainly refer to ideas expressed by the Arend Lijphart in his book named as “Political Accommodation: Pluralisms and Democracy in the Netherlands” published in 1968.

Hence, the main idea behind the term is that when a country (in that case the Netherlands) faces sharply fragmented plural society whether divided ethnically, religiously culturally, racially or on language bases the existing cleavages among these diverging subcultures can be settled without disintegration of country, resorting to violence or causing war by mainly negotiating mutually acceptable terms for consociation but only on condition if there is at least some minimal consensus among the elites of subcultures that the existing democratic system should not be destroyed (A. Lijphart, *The Spirit of Accommodation* 1968, 104).

By considering the theories related to the political accommodation, the case study intends to identify two major democratic approaches such as pluralist-majoritarian and consensual. Also based on the Lijphart’s conception and operationalization of terms, the main distinguishing features between these two democratic models are that the pluralist-majoritarian approach tends to be more „exclusive, competitive, and adversarial” (A. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* 2012) while the consensus model inclines more towards „inclusiveness, bargaining, and compromise” (A. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* 2012) that because of these traits, the consensus approach, otherwise can be also termed as „negotiation democracy” (A. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* 2012).

Next major term in the case study that needs to conceptualize is consociationalism that can be defined as one of the democratic model for political accommodation in plural societies. As far as we are aware of notion on consociationalism, the consociational approach facilitates mostly elite level power-sharing agreements among contested political power groups in comparison with the *winner-take-all* type competition politics (Deschouwer and Martina 2012, 500) characterizing power centralization and majoritarianism.

For these very reasons, many scholars in the field, among them most enthusiastic arend Lijphart, conceive this model to be successful institutional device for political stabilization in the countries with deeply divided societies. Given that, it is important to acknowledge that the countries with deep linguistic, ethnic, cultural or religious cleavages geographically located either in Western Europe (i.e. Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Northern Ireland), South Eastern Europe (i.e. Bosnia & Herzegovina, Cyprus), Middle East (i.e. Lebanon, Iraq), Africa (i.e. South Africa), Latin America (i.e. Columbia, Uruguay) and Asia (i.e. India) at some point in their histories have employed consociational arrangements with the varying degrees of success to stabilize their democratic systems via political accommodation.

By Considering the above defined key term namely political accommodation for the intended case study, the aim of the thesis is to explore first to what extent political accommodation, as a theoretical approach and also a policy measure, can be possible in a post-Soviet country with deep societal cleavages linking accommodation theory to a more normative one such as democracy in general and democratic stability in particular (O’Flynn 2010, 573). Second most important objective of the research is to explore which one from the proposed political accommodation approaches turns out to be most suitable for the democratic stability in such post-Soviet ethnically divide country as Georgia.

Consequently, in this cases study, the conceptualization of such term as the consociational model of democracy will be mainly attributed to the Lijpart’s formulation of the concepts on consociationalism that

entail following major components: elite accommodation and behavior, proportional electoral system, group autonomy or veto power for minority groups, and decentralization of governance (A. Lijphart 2008).

Prior to define another key term such as democratic stability for this intended case study, the more normative and broader term, democracy itself, should be also described. Despite variety of idiosyncratic understanding and interpretations of the term either in academic or political spheres, in this thesis work the term democracy tends to be associated with the Dahl's notion of the five major democratic criteria that necessarily define democratic process in any country pretending to be a democratic. hence, these criteria are "effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understating, exercising final control over the agenda and inclusion of adults" (Dahl 2015, 38).

As to conceptualization and operationalization of the more particular term such as democratic stability, in any country, to the extent we are aware of the term, it can be best defined by that country's ability to ensure security for its citizens (Baglione 2012) while at the same time to guarantee that provision of security is not at the expense of infringing major liberal, democratic and human rights principles. Accordingly, the level of democratic stability in a country such as Georgia can be determined through the evaluation of the extent to which citizens of that country are of provided with political rights and civil liberties.

In addition, while defining the level of political stability in any state it is crucial to find out how big is threat of recurrence of violent internal or external conflicts in that country. Besides, with the aim to further evaluate Georgia's democratic stability level, the projected dissertation study intends to employ those variables and indicators that assess national democratic governance based on the criteria that were mentioned above, the level of corruption, electoral process, civil society, media and judicial independence.

