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**Revaz Janashia**

**e-Governance: Missed Opportunity of the Revolutionary Government. Case of Georgia**

Revaz Janashia

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Scott Radnitz

Talant Mawkanuli

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# University of Washington

## Abstract

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Revaz Janashia

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Associate Professor Scott Radnitz

Jackson School of International Studies

This given thesis examines the circumstances around the introduction of the e-Governance in Georgia. It argues that after the Rose Revolution, the incumbent regime was extremely well-positioned to reform the very fabric of the society and the state itself. However, on the path of the democratization the Information and Communication Technologies were used in a limited way. Furthermore, the characteristics of the regime paired with the internal and external issues posed serious threat to the success of the e-Governance in the first place. The lack of any prior experience in this field, also played a major role in the failure of the new regime. And finally, it is argued that during the rule of the new government a perfect chance at employing the technologies for the benefit of the many was missed.

## Glossary

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization. Non-profit organization working for the benefit of the public.
<b>DEA</b>	Data exchange agency. Georgian LEPL founded in 2010 to promote the use of ICTs in the public sector reform.
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Institution promoting change in the society through the financial investments.
<b>e-Governance</b>	application of the ICTs at various levels of the government and the public sector and beyond, for the purpose of enhancing governance. It primarily involves governance as approach not government as institution
<b>e-Government</b>	describes the use of ICTs by state, local and federal agencies to enhance their activities, engage wide spectrum of the citizens and provide government services through effortless interaction.
<b>EU</b>	The European Union. Union of the European Countries initially organized as

the coal cooperation organization and later transforming the very fabric of the European Politics.

**FSU** Former Soviet States; In this case mainly Baltic and Caucasus countries

**ICT(s)** Information and communication technologies used to affect the very fabric of the society.

**IDPs** Internally Displaced Persons. Usually after the conflicts or some natural catastrophes.

**IDFI** Institute for Development of Freedom of Information. Georgian non-governmental organization working mainly on the freedom of information and e-Governance issues in Georgia.

**NAPR** National Agency of Public Register. Georgian state agency under the Ministry of Justice.

<b>PSH</b>	Public Service Hall – Georgian innovation in public administration combining the ICTs and bureaucracy to work on the one-stop principle, by providing all the services to the citizen in one place.
<b>Rose Revolution</b>	2003 revolution in Georgia, that resulted in Eduard Shevardnadze’s resignation over the accusations in meddling the parliamentary elections and wide-spread corruption.
<b>TA</b>	Transparency International. International human rights watchdog.
<b>UNM</b>	United National Movement – leading coalition that emerged victorious in the parliamentary elections after the Rose Revolution
<b>US</b>	United States of America. The only superpower in the world after the end of the Cold War.
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics. 1922-1991

## ***1. Introduction:***

During his 2005 visit in Tbilisi, Georgia the United States (US) President George W. Bush argued that we are living in unprecedented times when freedom is spreading from Black Sea to the Caspian Sea, to Persian Gulf and beyond (*US. White House Archives, 2005*). For the first time in the history of Georgia the US president was addressing the public from the Freedom Square in Tbilisi. However, things did not develop as Mr. Bush had predicted. In the most of the states he was addressing breeze of Freedom came in the form of the “Arab Spring”. Yet, Mr. Bush’s visit to Georgia signaled a dramatic change, consequence of the 2003 “Rose Revolution” in Georgia; which in turn initiated the process of reforms aimed at changing the core foundations of this state and society.

Revolutions happen to change the very fabric of the society. There are number of different ways one can imagine a society close to the ideal one. For some this is what comes to mind: a society with low unemployment rates, high living standards and environment-friendly policies. The list is obviously endless. Thus, it is clear that based on the personal preferences it can be further enriched and personalized.

Vital component of such society is the state itself. State is the definitive form of reference when it comes to the political life (*Abrams, 1988*). The concept of state had been long forgotten in Georgia, as a result of Russian and subsequent Soviet rule. Current understanding of the state has seen drastic changes throughout the past decades. It can be argued that it is no longer sufficient to provide basic goods and services to the public like healthcare, security, freedom of speech. The list has increased and now includes the active participation of the public in the decision-making. Arguably, this has always been the critical part of the functioning democracy. These were the issues the new Georgian government had to tackle with.

