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EU Integration Coordination in Georgia: Evolution of the Coordination Model and Contingent Factors

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Abstract:

The paper compiles a single case study on the national EU integration coordination in Georgia since 1991 to date. The paper aims to ground Georgia's case in the existing academic literature with a detailed case description and testing of the EU integration coordination mechanisms in Georgia based on theories and models in the PA literature. Georgia's coordination mechanisms are assessed against external incentives, such as 'socialisation' v. 'conditionality' (Schimmelfennig, 2009), and classified in terms of Kassim's (2003) system of national coordination. The paper describes five distinct periods in the evolution of EU integration coordination formats: the first encounter (1991-1999); the silhouettes of coordination (1999-2004); the deliberate coordination (2004-2014); the pragmatic coordination (2014-2022) and the coordination limbo (2022 to date). EU integration coordination structures from 2004 to 2014 are likened to a comprehensive centraliser – with the centre being the driving force of the entire coordination process, with all the issues or thematic areas being depicted in respective planning documents. Since 2014, the country's approach has been compared to that of a selective centraliser, since Georgia shows signs of selectiveness in its ambitions to deliver on a nationally agreed EU policy outcome. The paper finds that, unlike prevalent patterns in EU integration coordination, the relative stagnation of the EU coordination process happens after the accession; in Georgia, this has occurred during the onset of the conditionality stage, which makes this an outlier case. In assessing the

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reasons for the weakening of the process of coordination, this case supports findings that the actor-centric approach is vital to explaining the coordination efforts (Dimitrova & Toshkov, 2007; Fink-Hafner, 2013). The paper concludes that a significant improvement of existing EU integration coordination structures is needed to build a comprehensive approach, reinforced with horizontal coordination and networking, to construct an agreed and inclusive EU integration coordination.

Keywords:
coordination models, EU integration coordination, Georgia's EU coordination structures, horizontal coordination, vertical coordination

1. Introduction

Due to the cataclysmic geopolitical development - Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine that broke out in February 2022, the Associated Trio from the Eastern Partnership countries (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) scrambled to submit their membership applications to the EU in the following month after the invasion. On June 23, 2022, the European Council granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, while recognising Georgia's "European perspective" and expressing readiness to grant the same status to Georgia once the 12 priorities are met (European Commission, 2022). This anticipated candidacy status effectively moved Georgia closer to the pre-accession countries' basket, where carrots and sticks are clearly defined. It is salient to explore whether the move towards a pre-accession stage has affected the EU coordination mechanism in Georgia from both institutional and theoretical perspectives. The key research questions that the study seeks the answers to are: what internal EU integration coordination model has Georgia established over the last three decades, and how has it evolved? and what have been the key factors determining the quality and process of the coordination of the EU integration process in Georgia?

The evolution of the coordination structures of the EU integration process in Georgia is grouped into four phases assessed against the major factors identified in the literature: what drives the Europeanisation - socialisation or conditionality (Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 8)? What is the coordination model based on in terms of coordination ambitions and coordination centralisation (Kassim, 2003), and is the EU coordination process depoliticised or politicised in search for gain maximisation by domestic actors (Dimitrova & Toshkov, 2007)? Georgia's single case study shows that the internal (political gain maximisation) and external (socialisation/conditionality) pressures are affecting the choice of coordination models and the effectiveness of coordination, revealing, however, the evidence that the domestic political considerations seem to have a greater effect on coordination efforts.

The research method used is qualitative, primarily expanding existing theories using a new case – the evolution of Georgia's EU integration coordination mechanism.

The paper draws on primary sources - pertinent government decrees, laws, reports as well as thematic academic literature on the case studies of EU integration coordination and theories and models of EU integration coordination. The research is designed as a single case study of the national EU integration coordination in Georgia from 1991 to date. The design choice is justified as the main objective of a case study is to provide a comprehensive description of a new case (Creswell, 1998; Van Evera, 1997, pp. 50-54). Moreover, this single case design is informed by a theory and is considered a more useful approach to a case study in PA research (Garson, 2002). According to Van Evera (1997), process tracing tests theories using observations within cases (p. 56). This article extrapolates expectations from theories using a thick literature review and then tests whether we observe the same outcomes in the case of Georgia. Thus, the research design has three primary purposes: to fill the gap in the literature regarding the case description; extend the relevant EU coordination theories to a new case, and contribute analysis to the practitioners involved in EU integration.

2. EU integration coordination: definitions, models and theories

2.1 Definitions of coordination

Coordination can be interpreted as a concerted action between different parts of the system to achieve a common goal (Mienkowska-Norkiene, 2014, p. 867). Lindblom and Scharpf refer to negative coordination, which implies the prevention, reduction, or balancing of conflicting decisions by specific agencies; and positive coordination, which focuses more on collaboration between agencies, producing synergistic effects to create better quality services (Peters, 2018). As one aspect of positive coordination, Peters (2018) discusses strategic coordination, which refers to the mutually agreed actions between agencies to fulfil the broad strategic goals of the government. Peters (2018) also emphasises that during coordination, it is vital to involve the lower-ranking structures of the participating organisations in the process and the upper ranks. The above avoids "political conflicts over resources and the interpretation of laws" because it aims to create real services and provide them to users (p. 3).

Wright (1996) defines coordination as a "channel that extends from that within each ministry and inter-ministerial coordination (of both vertical and horizontal nature) at the domestic level to coordinating the domestic-EU interaction and then to coordinating within Brussels" (p. 149). According to Wright, EU policy coordination is complicated due to:

a. the high institutional and procedural density of EU affairs;
b. the high committee volume;
c. the complexity and fluidity of procedures;
d. the lack of control over agenda setting;

e. the weakness or absence of channels of co-ordination in the EU;
f. the dependence on bargaining, networking, and coalition building;
g. the impact of the changing size of the Union;
h. an evolving agenda;
i. and a range of skills and resources and administrative mismatch (Wright 1996 cited in Kassim et al., 2000, pp. 8-10).