### **Research questions and hypothesis1.7.**

***Preliminary Research Questions to be Guiding the Study.*** From general down to specific these elaborated initial versions of the research questions can be guiding the intended study on political accommodation for greater democratic stability in Georgia:

- **To what extent can political and democratic stability be ensured in Georgia through political accommodation approaches?**
- **Which political accommodation approach should Georgia adopt for its greater political and democratic stability?**

Concerning to theory improving research question, the study would like to seek to what extent the theories on political accommodation can predict democratic stability in a multiethnic post-Soviet country such as Georgia.

However, with the aim to explore deeper the Georgia's political landscape with specific attention of minority group configurations and their rights, the following case related research questions were elaborated:

- What is structure of ethnic relations that Georgia currently has?
- What are those specific patterns of ethnic politics in Georgia?
- What are the historical underpinnings for emergence and escalation of the intractable ethnic conflicts in Georgia?
- How the relationship between ethnic groups and state in Georgia can be described?
- What political attitudes do political leaders in Georgia held and what conflict management approaches they undertook?
- To what extent can major groups in conflicts agree on the core principles leading to democratic stability?
- To what extent electoral system in Georgia is an effective and democratic conflict-regulating mechanism?

***Tentative Hypotheses.*** Although, the tentative hypotheses derived from the factors that are affecting significantly on the prospects for democratic stability in Georgia can be divided into two categories, namely into external related to more geopolitical factors and internal related to more institutional, social and cultural factors, for this particular research project, because of the specific aims of the intended study, major focus will be devoted on exploring and testing hypothesis based on those endogenous causes that affect seriously on the perspectives for democratic stability in Georgia.

However, before discussing the hypothesis designed for this thesis, it is also important to briefly highlight those major geopolitical factors that significantly obstacle Georgia's attempts to ensure more democratic stabilization in the country wide. hence, firstly it should be mentioned that one of the such important aspect can be ascribed to the unstable and conflict-prone region that the South Caucasus appears to be and part of which Georgia is also and which poses significant challenge to the ethnically divided post-Soviet country to promote lasting peace along with political and democratic stability.

Moreover, it should be also underlined that the successor of the Soviet Union in the form of newly resurgent Russia, which in turn aspires to be recognized as a global superpower by expanding its sphere of influence especially in its close neighborhood mostly by means of hybrid tactics (i.e. Russia's hybrid aggression against Ukraine), seriously undermines the Georgia's sovereignty and hinders the post-Soviet country's legitimate aspiration towards integration into the Euro-Atlantic institutions aimed for ensuring better political and economic modernization along with democratic stability.

Given that, before the relative empirical data will be collected, presented and analyzed, the following sequence of tentative hypotheses, drawing from endogenous or the Institutional, social and cultural factors, were constructed:

**Hypothesis I.** The lack of experience of politics for more consensual and democratic power-sharing among political actors in Georgia often leads to violent ethnic conflicts and instabilities with often wider repercussions;

**Hypothesis II.** Georgia's political system marked by overly centralization of power and majoritarian approaches limits further the ability to better accommodate minority groups;

**Hypothesis III.** Georgia's legacy of the specific type of Soviet ethno-federal arrangement particularly manifested in the lack of culture of civic citizenship contributes significantly to the exacerbating cleavages between state and minority groups that threatens to become source of instabilities that the country faced not long ago;

**Hypothesis IV.** The lack of more tolerant and democratic attitudes among Georgian polity with regard to elaboration of better ethnic minority accommodation and integration policies;

**Hypothesis V.** The lack of unified and coherent state level strategy or even meaningful debates towards minority issues that include broader specter of the Georgia's audience protracts perspectives for resolving existing conflicts peacefully and efficiently;

**Hypothesis VI.** The lack of commitment among groups in conflicts (especially at the elite level) to bring "a lasting political resolution" (Yakinthou 2009, 103) to these protracted conflicts further undermine prospects for democratic stability.

## **Chapter II: Review of literature on theoretical and practical features of political accommodation approaches in relation to ensuring better democratic stability in deeply fragmented and multiethnic countries**

Continuing scholarly debate on selection of most workable constitutional model that can facilitate political accommodation and therefore better stabilization of democracy in countries with deep societal divides points to the salience of the issue not only among academics in comparative politics field but also policymakers and citizens in general especially those residing in ethnically divided countries.

According to a renowned Dutch scholar in consociationalism, Arend Lijphart, among the proposed democratic models that we are currently aware of, roughly two approaches, majoritarian and consensus versions of democracy can be differentiated (A. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* 2012). More specifically, though, the model of consociational democracy can be regarded as a subset of general consensus democracy pattern.