Modern progress in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) allows the state to reach the far greater number of its citizens. Remote geography and the costs of the citizen participation have been dramatically reduced due to the technological advancements. More and more states are exploring the possibilities of the ICTs as they decrease budgetary spending and the need for the excessive bureaucracy. Estonia ditched the standard paperwork from the year 2000 and replaced it with electronic documentation, which allowed the state to save up to 192.000 Euros yearly (*Napetvaridze, 2014*). In addition, the ICTs provide more transparency and assist in the successful elimination of the so-called “petty corruption”.

This is a rather optimistic view of the state and the impact of the ICTs. Nevertheless, the development of the ICTs gives hope that some statements from above can be met to certain extent. Some argue that ICTs enable societal changes if the conditions, necessary for the realization of its full potential are set up (*Da Silva J., 2005*). Successful utilization of the ICTs requires public sector to take active role in the process. This in turn creates favorable conditions for the business sector and advances innovative civil society. Thus, the country becomes “a more efficient and effective public sector offering integrated, secure, and high quality e-Services. Improved usage and participation enable ICT-driven sustainable economic growth” (*Twinning – A Digital Georgia: e-Georgia Strategy and Action Plan 2014-2018*).

ICTs promote the use and implementation of Electronic Governance or e-Governance to achieve the abovementioned conditions. Besides economic benefits, e-Governance eliminates the widespread corruption throughout the governance system and creates favorable conditions for the timely delivery of the services for the citizens. These are very promising prospects for the countries of the Former Soviet Union (FSU); for many of these states graft serves as an informal state institution and dealing with it poses serious issue (*Darden, 2008*). Two countries of the FSU: Georgia and Kazakhstan have been often noted as the successful stories of the ICT implementation, with Kazakhstan being the leader

of the region not including the Baltic States (*IDFI E-Governance and E-Transparency – International Tendencies and Georgia, p.32; 2011*).

This paper will study the establishment of e-Governance in the republic of Georgia and analyze its role in the revolutionary government's agenda. It will be argued that it represents a missed opportunity for the number of reasons. For the success of the e-Governance it is vital to set up the necessary conditions so that it can thrive. Thereby, the measures Georgian government took after the 2003 "Rose Revolution" at reforming the country unfamiliar with the concept of the rule of law, underperforming in democracy and plagued by the corruption are of utmost importance to this paper.

One of the reasons why Georgia was chosen is its remarkable success in the implementation of the ICTs in the public administration. United Nations (UN) in its annual e-Government report has continuously ranked the achievements of this state extremely high. Nevertheless, UN's e-Participation index ranking of the states based on the citizen input in the public administration through the ICTs has been low or steadily declining for Tbilisi (*UN e-Government and e-Participation report, 2017*).

The incumbent government of Georgia after 2003 was outspokenly Western oriented; with its aspirations towards the European Union (EU) and continuously working towards the implementation of the European values inside the society and government. It also demonstrated support for the concept of "Good Governance" put forward by the Obama administration (*Digital Georgia Action Plan 2014*) and trying to emulate the success of the Baltic states.

However, the new government had to start from scratch and reform almost all aspects of the state. Thus, its views on e-Governance and subsequent role of this concept in the democratization process and its importance to the revolutionary government's agenda represents a rather unexplored area. Little to nothing has been written about this topic and this paper is an attempt to contribute to the scholarship by filling this gap. At first glance, it might seem that technology is being unilaterally

praised for its role in improving management and governance. Some studies suggest that this is not always the case (*Jho, 2005*). Thereby, technology becomes an “end” rather than the “means” in such cases; which raises the question whether the development of ICTs serves: government, citizens, or technophiles. Thereby, the hypothesis put forward by this study may be formulated in the following manner:

After the 2003 Rose Revolution, the incumbent government launched series of reforms aimed at modernizing all aspects of the state and the society; introducing the ICTs to the country was part of this process and further democratization of the country. However, the role of the e-Governance in the agenda of the new regime never developed past the technological advancements in this field since the attitude of the ruling party was to modernize public sector through the introduction of the e-Government and never to promote the input from its citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the governance process. The authoritarian nature of the Saakashvili’s regime, paired with the total control over the public sphere did not create favorable environment necessary for the success of the e-Governance. In addition, to the domestic issues, the foreign tension with the Russian Federation, limited the financial capabilities of Georgia, as well as put other issues at the top of the agenda.