Kassim et al. (2000) expect both convergence and distinctiveness in the member states who are interacting within the EU institutional framework (pp. 12-19). According to Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007), regarding EU policy, due to its intergovernmental and supranational nature, coordination arrangements "frame, channel and condition the national input to the European level and the European impact on the national level" (p. 961).

Considering the objectives of the presented research, which examines the coordination of implementing EU integration coordination among the public agencies of Georgia, we define coordination as the centralised management of actions of interdependent agencies and adjustment of coordination through vertical and horizontal arrangements, including hierarchy, networking, and collaboration, to deliver national policy at the EU level and to achieve a declared goal of EU integration.

2.2 Coordination challenges in relation to models of public administration

Weberian and the NPM models differ in the degree of integration of public organisations and interinstitutional coordination. The Weberian model, characterised by vertical accountability schemes, implies centralised control as the basis of effective coordination (see Davoudi & Johnson, 2022; Bouckaert et al., 2010; Peters, 2018). In contrast, NPM, with its focus on organisational efficiency, internal goals, and performance, is based on the deconcentration of power, a high degree of independence of individual agencies, horizontal relations and communication, and flexible subordination schemes (Hood, 1991; Rhodes, 1997; Davoudi & Johnson, 2022; Bouckaert et al., 2010).

In the scientific literature, the tendency towards disintegration is considered one of the main disadvantages of the NPM (Osborne 2006, 2010; Lægreid et al., 2014; Christensen, 2012, cit. in Davoudi & Johnson, 2022), as it leads to the separation of public policy and management processes, making vertical coordination increasingly difficult (Baier et al., 1986, cit. Davoudi & Johnson, 2022). Agencies with high autonomy coordinate less with other agencies than those with low autonomy (Bjurstrøm, 2019). Specialisation, one of the important values of the public sector, is considered one of the most undermining factors of coordination (Peters, 2018).

Vertical coordination and integration of public institutions are essential aspects of

organisational and sectoral development and create public value to "bridge public programmes and policies with their implementation" (Davoudi & Johnson, 2022, p. 2). However, despite the clear superiority of the Weberian system over NPM, the central dilemma of coordination is that, in the modern environment, a Centre of Government (CoG) institution consisting of vertical, hierarchical structures must solve problems that are horizontal and complex by nature (Brown et al., 2021; OECD, 2018).

NPM reform has been an accepted way of increasing state efficiency and overcoming bureaucracy in many countries since the 1980s. Even in countries where the Weberian model dominates, the NPM tools are widely used (Dan & Pollitt, 2015). In order to avoid the above-mentioned sectoral disintegration and the narrowing of policy processes in separate fields, it is important to focus on policy integration (Peters, 2018). Thus, bringing the vision of centralisation and integrated policy implementation into the NPM paradigm is unavoidable. Moreover, the complexity of the problems the states face leads to the need for increased interagency coordination and communication. Very little policy remains under the domain of one specific ministry or agency. However, requires joint cooperation between public sector actors, not only of a vertical but also a horizontal nature.

On the other hand, the excessive rigidity of the hierarchical system of the Weberian model and the low level of independence of agencies may promote formalisation and bureaucratisation of the process and prevent them from creating public value. Modern developed states use the crucial tools of coordination introduced through NPM, including networking, horizontal communication, and informal relations (Palmatier et al., 2007, cit. in Davoudi & Johnson, 2022). Without them, coordination processes cannot be effective. OECD recommendations indicate the necessity to develop collaborative leadership skills at facilitating and supporting the activities of ministries and less at command and control. Such a system will contribute to the establishment of horizontal relations and the solution of complex, cross-cutting political tasks (OECD, 2018, p. 43).

In the example of Georgia, we can discuss the effectiveness of coordination processes within the framework of both the Weberian and the NPM models. Practical implementation of the NPM reforms in 2004-2009 brought both positive and negative results. Among the first, the development of public services and e-government, the increase in efficiency and flexibility of public organisations, and the overcoming of administrative corruption should be named. However, simultaneously, it led to the sector's fragmentation at the expense of the development and reformation of individual line ministries, extreme inefficiency of coordinated public policy processes, and high politicisation. In order to respond to the emerging problems, the Public Administration Reform (PAR) started in 2014 within the framework of the Association Agreement with the EU. It introduced the Weberian career of professional public service. However, even under this approach, the effectiveness of the coordinated implementation of public policy remains questionable.

2.3 Theories and cases of EU integration coordination

There is still an acute lack of studies that review coordination structures of pre-accession and accession countries, even though the pre-existence of coordination structures is extremely important in their long-term development during accession talks and after the EU membership as well (Dekanozishvili & Kapanadze, 2015; Dimitrova & Toshkov, 2007; Heyen, 1992). Therefore, although the current article concerns Georgia's coordination of EU integration, the literature is reviewed on the pre-accession and post-accession coordination processes.

Christensen et al. (2016) have employed two theoretical approaches to explore what determines a specific coordination choice. A structural-instrumental perspective emphasises that a choice of structure of public administration can affect the quality of coordination while choice depends on administrative executives' perceptions. According to the cultural perspective, informal values and norms rooted in the historical institutional traditions of political-administrative systems influence decision-making (Selznick, 1957, cited in Christensen et al., 2016, p. 319). According to this view, public sector ethos, public values, and trust determine how bureaucracy acts and thinks. Different administrative traditions or cultures represent filters producing different coordinating patterns in different contexts (Christensen et al., 2016, p. 319). Such explanatory variables as norms, identities, 'logic of appropriateness', and 'path-dependency' (March & Olsen, 1989; Krasner, 1988 cited in Christensen et al., 2016, p. 319) are at work. Therefore, from this perspective, specific organisational values lead to specific choices of coordination mechanisms. Gärtner et al. (2011, p. 79) suggest that historical institutionalism and a focus on resources might be the best approach to studying why the diversity in coordination models is prevalent.