It is argued that the consensus model of democracy, if compared to majoritarian tactics of political integration especially in relation to power-sharing and accommodative traits, tends to be more characterized by “a proportional representation (PR) electoral mechanism, multi-party system, coalition governments and federal and decentralized government” (Barrington, et al. 2010, 194).

Consequently, in comparing these models in their potential for stabilizing democracy, many experts and scholars agree that for a country with deep societal divisions, consensus models of democracy can be better option mainly due to its power sharing and group autonomy attributes (A. Lijphart, *Constitutional Design for Divided Societies* 2004, 96). On top of that consensus model also fosters better political accommodation of diversities leading to democratic stability in plural societies.

it should be noted though that concerning specifically to consociational model, the some well-known academicians in the comparative politics field (e.g. Brian Barry 1975; Donald L. horowitz 1985, 2000) started to question and criticize argumentatively the reliability and universality of the consociational approach for countries with multiple identities (A. Lijphart, *Constitutional Design for Divided Societies* 2004, 99) by pointing to the idea that “there may be differences between divided societies that enable a ‘consociational solutions’ too - to bring about stability in one and not another”(Barry 1975). Besides, it is also important to observe that “consociational designs failed in Cyprus and Nigeria, and Uruguay abandoned its Swiss-style consociational system” (A. Lijphart 2008).

As a consequence of these long going debates on the uncovering best power-sharing mechanisms for divided multiethnic countries, taking place not only in academic but also in policy-making spheres, two major subdivision of approaches can be further identified often formulated as integrationist and accommodative techniques (O’Leary 2009, 15).

While both approaches share major democratic credentials and principles with each other, the main distinguishing features between these two power-sharing views lies in how each of these approaches see the roots of the emerging internal conflicts in relation with understanding the existence of multiple identities in a divided society.

Particularly, many proponents of the integrationist outlook, by seeing something threatening and unstable in dual or multiple identities, strive to support of creation the sole overarching identity from the multifaceted setting of divided countries, those with more accommodative leanings, on the other hand, by acknowledging the fact that identities can sometimes and someplace be resilient, durable and inflexible, see best solution in “encompassing dual or multiple public identities in many roomed- political mansions” (O’Leary 2009, 16)

### **Chapter III: Scope, design, methodology**

Considering the scope and research area of the concerned doctoral level research, mainly related to the post-Soviet transitions, democratic consolidation and political accommodation theories, the study firstly aims to embark on the comparative evaluation of the major approaches of political accommodation in relation with democratic stability in plural societies particularly for such post-Soviet ethnically divided country as Georgia.

Whereas to examine which model of political accommodation has most potential for the stabilization of democracy in Georgia, the method of process tracing will be employed to unlock those causal mechanisms in timeline that affect significantly on Georgia's aspiration towards better democratic stability and consolidation.

Considering the complexity of the topic and limited timeframe of the PhD program the thesis writing process will be divided into three stages. In the first stage, the introductory chapter will be developed, whereas in the second stage, the study intends to collect, present and analyze relevant data. At the final stage though, the research process will proceed with writing findings, conclusions and inferences based on the empirical data.

### **Stage of Data Collection**

At the data gathering path, the intended research focus will be pointed to the collection of the relevant empirical data mainly by employing qualitative approaches. As a result of this process, the primary and secondary sources relevant to the research questions and hypothesis will be drawn. In order to test the hypothesis and find argumentative answers to the research questions the study poses, the techniques such as interviews and surveys can be utilized to obtain primary data for further analysis.

As to further data gathering tactics limited to the issues study wants to unfold, the methods such as retrieving official documents in forms of legislative acts, governments' decrees, or policy papers will be employed. In addition, the pertinent sources in forms of the newspaper or magazine articles, research analysis, papers or books will be observed, processed and analyzed.

With regard to testing the hypothesis related to the internal causal factors that affect significantly the Georgia's prospects for better democratic stability, the primary data can be acquired through the qualitative interviews, structured or semi-structured, with experts from foreign policy or strategic study think tanks, government officials as well as representatives of academia, nGO sector and civil society including those from various minority groups.

### **Stage of Data analysis**

Further major step after collecting relevant data either from primary or secondary sources, would be codifying and categorizing the data obtained through interviews, surveys, and observations of the related literature.

### **Stage of Synthesis**

In the final stage of the intended PhD research process, next step will be to draft analysis, discussion and conclusion through synthesizing my understating of the pertinent theory and the prior research with the findings of my empirical study.



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