The main focus will be the attitudes of the Georgian government that took office after the events of 2003 and maintained it till 2012 towards the concept of e-Governance and ICTs in general. And their perspectives on its importance in the democratization process of the country. Thus, this particular paper will be done in a case-study manner. There were pros and cons for the single-case solution. According to the common knowledge this method is more suitable for the hypothesis generation (*Flyvberg, 2006*). Some define case study as a great way for the detailed examination of the event and analyze one instance (*Mitchell, 1983*). Since the cases studies always decompose into the sequences of events (*Falleti & Mahoney, p.214*), which in turn can be further decomposed using spatial, temporal and other attributes. This approach seems most natural for this type of paper. For the within the case

analysis: the process tracing method is the most useful tool. More precisely the inductive process tracing is the most suitable: as it allows deriving propositions and formulating sequences from empirical observation (*Hall, 2013*). With regards to the sources primary sources will be the public/press statements of the Georgian officials on the topic; state formulated documents governing this sphere and the state run web-pages set up by the revolutionary government. The secondary source will be the United Nations (UN) data on electronic government survey.

Furthermore, it will be crucial to understand the motivation of Georgia, as why did it invest in the ICTs in the first place; whether it used its own funds for this or was encouraged to do so by other states/donors. What were the characteristics of the regimes when dealing with the civil society and democracy in general; how did the international society look at the progress of Tbilisi in this sphere; what did they miss.

## ***2. Research Design***

The following research aims to understand the incentives of the revolutionary government in the use of the ICTs. Obviously, the new leadership had to start from scratch and reform all aspects of the state and the society itself. After the dissolution of the USSR it was necessary to modernize the country and to adapt it to the new realities. Hence, it is important to understand the role of the new technologies in this process of the modernization. To be more precise, how important the revolutionary government assumed the technologies to be.

In the aftermath of the Rose Revolution the new government had the support from the public to push for the reforms. After the two civil wars and collapsed economy (*Sammut & Cvetovski, 1996*) the country needed change. Most importantly it was necessary to get rid of the corruption plaguing

the state and create effective democratic governance (*Freedom House, 2003*). e-Governance offers a lot in the elimination of these problems. Hence, it should be the reason why Georgia invested into this field. However, things are not so simple. And what were the external and internal challenges throughout this process is something that has not been studied widely. To better understand to what extent Georgia used the ICTs, as well as, what were the specific steps it undertook and mistakes made, this study has been designed in the following manner.

Firstly, this research lays out the core principles of the e-Governance and the ICTs in general. It identifies what do they mean and the current scholarship on them. This study also discusses the benefits offered by them and why states might get interested with employing them. Additionally, it identifies the specific tools to measure the success of Georgia in the implementation of the ICTs and e-Governance in general. Thereby, when the case-study is done it is easier to measure the revolutionary government's progress.

Secondly, the study is divided into two main phases before and after the 2008 August War between Georgia and Russia. This war has been a watershed for the new government. It greatly affected the internal politics of the country as well as the development speed. This paper argues that the implementation of the ICTs suffered greatly from this war, since its progress was hindered. The country had to allocate money and resources to deal with the aftermath of the conflict, rather than spend funds on the development of the ICTs.

In addition, this war marks the end of the initial phase of the ICTs' introduction to the state of Georgia. Before this conflict the country received limited support in the development of the ICTs and its own expertise and creativity were minimal. However, afterwards it initiated major changes, which put Georgia on the map as the pioneer of the e-bureaucracy. After the war, Georgian interest in the use of the ICTs as well as foreign support increased and yielded amazing results. This paper will

analyze why this happened. Despite, some great progress after the 2008 the technical and budgetary restraints experienced before this date were replaced by other issues.

The post 2008 situation with the e-Governance in Georgia discusses the abovementioned change. Saakashvili and his government became increasingly authoritarian: limiting public space and citizen involvement in the decision-making. The analysis of the speeches by Mr. Saakashvili, as well as general layout of the ICTs during this period greatly assist this research in the identification of the e-Governance challenges. The lack of the political will for the growing civil involvement present throughout this period seriously limits the development of the successful e-Governance. To what extent exactly is a major point of discussion in this paper. This change of issues limiting success of the e-Governance is the cornerstone of this research. Understanding whether the technical difficulties or the absence of the political will are the recipe for the failure of the e-Governance will greatly benefit other developing countries and give clear lesson to the donors about the pitfalls they need to avoid.

### ***3. Current Scholarship on e-Governance: its Peculiarities and Major Components:***

Before this study shifts to its main focus – the case study of Georgia it is important to clarify that the concepts this paper is dealing with are contested and frequently debated upon their scope and “true meaning”. Thereby, this paper addresses this situation as a “Definition Crisis”. There are actually number of such crises.