According to the widespread notion in the literature, once a country moves into the stage of a conditionality-based framework of interaction with the EU due to pressure to comply with acquis requirements, it either transforms existing coordination structures or creates new ones (Dekanozishvili & Kapanadze, 2015; Dimitrova & Toshkov, 2007). Kassim et al. (2000, p. 15) suggest that coordination of EU policy at the national level depends upon the political opportunity structure within the country. Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007) argue for a similar actor-centric approach: administrative change most often follows the formation of a new government as "actors benefit from one organisational configuration more than from another, and as a result, they try to achieve the more beneficial institutional arrangement." (p. 977). External conditions (less conditionality v. more or vice versa) provide an opportunity for politicians, especially the new governments or new coalitions; however, change is constrained by historical and institutional legacies, but the core causal logic that explains variation across CEE is gain maximisation by governments.

In their study of 16 central and eastern European countries' coordination systems, Dekanozishvili and Kapanadze (2015) have singled out indirect coercive institutional isomorphism as the most salient factor causing transformation or formation of coordination structures due to "formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations

by other organisations upon which they are dependent" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Dekanozishvili & Kapanadze, 2015, p. 65).

In her single-case study on Slovenia, Fink-Hafner (2013) posits that in the case of post-communist countries, four factors influence national systems of coordination regarding EU policies: 1) functional pressures from the EU; 2) the evolving national party system; 3) existing politico-administrative traditions and 4) informal decision-making between the EU and Governments during a global crisis (so-called "informal intergovernmentalism"). The study finds that in Slovenia, "politicisation of EU business due to national and EU-level factors" occurred in the post-accession period. Fink-Hafner (2013, p. 39) defines „politicisation" as "the emergence of differences in the EU, expressed through party competition over policy content, the domestic management of EU policy, and the role of senior officials in EU processes". According to Fink-Hafner (2013), all four identified factors have brought about the politicisation of EU matters in post-communist countries.

In a classic study, Kassim (2003) has developed a four-pronged system of national coordination based on two dimensions: coordination ambitions and coordination centralisation. Hence, there are four coordination types: comprehensive centralisers; comprehensive decentralised; selective centralisers; and selective decentralised. Coordination ambition is related to member states' desire, whether they wish to construct an agreed national position on the full range of EU policies or contrary, they have only selective ambition focusing on some policy issues. Regarding centralised systems, all national representatives present coherent positions, and EU affairs are conducted at CoG, with overall coordination and dispute settlement powers. In decentralised structures, there is no single authoritative actor. EU affairs are conducted by respective ministries and or subnational governance structures that enjoy a veto or cannot be easily bypassed by the centre (Kassim, 2003, pp. 90-91).

According to conventional knowledge, the higher the leadership level, the more coordination authority. Network coordination is either an alternative or a supplement to the hierarchical mechanism. It implies the interaction and interdependencies between government and non-governmental actors, government and civil servants, and cross-sectoral cooperation (Christensen et al., 2016, p. 318). Based on the study of six countries, Christensen et al. (2016) found that no single principle of organisation dominates the crisis management area. Regarding causal assumptions, the quantitative study found that the cultural dimension (path-dependency and administrative culture) influences perceptions of coordination quality more profoundly than structural features (p. 328) and that hybrid systems are more prevalent in times of crisis, provided that a good enough culture of coordination is present (p. 330).

According to the Fink-Hafner study (2013), although during the accession process, EU external scrutiny conditioned modernisation, including in public administration, the post-communist culture of subjecting every policy area to politics has persisted and produced variations in the process of coordination efforts on EU matters as the external pressure was lessened post-accession. Change in the national

party system from a multi-polar to a bipolar structure has also led to the politicisation of at least certain aspects of EU policies (Fink-Hafner, 2013).

Gärtner et al. (2011) adopted the Kassim model to check the state of coordination in the new EU member states that joined in 2004 and 2007 and added the 12 new members to the existing 13 countries, giving us the most comprehensive overview of the national coordination systems to date:

1) Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia are comprehensive centralisers, along with some old member states - France, the UK, Sweden and Denmark.
2) Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia are comprehensive decentralisers from the new states, along with Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany and Belgium.
3) Malta is the single selective centraliser, along with old member states: Portugal, Spain and Ireland.
4) Estonia, Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus are selective decentralisers.

Research shows that there is no dominant coordination model. Systems are less centralised than expected, administrative structures conduct the brunt of the work. There is no observable distinction between the new and old Member States, except that four new Member States fill the previously blank selective decentralisers category, an outcome that the authors explain due to limited resources forcing a selective approach (Gärtner et al., 2011, pp. 94-96).

The abundance and or scarcity of resources is also deemed central to effective coordination efforts in other studies (Kassim et al., 2000; Wright, 1996; Panke, 2010). According to a study of domestic coordination of EU policies in 19 smaller EU member states, achieving good negotiation outcomes is exacerbated for small states due to the lack of resources (Panke 2010). Effective coordination happens when three factors are at play "good cooperation between Permanent Representations and the lead ministries, autonomous lead ministries that prioritise EU work and good inter-ministerial conflict resolution systems" (Panke, 2010, p.770).

Many authors support the same thesis that in post-communist countries, depoliticisation of the civil service due to external EU scrutiny during the pre-accession and accession period was partial, while the EU coordination systems were downgraded and politicised after attaining full membership (Verheijen, 2007; Dimitrova & Toshkov, 2007; Beblavy, 2009; Batory, 2012). Meyer-Sahling has found that change of power between governing parties that are polar opposites also affects the general level of politicisation of public administration. That effect is due to the communist past rather than the prevailing modes of politicisation found in Western democracies (2008).

3. Analytical framework

To answer which internal EU integration coordination model has Georgia established

over the last three decades and how it evolved, the study below provides a detailed case description starting from Georgia's first encounter with the EU to date, denoted with such cooperation agreements as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Association Agreement (AA) and finally the European perspective and the anticipated candidacy. Regarding factors affecting coordination ambitions, the reviewed literature identified two key factors determining the quality and process of the coordination of the EU integration – socialisation, as a more internally driven stimulus or conditionality, and as a more externally driven stimulus (Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 8). The study adopts the socialisation and/or conditionality character of relations generally associated with these historical formats as one of the frameworks, against which the coordination efforts are studied.

To determine the quality of coordination, the authors analyse key documents (strategies, action plans) that outline coordinated efforts and instruments, as well as the forms of activities and commitments of different agencies to achieve a common goal. The documents officially manifest the government's intended planning, implementation, monitoring, and reporting actions for the EU integration coordination process. The case also describes coordination structures –inter-ministerial and intra-ministerial mechanisms that set the formal and informal rules for information exchange, giving assignments, and decision-making on the matters of the EU integration coordination process. Power relationships and a position in the decision-making chain hierarchy significantly affect the coordination process's effectiveness. Therefore, the study involves pertinent regulations and official documents (decrees, orders, ordinances, agreements, and the like) that govern the coordination processes. Analysing their evolution and change against the backdrop of changing cooperation formats with the EU will provide findings informing the research questions.

To further distinguish stages with discernible characteristics in the historical evolution of EU policy coordination mechanisms in Georgia, based on the literature review above, the analysis will adopt Kassim's (2003) four-pronged system of national coordination based on two dimensions: coordination ambition and coordination centralisation. In each period, the governments' coordination ambition will be identified against the background of historical facts (whether the government devoted full attention to EU policies or selectively focused on some policy issues). It will assign qualifications for each period based on the model.

Thus, the analysis will focus on the interplay of the external and internal incentive structure against the backdrop of the historical evolution of the coordination mechanism in Georgia. Furthermore, since the debate on the influence of external-internal incentives is divergent in the literature, the analysis will dwell on which side of the argument is strengthened by this case. According to the literature review above, some authors find that high external stakes are the best stimuli for intensification of the Europeanisation efforts, thus having the most effective coordination mechanism. In contrast, others argue that the political opportunity structure within the country and

the calculations of political gain maximisers weigh in more heavily in determining the coordination ambition, not the level of external incentives. The interplay of internal and external stimuli and the existing level of ambition and centralisation will be summarised into a table to reveal the full nature of the case study based on the authors' chosen analytical framework.

4. Evolution of Georgia's EU integration coordination

4.1 First encounter (1991-1999)

Georgia has established a cooperation framework with the European Community (EC) from the outset of its independence. At that time, this cooperation primarily included financial and humanitarian assistance that Georgia's struggling socio-economic situation required. Moreover, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the EC did not have any political, social, or economic vision toward the former Soviet constituents. It was only in 1991 that the EC speedily designed and started implementing the Technical Assistance Programme to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS). The Programme had a generalised approach to the 12 participant countries[4] with the overall objective to "help individual states to develop effectively functioning market economies based on private ownership and initiative, and to encourage the development of pluralistic democratic societies" (European Commission, 1992). There have been other EU support programmes as well. Notably, humanitarian assistance has accounted for € 160 million and has, in particular, helped combat very serious humanitarian situations in the mid-90s. During the 1992-2004 TACIS programme, national allocations represented more than € 110 million and the Food Security Programme has disbursed over € 70 million (European Commission, 2005). Such technical support required systematised coordination efforts from the government, thus contributing to forming an early ad hoc coordination process with the EC.

4.2 Silhouettes of coordination (1999-2004)

In 1996 the European Union and Georgia signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), primarily providing technical assistance in governance and economic and social development. The Agreement came into force in 1999. The objectives of the PCA were to establish a framework for political dialogue between the Parties and a basis for legislative, economic, social, financial, civil scientific, technological, and cultural cooperation to consolidate Georgia's democracy and develop its economy to complete the transition into a market economy (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, 1999).

The PCA also established a Cooperation Council tasked to supervise implementing this Agreement. The Council was supposed to meet at the ministerial

4 Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. Mongolia, not a member of the Soviet Union, was also included in the TACIS programme.

level at least once yearly (Article 81). The Council included members of the Council of the European Union and of the Commission, while from Georgia's side, the members of the Government of Georgia were to participate in the meetings (Article 82).

The above, presumably, pushed the Government of Georgia to establish the first-ever horizontal coordination mechanism on EU affairs. Almost a year later, on 27 July 2000, the President of Georgia established a "Government Commission to Support Georgia-EU Partnership and Cooperation" and introduced its Rules of Procedure. Initially, this Commission had eight members, of which three were not even members of the Government of Georgia, and half represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Minister of Foreign Affairs chaired it, and 5 out of 18 ministers at that time were members of the Commission. The President (chair of the Government) did not participate in the meetings (President of Georgia, 2000).

In addition, another parallel coordination mechanism was established in 2001 - "Coordination Council for Cooperation with the EU". The mechanism was intended as a higher-level coordinating body, with the President acting as its chair. The council had 18 members (both political and civil servants), and the main objective was to support the country in the process of its "approximation with the EU", which was set as "one of the main foreign policy priorities" of Georgia. Out of 18 members, 10 were from the Government (President of Georgia, 2001).

4.3 Deliberate coordination (2004-2014)

The change in the political leadership of Georgia in 2003, with a strong vision and ambition to pursue the country's Europeanisation process, was a strong impetus for the Europeanisation and, thus, advancement of the EU affairs coordination structures within the Government.