Definition of the e-Governance itself varies. e-Governance in short can be described as application of the ICTs at various levels of the government and the public sector and beyond, for the purpose of enhancing governance (*Holmes, 2001*). It primarily operates on these levels: Government-to-Citizen

(G2C); Government-to-Business (G2B); Government-to-Government (G2G); and Government-to-Employee (G2E) (*Garson, 2006*).

UNESCO defines it as the “public sector’s use of the information and communication technologies with the aim of improving the information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective. e-Governance involves new styles of leadership, new ways of debating and deciding policy and investment, new ways of accessing education, new ways of listening to citizens and new ways of organizing and delivering information and services. e-Governance is generally considered as a wider concept than e-Government, since it can bring about a change in the way citizens relate to governments and to each other. e-Governance can bring forth new concepts of citizenship, both in terms of citizen needs and responsibilities. Its objective is to engage, enable and empower the citizen”(www.unesco.org).

The concept of the governance incorporates many things: governing, rule, authority structures and domination (*Tiihonen, 2004*). Some have claimed that the term governance is still notoriously slippery and for good reason (*Pierre, Peters & Bradford, 2001*). Last decades have had their say in this concept. With some arguing that governance implies various modes of interactions and institutions from public to private and the third sector (*Wignaraja, 2000*). Thus the UNESCO’s definition of the e-Governance should not come as a surprise. It should rather be understood as the evolution of the governance concept itself. In this sense, it can be argued that the third sector comprising generally from CSOs is the vital component for any form of governance electronic or conventional. However, citizen-input is much more important for the e-Governance.

e-Government on the other hand describes the use of ICTs by state, local and federal agencies to enhance their activities, engage wide spectrum of the citizens and provide government services

through effortless interaction. Its definitions vary by the parties involved. Nonetheless, the key characteristic remains the same – use of ICTs to support government operations and provide government services by transforming the nature of the public interaction with business sector, citizens and other governments (*Leitner, 2003*).

The difference between these two can also be tracked to the technology and its importance. Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley (*2006, p. 129*) for instance develop a concept of “techno-centric” model where technology has become “ends” instead of “means”. This concept further reinforces the underlying idea of e-Government which is about delivering services with reliable and comfortable top-notch ICTs. This approach emphasizes the ease of interaction between government services and its users. However, it completely disregards any input from the users (citizens, businesses) effectively excluding any form of their participation and even creation of e-Governance. Such approach has already raised concerns among the civil society (*Jho, 2005*) as it only treats users as consumers of services, whereas e-Governance with its focus to engage citizens and general civil society in decision-making “encompasses the participatory aspects of democracies” (*Niyrenda and Cropf, 2010. p. 25*).

Despite many different theories arguing about the subject of the e-Governance and its subsequent differences with the e-Government; they all agree about the major components they are made up from. Laune and Lee in their 2001 study – “Four Stage E-government Model” suggest following four stages:

1. Cataloguing: This stage implies the online presence of the government; establishing the web-pages of the government agencies.
2. Transaction: This stage marks the start of the population interaction with the government via online means. This is when the bilateral relations between society and government take place.
3. Vertical Integration: This stage describes the relationship between Federal and State Governments; connected between each other for different functions and services.

4. Finally, the Horizontal Integration: this stage discusses the integration which includes different functions and services. (*Laune & Lee, 2001*).

World Bank Study – “Three Phases of E-Government” on the other hand identifies three levels of e-Government:

1. Publish Level: The information about the government and produced by the government is showcased on the state web services and is being updated on regular basis.
2. Interact Level: This is when the two-way communication is possible; this phase marks the start of the feedback from the state official, which in turn are responding to online user input.
3. Transact Level: This phase implies that citizens are able to obtain government services online and they can access direct links to all the state offered services through governmental web-pages. (*World Bank, 2002*).

Civil society is a major component of the successful e-Governance and further sustainable democracy; however, it has its own issues. It is often described as indivisible element of the governance and suffers from inconsistency in its definition (*Seligman, 1992*). Ever since the publication of Alexis de Tocqueville’s “Democracy in the United States” the studies linking civil society and democracy have proliferated throughout the world. With many empirical evidence that the quality of public life and the performance of social institutions are heavily influenced by the norms and networks of civic engagement (*Putnam, 1995*). Collaboration with the public is essential for the promotion of the democratic values and accountability (*Fung, 2006*).

Moreover, public input can potentially provide the information to the managers for the better allocation of the public resources and subsequent efficiency of the policies (*Moynihan, 2003*). Cooperation with the public is crucial for the success of government policies; it improves the results and raises the acceptance of government endeavors. This is what e-Governance largely promotes

through the use of the ICTs. Whereas, e-Government only utilizes ICTs as a medium conveying its services disregarding the message. Civil society, thus, needs to be included as the key participant in the decision making process for the proper governance and e-Governance.