In 2004, after the adoption of a new Law on Structure, Powers, and Rules of the Government of Georgia (Parliament of Georgia, 2004), the President introduced a new position of "State Minister in European Integration Affairs" (President of Georgia, 2004). On December 31, 2004, the Government established an Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration (OSMEEAI) (Government of Georgia, 2004). The State Minister was charged with coordinating the European and Euro-Atlantic Integration process. The State Minister also served as the Vice Prime Minister of the cabinet, which increased OSMEEAI's political significance and visibility in the governing structures. The above was quite a unique and unparalleled decision since, at that time, Georgia did not have a European perspective. Unlike Moldova and Ukraine, Georgia did not have any provisions for free trade in the PCA. Thus, the EU did not consider the possibility of signing an association agreement with Georgia at that time (Gogolashvili, 2017, p. 7).

OSMEEAI had wide-ranging functions in Georgia's EU integration process, often substantially overlapping with the MFA. Some of the key functions included:

a) Coordination of the development and implementation of the strategic action plan of the Government of Georgia, its implementation and monitoring;
b) Cooperation with the EU institutions (European Commission, European Council, European Parliament, and the like);
c) Providing regular and direct contact with the European Union and NATO missions to Georgia, and cooperation with Georgian embassies in EU and NATO member and candidate states to promptly exchange analytical and current information.

In addition, the same year, the Government of Georgia established a new political-level coordination mechanism – "Georgia's EU Integration Governmental Commission" (Government of Georgia, 2004). The Commission replaced the abovementioned two coordination mechanisms – "Government Commission to Support Georgia-EU Partnership and Cooperation" from 2000 and "Coordination Council for Cooperation with the EU" from 2001. Two major changes underpinned the creation of the new EU Integration Commission. One was related to the composition – almost all ministers from the Cabinet, except for the Minister of Defence and the Minister of IDPs and Resettlement became members of the Commission. The Prime minister became the chair, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the State Minister for EU integration acted as deputy chairs of the Commission. Another one concerned function – the commission was charged "to coordinate work of different state agencies to facilitate the EU integration process". However, most importantly, it was tasked to support the Georgian legislation harmonisation process with the EU acquis.

In 2006, after the inclusion of Georgia in the European Neighboured Programme (ENP), the Georgia-EU Council adopted a 5-year ENP Action Plan, which had eight priority areas and included hundreds of concrete actions to be implemented jointly (EU-Georgia Cooperation Council, 2006). In addition, OSMEEAI, in cooperation with the relevant ministries and governmental agencies, started developing annual Action Plans for implementing the ENP in the Logical Framework Matrix that provided specific measures to achieve the priorities of the Action Plan. Overall, the implementation of the plan and reforms were positively assessed by the EU (European Commission, 2014). In addition, during 2004-2014, Georgia was also included in the Eastern Partnership Programme. Georgia also concluded the Readmission Agreement through these coordination mechanisms and launched negotiations on the Association Agreement and Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP).

Such achievements in the EU integration agenda could not have been achieved without proper analytical, administrative, and technical support, most notably without an effective horizontal coordination mechanism. Alongside overarching structures, the Government would periodically create working groups or ad hoc Commissions that reinforced the specific EU integration agenda and provided for reinforced horizontal coordination as a supplement to the existing hierarchical coordination via networking and collaboration on the PCA, the ENP, and the DCFTA (Government Decree # 93,

1994 cit. in Kapanadze, 2015, p. 114; Government Decree #112, 2005; Government Decree #195, 2005; Government Decree #78, 2009). All of the ad hoc structures successfully completed the given tasks: the PCA, the ENP, and the DCFTA agreements had been concluded, and their implementation was either completed or is ongoing (i.e. in the case of DCFTA).

4.4 Pragmatic coordination (2014-2022)

Significant shifts were made in the coordination structures in 2014 as the three Eastern Partnership countries - Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine signed the Association Agreements (AA) including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). These Agreements represented a significant step forward for Georgia in its EU integration process.

From the coordination perspective, it is essential to mention that although there was a peaceful turnover of power in Georgia in 2012 from one ruling party to another, the new government did not make any significant changes to the existing EU integration coordination mechanism, while drastic changes in other areas were observed. The only shift was the demotion of the State Minister for OSMEEAI to a regular cabinet member, removing the title of Vice Prime Minister. This decision was primarily associated with the distribution of the portfolios among the coalition government parties and their functional roles. However, the decision was criticised because an Office with no "extraordinary political status or leverage mechanism" would be unable to negotiate position and lead the reforms' implementation process (Khoshtaria, 2015, p. 118).

In 2014, the Government of Georgia issued a special decree outlining special measures (preparation and division of labour) to sign the AA and adopt the Association Agenda (Government of Georgia, 2014). In particular, at the highest political level, the EU Integration Commission had to ensure overall guidance of the process, while at the technical, level three coordinators were designated:

1. OSMEEAI was charged with developing a policy for the AA implementation, coordination, and monitoring within the government and elaborating annual and bi-annual plans and annual implementation reports through coordination with all the ministries involved. However, another novelty was that the Office was tasked with engaging civil society in the process.
2. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to coordinate and lead the negotiation processes with the EU.
3. The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MoESD) - a third and a new central player in the EU integration affairs, was tasked with leading overall coordination and monitoring of implementing the DCFTA through the elaboration of the DCFTA part of the annual Action Plans and Reports.

Other line ministries were tasked with working with the abovementioned agencies in their respective areas. A year later, in 2015, a new decree was issued calling on the line

ministries to designate and strengthen the structural units dealing with the EU integration affairs within their institutions. Moreover, they had to appoint deputy ministers responsible for the process internally.

Creating ad hoc formats for reinforcing specific EU integration tasks, hence, reinforcing the existing vertical coordination with horizontal coordination efforts also continued in this period. One significant ad hoc arrangement was creating a "working group for dialogue between Georgia and the European Union for further liberalisation of the visa regime" (Government Decree # 2365, 2014). The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs headed the working group, and the group reported to the EU Integration Commission. It was tasked with taking appropriate measures in coordination with the government commission on migration issues, developing Georgia's position, and conduct a dialogue on introducing a visa-free regime with the EU. The process was successfully concluded in 2017, and Georgia received a visa-free status with the EU.

In 2016, the Government of Georgia replaced the statute of the EU-Integration Commission adopted back in 2004 (Government of Georgia, 2016). The new document added two new important functions to the Commission's scope: supporting the legislative approximation process (the previous version focused only on harmonisation); and developing a long-term strategic communications policy to raise societal awareness of the EU integration process.

A significant shift in the EU affairs coordination structure was the merger of OSMEEAI with the MFA in 2017, which was part of the Government restructuring process, when the number of ministries decreased from 16 to 13, and the position of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration was abolished. The changes were justified by the "optimisation of the government" structures, and it was alleged that this move had no political context regarding the importance of the EU integration process. However, in practice, the perception emerged that the coordination system may have suffered from this change, considering the importance of the political level leadership in centralised governance systems, such as Georgia. The State Minister had political authority and ensured higher legitimacy to the EU integration process (Kapanadze, 2015, p. 109).

Despite this change, since 2018, under the leadership of the MFA and MoESD, the EU integration coordination systems have been further reinforced. In particular, electronic planning and monitoring systems were launched, and limited guidelines for the line ministries became available.5 In addition, there were attempts to establish administrative-level coordination mechanisms under the Commission. However, this has yet to gain the recommended functionality (OECD/SIGMA, 2018).

5 For the Association Agreement – www.aa-monitoring.ge For the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement – www.dcfta.gov.ge

4.5 Candidacy limbo (2022)

As Georgia received a membership questionnaire from the EU on April 11, 2022, the government coordination system faced heightened pressure to prepare a national response with a favourable outcome at the EU level. The impromptu EU Integration Commission sitting was convened on 15 April 2022 to coordinate the Questionnaire Response Preparation process. The MFA was tasked with coordinating the process at the technical level, and informal "special working groups" were formed to document the response. On May 2 2022,responses for the first part (political) were submitted to the EU by the Government of Georgia. On May 62022, another EU Integration Commission sitting was held to finalise the second part of the questionnaire.

Judging by the urgency and the speed, the existing coordination systems proved their capacity to deliver on the emerging new tasks. However, the outcome of the process did not result in being granted the status. While there is no direct evidence to attribute the outcome to the lack of an effective coordination system, there is a body of evidence that could ascribe this shortcoming to ongoing and increasing politicisation (as defined by Fink-Hafner, 2013) of the EU integration coordination as well as selective approach to realisation of EU integration policies, to be analysed below.

5. Quality of the coordination

Two key elements determine the quality of coordination in public administration: the effectiveness of existing coordination instruments and individual ministerial structures in the EU coordination process.

5.1 Coordination instruments

Until the candidate status is granted, the AA remains the key framework for the EU - Georgia cooperation. Therefore, in parallel with the 12 conditions, the state agencies are implementing activities as identified in relevant planning documents such as the Association Agenda. The document aims to facilitate implementing AA by creating a practical framework through which the overriding objectives of political association and economic integration can be realised (EU-Georgia Association Agenda, 2014).

Going into a more operational level, the principal coordination instrument for the Government of Georgia is the National Action Plan for Implementation of the Association Agreement (NAPIAA). The Action Plan includes short-term activities organised per the AA or the Association Agenda articles. The plan's template also covers the activities' results and output indicators that need to be filled in, as well as responsible agencies. However, based on the analysis of the previous three action plans, the following quality-related challenges can be identified (NAPIAA 2021, 2022, 2023): 1) lack of reform-oriented activities, 2) repetitive activities from the previous years, 3) lack of results-based planning and 4) inexistence of the budget.

DCFTA Annual Action Plans are also developed (part of the NAPIAA). These

action plans also suffer from the same quality challenges described above, except for the identified budgets for most activities. In addition, DCFTA plans have goals and objectives identified but do not have any result indicators (Annual DCFTA Plan 2021, 2022, 2023).

In 2018, OECD/SIGMA assessed Georgia's EU integration coordination mechanism against the European Principles of Public Administration. Three principles out of 12 in Policy Development and Coordination set the standards for the EU Integration framework. The result of the assessment of Georgia's framework was relatively low – 10 out of 16 on "clear horizontal procedures", 5 out of 16 on "A harmonised medium-term planning system" and 4 out of 17 on "systematic and timely transposition of the European Union acquis" (OECD/SIGMA, 2018).

The analysis found challenges in aligning NAPIAA with the central planning documents. Civil servants' capacity at the centre and in line ministries involved in EU Integration affairs still requires further development. SIGMA made several recommendations for further advancement of the EU coordination structures (OECD/SIGMA, 2018). However, a review of the implementation of the recommendation in 2021 by the agency showed that most of the recommendations had not been fully implemented, though a certain degree of progress was observed.

5.2 Coordination structures within state agencies

Currently, 14 state agencies are part of the EU Integration Commission, out of which 13 are members of the Cabinet, underlining the high political decision-making and the whole-of-government nature of the supreme coordination mechanism. Out of 14, 10 agencies have a specially dedicated unit dealing with the EU integration process (either at the 1st level or 2nd level). Out of these 10, none of them have a minister directly responsible for the unit, and only two are subordinated to the first deputy minister. In the rest of the cases, deputy ministers ensure oversight of these units.