There are various applications of the Electronic Government. However, the key concept always involves the communication with the public. Modern world where online-oriented governments are becoming increasingly popular has pushed for the emergence of the e-Government focusing on the external communications. This unprecedented shift to e-Government according to Margetts (2012, 456) has positively affected the government which in turn became “externally facing”. However, one should not forget that this applies to different extent to the various state agencies.

Moreover, what Margetts calls the revolutionary change is just a new phase in the Public Relations (PR). Government agencies have always employed some sort of PR for the purposes of the public administration. Although, Margetts grasped the most vital characteristic of the e-Government – external communication and the general orientation towards the active interaction with the public; e-Government in itself should not be viewed as the purpose rather it should be understood as the means towards the goal – public interaction (or PR).

A leading figure in the field of PR – James Grunig (1997) has claimed that a well-done government PR is a symmetrical communication between the public and the state. PR provides the place for the government accountability. The concept of accountability has been identified as the integral part of the functioning democracy.

PR in this sense serves number of goals: a) it informs public and promotes the idea that the well-informed citizens are key to the sustainable democracy; b) it helps government to be in touch with the population providing them with the first-hand information on the sensitive political issues, thereby, strengthening the support within its constituents and c) it assists the government agencies to fulfil their

duties with the assistance of the informed public. This falls under the Government to Public (G2C) characteristic of the e-Government and makes the PR feel like the natural venue for it. Thus, implying that the scope of ICTs constitute the natural boundaries of the state apparatus and the civil society has little to do with the inner bureaucracy of the state.

The evolution of the ICTs allows the government to be more responsive to the public which is so vital for the PR. In addition, the popular social media platforms provide great opportunity for the citizen input and government responses (*Thomas. 2012. 190-193*). This opens up new opportunities to engage with the citizens. Whether, states should rely on extremely popular social media platforms remains a question though.

It can definitely be the part of the successful e-Government policies. However, Thomas should have put greater detail to the fact that states need to enrich their own capabilities like: improving government web-pages to provide the space for the citizen input; provide the chat option where citizens can ask questions directly and get answers in real-time; provide forums for the discussions and many more.

Another great way to enhance e-Government capabilities is the utilization of the free online resources (besides social media) by the state for its purposes – informing citizens/promoting state services. This, often no to low cost investment is a great e-Government strategy for the state that seeks not to improve its ICTs but serve the public. Often the controversy with the ICTs arises from the fact that it is unclear whom they benefit.

When utilizing online services like Youtube, iTunes it is possible to meet the purpose of the e-Government – interacting with the public and maintaining government transparency with the lowest imaginable budgetary expenses. This has been put in practice during Obama's healthcare act in 2010

(Lee, 2010. 263). Thus, Lee argues that it is a great way to engage with the public, but misses out on the greater picture that it is just one successful PR strategy enabled by the e-Government.

e-Government can be much more than the medium for PR. To better understand its various applications, it is necessary to examine the concept: “e-Government is the use of ICTs, and particularly the internet, as a tool to achieve better government” (OECD, 2005, 11). Moreover, e-Government is the application of the ICTs to benefit all the citizens via the creation of the “new mode of public service” (Silcook, 2001, 88).

Silcook’s definition underlines the widespread application of the ICTs within the government enhancing the state services and developing new digital ways of delivering them to the public. However, the issue with this approach is rooted in its self-imposed limitation – enhancing current government services instead of introducing new approaches. The implementation of the ICTs is always focused on this aspect rather than revolutionizing the service, mere evolution is sought after.

The idea of delivering services via ICTs to the citizens belongs to the realm of public administration. Thus, it is a vital component of the modern functioning government. ICTs are obviously sophisticated means of enhancing the government capacities by changing the approaches within the public administration. This has led Atkinson to characterize the e-Government as the “reengineering government” (2001).

However, the reengineering does not by itself imply the radical changes, its meaning can vary from full reimagining to the adaptation to the new reality. Locating e-Government within the old concepts of the public administration as pursued by the government before the tremendous changes in technologies. It is necessary to be cautious when applying Atkinson’s term towards e-Government as it might take away any possibilities for the democracy enhancement ICTs hold. Since, he is limiting

them being only good as the means of the public administration for the state service delivery improvement.