Surprisingly, the key CoG – the Administration of the Government of Georgia – does not have any structural unit that deals with EU integration. Neither its statute identifies such function in the list. Currently, it can be considered that at the working level, the MFA is the central coordinating body of the EU integration process in Georgia. Since the merger in 2017, the MFA introduced the Directorate General (DG) for the EU Integration in its structure. Currently, the DG has two structural units: (1) the EU Assistance Coordination and Sectoral Integration Department and (2) the European Integration Department. A third structural unit in the MFA – the Department of Europe, is also responsible for bilateral relations with European countries (Statute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005).

Although the EU Integration coordination structures under the MFA seem complex and, to some degree, duplicative, its main weakness lies in the need for more power to force the processes. The DG is not directly subordinated to the minister, or even to the first deputy minister. In practice, this may impede the DG and its structural

units from effectively coordinating the EU integration process horizontally across the government. In addition, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is not a vice PM, as once was the case right after the merger. Moreover, according to the European Principles of Public Administration, the CoG shall be reviewing all government draft legislative acts to ensure conformity with the EU acquis, which the MFA needs to do. The ministry staff, traditionally staffed with diplomats, lack expertise in the sectoral reforms that the EU integration process entails. Although a high level of each sector-specific proficiency is optional, some degree of relevant knowledge and skills is important for effective and quality coordination. The MFA does not have a relevant profile.

The Ministry of Finance, one of the key CoG institutions in Georgia, has a substantially low profile in the process. A secondary structural unit within the ministry – the European Integration and Programmes Service – is established under the Public Debt Management Department. However, neither the statute nor functional description provides information on how these two are related and how the Ministry discharges its supposedly key function in European integration.

The Ministry of Justice – yet another CoG – also has a dedicated unit (EU Law Department) responsible for analysing the compliance of Georgian legislation with EU law sources (regulations, directives, decisions), if necessary, amending or drafting normative acts, as well as a legal examination of draft normative acts developed by various agencies in order to approximate/harmonise the Georgian legislation with the EU regulations (Government of Georgia, 2013). However, the SIGMA study found that their opinions are issued inconsistently (OECD/SIGMA, 2018, p. 11).

6. Analysis of the EU integration coordination process in Georgia

The case study reveals that Georgia's EU integration coordination structure and the quality of coordination have been evolving vis a vis the interplay of internal and external factors. After gaining independence, Georgia's EU integration coordination structure was nascent. Despite significant contributions to the EU's stabilisation efforts (namely the TACIS Programme), these did not translate into forming a coordination structure in Georgia then. Although the Programme's design required horizontal coordination across the government agencies (given that priority areas were intersectoral), in Georgia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the main interlocutor for implementing the Programme activities, and no systematised coordination mechanisms emerged. Thus, until 1999, Georgia's first encounter with the EC/EU was based on socialisation with select areas marked for cooperation.

During 1999-2004, an emerged silhouette of coordination served as an initial step for introducing the horizontal coordination mechanisms for EU integration across the government of Georgia. Nevertheless, in practical terms, it did not bring significant outcomes regarding EU integration. The PCA and the relevant structures significantly

raised EU-Georgia relations to higher levels. However, significant Europeanisation or the sectoral integration of the country could not yet be observed (Gogolashvili, 2017, p. 8). The PCA fostered comprehensiveness of EU integration cooperation; however, relations still denoted by socialisation and politicisation needed to be higher as no conditionality was involved. Although some coordination mechanisms emerged in the year 2000, these did not entail the formalisation of significant coordinating structures within the government.

Since 2004, the election of a Euro-enthusiastic government pushed Georgia toward more deliberate coordination. Establishing a special ministerial agency dedicated to the EU integration gave a strong impetus for developing the coordination mechanism. It equipped it with high political legitimacy, leading to the development of respective capacities of the staff and networks. The above represented a major upgrade to the existing vertical and horizontal EU policy coordination structures within the government of Georgia. The strong political will (internal drive) and change in the EU's interests towards the region (external drive) contributed to such a dramatic shift. In particular, in 2003 the EU adopted its first European Security Strategy, emphasising the importance of stability in the region and that the EU should "take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus, which will in due course also be a neighbouring region" (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 10). In addition, completing the most extensive enlargement cycle in 2004 (10 new members from Central and Eastern Europe) created incentives for other aspirant countries' governments to further their own integration processes. Such efforts have resulted in tangible outcomes for Georgia: the design of the ENP and the country's inclusion in it (Rinnert 2011, p. 6). The ENP, for its part, rested on the two key principles of cooperation between the EU and partner countries: joint ownership and differentiation. It has also established a conditionality approach - the EU would support the partner countries by offering rewards or incentives based on progress in priority areas, requiring establishing effective coordination mechanisms, which has finally operationalised the PCA through robust monitoring, reporting, and review by existing coordination mechanisms (European Commission, 2004). Thus, Georgia's EU integration mechanism was strengthened in response to the conditionality requirement of a more robust cooperation. Notably, during this period Georgia's public management model was implicit, without any legal codification, of the NPM character, resulting in some positive effects on the EU coordination system, as the CoG approach was aimed at efficiency and goal-oriented performance, resulting in not only the vertical coordination structures but also the horizontal approach, reinforced by networking and collaboration via the creation of goal-oriented ad hoc supplementary structures.

In 2014, the AA and DCFTA promised the country significant economic and political benefits, which would only be achieved with an effective coordination mechanism. Nevertheless, the abolition of the OSMEEAI in 2017 impacted on the EU integration mechanism and the processes, with the quality of coordination being challenged while the rest of the parameters remained the same. This period was marked

by a stronger conditionality as much as the AA, Visa Liberalisation, and direct budgetary support from the EU required a more solid coordination mechanism. However, unlike in the previous phase, the internal drive was weakened after the 2020 elections as EU policy implementation regarding Copenhagen criteria was interpreted by the ruling political party as uninvited power-sharing recipes that could lead to a higher and more democratic redistribution of political power.

In 2022, especially after the presentation of the 12 priorities as a precondition for gaining the candidate status, the introduction of the partisan approach left Georgia's more or less functioning EU integration coordination system in a state of limbo – the implementation process of the 12 conditions has sidestepped nearly all the existing EU integration coordination mechanisms. The ruling party, purportedly through the Parliament of Georgia, took over the process. Moreover, it was the chairperson of the "Georgian Dream" (GD), not the Speaker of the Parliament, who delivered a press briefing from the party office on 1 July 2022 and presented the action plan on how they intended to meet the 12 priorities outlined in the European Commission's opinion (Political Party "Georgian Dream", 2022).

This decision was primarily justified based on the political nature of the 12 priorities, and thus, Parliament's legislative role was deemed paramount. However, most of the priorities could still be coordinated through existing EU integration coordination structures, with increased participation of the Parliament, especially considering that most of the agenda items were part of the AA. Furthermore, considering the complexity of the intended reforms, the involvement of all branches of Trias Politica and civil society was significant not only in principle but also in practical terms, as inclusiveness was point number 10 in the 12 EU conditions. Such an approach has led to weak implementation of the 12 priorities (State of Implementation of 12 Priorities, 2023).

According to the internal political discourse by the ruling party - GD, these preconditions became interpreted as recipes for losing the existing dominant distribution of political power, giving birth to perceptions that the clash between the government's power centralisation domestic agenda and the country's external, foreign policy agenda is imminent. The emergence of party competition over the EU policy content has been brewing since the 2020 elections and became most acute in 2021, denoted by such instances as the non-fulfilment of the April 2021 agreement brokered by Charles Michel, the President of the European Council as well as weak implementation of the 12 conditions and perceptions of backsliding of democracy in Georgia (Brzozowski, 2023). This clash has led to the over-politicisation of the EU integration agenda and, thus, contributed to the weakening of effective coordination, paradoxically at a time when Georgia is on the threshold of becoming an accession country (Giuashvili, 2023). Although preparations for the membership process require an even more robust and more effective coordinating system, no single meaningful change or update has been observed in the country's EU integration coordination system since Georgia applied for EU membership in March 2022.

Sidestepping a well-established coordination mechanism and transferring the pulpit to the ruling party limited the opportunity to advance the institutional framework to the next level. Extreme politicisation also conditioned a more selective nature of the coordination. The frequency of the EU Integration Commission sessions held in this period indicates the weakening of political will and selective centralisation. For instance, during the 2004-2014 period, 51 Commission sessions were held, while from 2015 to May 2023 – at a time when coordination should ideally have accelerated considering the AA/DCFTA, visa-free, and later the membership application – there were only 15 sessions, showing the selective approach to the EU coordination from the CoG.

Table 1:

Summary of the key aspects of the EU integration coordination process in Georgia

Stages of Coordination	*Coordination Lead Agency*	*Socialisation/ Conditionality*	*Comprehensive/ Selective*	*Centralised/ Decentralised*
First encounter (1991-1999)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Socialisation	Selective	Centralised
Silhouettes of coordination (1999-2004)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Socialisation	Comprehensive	Centralised
Deliberate coordination (2004-2014)	OSMEEAI	Weak Conditionality	Comprehensive	Centralised
Pragmatic coordination (2014-2022)	OMSEEAI (2014-2017) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018-2022)	Conditionality	Selective	Centralised
Candidacy limbo (2022-)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Conditionality	Selective	Centralised

Source: Authors' own, 2023.

7. Conclusion

The single case of evolution of Georgia's EU integration coordination mechanism revealed that in Georgia, the structure has been primarily following the Weberian model – with a strict hierarchy and delegated functionalities to the line ministries and agencies. In primarily Weberian public administrations, prevalent in most eastern European countries, including Georgia, the coordination mechanisms are assigned to the CoG institutions, as is the case in Georgia. Although this is crucial for effective coordination, a streamlined horizontal approach is needed for a better alignment of planning and financial resources, oriented towards achieving stated objectives in a harmonious and timely manner. The paper shows that Georgia has also developed horizontal coordination structures along with the CoG approach.

Regarding centralisation and effectiveness of coordination, the studies discussed above have consistently shown that change in the coordination model towards strengthening effectiveness is prevalent during the accession period. The weakening and politicisation of coordination usually occur after the membership has been accomplished. Regarding Kassim's model, from 1991 to 2014 Georgia's EU integration coordination is that of a comprehensive centraliser – with the centre being responsible and a driving force for the entire coordination process and all the issues/thematic areas being depicted in respective planning documents. Since 2014 and especially after 2022, the coordination approach resembled that of a selective centraliser, revealing that the case of Georgia is a deviation from the dominant academic findings, as the politicisation of the coordination structures started before the accession talks, while this primarily happens after countries achieve membership of the European Union (Verheijen, 2007; Dimitrova & Toshkov, 2007; Beblavy, 2009; Batory, 2012; Fink-Hafner, 2013). Hence, the single case study in this regard supports Dimitrova and Toshkov's (2007) and Fink-Hafner's (2013) findings that the actor-centric approach is the key causal factor in explaining the coordination efforts together with other factors. This case points to the need to research further the interconnection and precedence of internal over external factors in the EU integration coordination. Further studies may reveal those variables at the domestic level that take precedence over external factors and condition different outcomes in terms of the effectiveness of domestic coordination of EU integration policies before and during the accession talks.

Once Georgia is granted the candidate status, a significant improvement of existing coordination structures in terms of CoG ambition to construct an agreed and inclusive national position instead of the current selective ambition will be necessary. There is a need for clear political support from the central coordinating body to realise the goal of EU integration if the country is to continue with a comprehensive centralised model of EU integration. Such an approach demands that the national EU integration coordination system is better informed and positioned to collect, streamline, analyse, and use information from different sectors to deliver a response at the EU level commensurate with the declared national goal of the EU accession for Georgia.

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