Another issue with this approach is the interchangeable use of e-Government and e-Governance. As seen above e-Government addresses the use of ICTs for the benefit of the citizens and as it belongs to the field of public administration in the online world the term e-administration can be used interchangeably when discussing it. e-Governance on the other hand “encompasses the participatory aspects of the democracies” (*Nyirenda and Cropf, 2005, 25*). Thereby, it disregards the limitations of the e-administration and brings into the picture the citizens. Such definition opens new opportunities for the use of ICTs as it introduces the participation concept and citizen-input in the decision-making.

It is necessary to proceed with caution when discussing Nyirenda and Cropf’s definition as the distinction between government and governance has been identified as steering versus rowing (*Osborne and Gaelber, 1992*). The abovementioned application of ICTs as part of the e-administration falls under the steering definition. e-Governance, on the other hand, has the possibility to bring the rowing aspect to the table. It all depends on the goals set by the state. Yet, ICTs provide effective means to the government to include the citizen participation in the decision-making process for low to no cost for the state.

This is probably the most difficult task for the ICTs as the history of developing two way interactions between the government and its citizens via the Internet has demonstrated (*Song, 2002, 49*). Again, Song has cornered himself with the evidences that governments generally prioritize ICTs for the purposes of e-Administration and PR rather than building the sustainable ways in which citizens can participate in the decision-making process and make input in the governance.

This inherent ability of ICTs to increase transparency and reduce the costs of citizen participation in the democracy have forever linked the e-Governance with the idea of sustainable democracy.

Research, on the other hand, claims that the e-Voting has no effect on the citizen turn-out or their interest in political affairs (*Feick, 2007*). This does not necessarily mean that ICTs do not promote democracy though. What Feick has demonstrated is the fact that ICTs by themselves have little to no effect on the election processes. Decision-making, however, is a completely different field.

It has been already showcased that there are numerous advantages of the citizen participation in the decision making process: a) citizens learn more about the government b) they gain skills to become activist citizens c) gain some control over the political processes (*Irvin and Stansbury, 2004*). This works both ways as the government itself: a) gains more legitimacy b) mitigates the risks of the new policy approvals by the public and c) builds trust with its citizens.

This has already been successfully tested in South Korea. There, the deliberate use of the ICTs for the e-Governance purposes resulted in the civic groups becoming the formidable force in the Korean politics (*Choi and Wright, 2004*). Furthermore, the subsequent success of the ICTs in the elimination of the corruption in Seoul's self-government (*Cho and Choi, 2004*) provides a great argument for the democracy promotion abilities of the technologies. It creates the so-called Cybering of the democracy dimension: this is the effect internet has on the public space as it creates new and unregulated sphere where government control was initially minimal, thus, allowing citizens with different political ideas to express themselves (*Saco, 2002*). The "access control" towards what is allowed to see and do in the internet is a great way to achieve this goal (*Deibert&Palfrey, 2010*).

The progress in the ICTs has not gone unnoticed. ICTs have increasingly become part of the public administration and more and more governments are seeking to have well-developed e-services using the current achievements in the field. Turkey has been one of such countries. "Adoption of e-Government Services in Turkey" by Murathan Kurfali is a study investigating the underlying factors influencing the citizens' decision to use state e-Government services in Turkey. One single finding of

the utmost interest from Kurfali's work is the implications of Trust of Internet and how it translates into the improved levels of trust of government.

Kurfali's survey involved 529 participants and was done online. The sampling was based on the method of purposive or confirmatory sampling which is a non-probability sampling method and seeks to identify participants most relevant for the purposes of the study. However, the 529 respondents were mostly from the Informatics Association of Turkey as they were regarded as the natural users of e-Government. Thus, his findings cannot be regarded as generalizable.

Another Scholar Vladimeri Napetvaridze in his 2014 study: "Establishing of E-Governance in Georgia and Republic of Moldova: Problems and Perspectives" takes the same route as Mr. Kurfali and relies on the online survey for his primary source. This is a rather common tactic when studying the e-Governance in general; however, for the purposes of this paper it is not applicable. This study examines the attitudes of the revolutionary government towards e-Governance and its important in their agenda. Thereby, a different direction had been chosen.

#### ***4. Case of Georgia before 2008***

Before discussing the case of Georgia after the Rose Revolution, it is important to briefly touch upon on the situation leading up towards it. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union Georgia regained independence and under the nationalistic government of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia – pioneer for the fight of the Georgian freedom from the Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics (USSR). Despite his solid resume as a well-documented anti-Soviet dissident, Georgia was internationally isolated for his nationalistic policies targeting ethnic minorities in the so-called South Ossetian (Samachablo Region) and Abkhazian autonomous republics. As a result, the separatist wars broke out in these regions.

Domestically Gamsakhurdia's policies were not popular either and he was accused of not bringing the change of the system but rather "changing of the guard" (*Parsadanishvili & Dobbins, 2007*).

In the subsequent civil war that ousted Mr. Gamsakhurdia, Georgian elites invited the former USSR Minister of the Foreign Affairs Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze. He was soon elected as the president of the country (*Ekedahl & Goodman, 1997*). His rule was characterized by the clan structures dominating all the aspects of the state and the society; wide-spread graft system and the complete absence of the rule of law (*Wheatley, 2005*). Meddling in the 2003 parliamentary elections by Mr. Shevardnadze was the final straw for the public. The ensuing protests led to the president vacating the post and calling for the new elections. Which saw the young, US educated reformer – Mikheil Saakashvili and his united opposition party – United National Movement (UNM) emerging victorious. Mr. Saakashvili, subsequently, became the next President of Georgia winning the extraordinary presidential elections in 2004 by overwhelming majority of 96% (*OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, 2004*).

After the Rose Revolution in November 2003 Georgia received immense support from the United States in its reforms (*Ielys, 2015*). Huge sums of money were allocated towards the modernization of the country. Although, it is often believed that the rapid development of the country after 2003 was solely due to the new government under Mikheil Saakashvili and tons of money invested by the US (*Anabe, 2006*). It is worth to note that Saakashvili's government also took credit for the many reforms initiated and planned during the previous government. However, the question whether these reforms would be successful without the regime change is something no one will ever be able to answer fully.

Mr. Saakashvili's government had to reform almost all aspects of the state and the society itself. One of the major motivations for the FSU country to invest in the ICTs was and is the ever raging systemic corruption. As of 2003 Georgia was steadily ranked as one of the most corrupt states in the

whole Eurasia (*Transparency International, 2003*). This has been the cradle of all the problems plaguing the countries like Georgia emerging after the collapse of the Soviet Union (*Legvold, 2016*).

This problem had become so potent that it penetrated all levels of the state and the everyday life. It had even penetrated the higher education, effectively crippling the ability of these countries to produce highly qualified personnel. Thus, limiting their progress and development. For instance, it was almost impossible to get admission into the university without paying bribes. This system was already taken for granted and majority of the professors were managing it so well that they were nicknamed – “Academic Barons” (*Rostiashvili, 2011*). These profiteers, obviously, were in opposition to any kind of reforms aimed at changing the status quo and privileges they enjoyed for decades.

It was already mentioned that many reforms that the UNM got credit for were initiated during the Shevardnadze’s government. Likewise, the reforms in the higher education were initiated by the World Bank in 1999 and culminated in the creation of the National Assessment and Examination Center (NAEC) (*World Bank, 2012*) a year before the Rose Revolution. This study does not aim to discredit the gains of the Saakashvili’s government. Although, the reform started before his rule, no actual change happened before the ousting of Mr. Shevardnadze from the office. Without the new president’s dedication to change the system and subsequent support of the reform it would have been almost impossible to ensure fair proceedings in this sphere.

Maia Miminoshvili’s story is the great argument for the point presented above. She served as the head of the NAEC for years. She spearheaded the project from the start and was working with the World Bank. Later, she served as the Education Minister for some time after the Rose Revolution, before going back to managing the NAEC. She was unmatched for her dedication to the reform of the education sphere. Thanks to her efforts the NAEC was able to successfully eliminate the corruption and for the first time in the history of the independent Georgia it was possible to get admission to the

University without the bribery. Her resolve was highly praised on numerous occasions. With President Saakashvili going so far as claiming that the fact that her own son failed the admission tests, only indicated how uncorrupted she was (*Mchedlishvili, RFERL, 2012*). Her story perfectly sums up the idea that although reforms started during Mr. Shevardnadze they materialized during Mr. Saakashvili's rule. The latter, did not disregard the qualified personnel and great projects. On the contrary, he made their success possible in the new Georgia.

Although, the ICTs did not play major role in the reforms of the education sphere. It is important to understand that for the successful e-Governance setting up the proper environment free of corruption is vital. The role of the ICTs was minimal and only translated into the formation of the web-pages for the newly formed bodies governing the fair acceptance into the university (*Rostiashvili, 2011*). One such case of minimal ICT involvement was the creation of the [www.naec.ge](http://www.naec.ge) a web-portal for the National Examination and Assessment Center. According to the previously mentioned stages of e-Government this fact constitutes the "Publish Level" – when the web-page displaying state agency's activities is created and updated for the convenience of the public; limiting any two-way interaction (*World Bank, 2002*). Despite some changes to the portal it did not transform to the higher levels where the interaction or feedback from the citizens would be possible during the UNM rule.

This result should not come as a surprise. Since the World Bank itself did not have any expectations that ICTs would in some way change the outcome of their project. World Bank served as a donor in this particular case and assisted the Georgian government greatly in the process of changing the corrupt system (*Rostiashvili, 2011*). However, it is important to understand that The use of the ICTs with the purpose of reforming the education sphere was obviously welcome, but, not required. It was more of an additional feature rather than inherent component of the reform. Thereby, it can be said with the great assurance that the initial role and expectations of the ICTs in the

transformation of Georgia was quite minimal from the perspective of donors as well as Mr. Saakashvili's government itself.

On their own ICTs cannot do much as again more systemic approach is required, besides the heavy investment into the ICTs (*Bhuyian, 2010*). Others conclude that the technical arrangement changes like in the management style governing the education sphere are not enough to eradicate this problem and rather broader means are necessary to achieve a strong civil society which might be the solution of this problem (*Temple & Petrov, 2004*). Mr. Saakashvili did not put much effort into the civil society though. Through the constitutional changes he gained new executive powers (*Cornell & Nilsson, 2009*) and proceeded with the reforms.

Previously, it was mentioned that ICTs reduce the cost of bureaucracy and Georgia definitely had one of the most complicated bureaucratic systems. A leftover from the Soviet past that governed the interaction of the state officials and general public creating (creates) the opportunities for the bribery. Simplifying the bureaucratic procedures, eliminating the queues and drastically reducing the amount of the required documentation can obviously decrease the bribery opportunities. The example of Estonia was already mentioned in this paper. This country shifted from the standard paperwork and replaced it with electronic documentation, which allowed the state to save up to 192.000 Euros yearly (*Napetvaridze, 2014*). This is a great example of reducing expenses with the use of the ICTs.

The reduced size of the bureaucratic apparatus is obviously appealing to any government regime. This pushes the creation of what some call the e-bureaucracy (*Cordella, 2007*). Other scholars have already come to the similar conclusion, claiming that this is the basic motivation for the FSU countries like Kazakhstan for instance in its quest for the development of the ICTs and even arguing that the development of this sector already yields results in the elimination of the petty corruption (*Sheryazdanova & Butterfield, 2017*).

Reforming the bureaucracy is no easy task. Cordella & Tempini have studied extensively the case of the Venice Municipality; and concluded that the involvement of the ICTs in the bureaucracy does not eradicate the need for bureaucracy, but enhances it; making it more flexible (*Cordella & Tempini, 2015*). However, Georgia did not go the flexible way. The process of reforming Georgian bureaucracy was characterized with the heavy-handed approach from the state and total reshaping of the established norms. Thus, it has been called by some “rebooting the bureaucracy” (*Bennet, 2012*). Saakashvili stated that “we want to become European Center of the region” (*Tabula, 2010*) and to do so it was necessary to push for the total reforms without any compromise to the existing system or any plans for its incorporation in the future projects. In this quest he relied heavily upon the Georgian businessman who earned his fortune in Russia Mr. Kakha Bendukidze. With his help in the very first year 40.000 civil servants were laid off (*Aliyev, 2014*). This did not come as a huge surprise for anybody, since Mr. Saakashvili had promised the complete overhaul of the system.

These men did not only decrease the number of ministries from 18 to 13, but often advocated for the legal persecution of the civil servants that took bribes; consequently, everyday news was saturated with the information on the corrupt public officials and their arrests. This led Mr. Saakashvili to claim that “the cabinet members are not corrupted. But I cannot say the same about the lower level officials” (*Civil.ge Archives, 2004*). Despite the unwavering support the UNM led Georgia enjoyed from the very aftermath of the Rose Revolution from the West, not everybody was happy. The anti-corruption crackdown was “raising eyebrows” externally and internally (*Rferl.org Archives, 2004*). But, it did not stop UNM’s push for the reforms. The creation of the National Agency of Public Register (NAPR) in 2004 is considered as the starting point towards the employment of the e-Government in this process ([www.napr.gov.ge](http://www.napr.gov.ge) 2004).

To eradicate the corruption in the “Lower Level Officials” (*Civil.ge Archives, 2004*), it was deemed necessary to decrease not only the number of the civil servants; but, to reduce the reliance on

the old bureaucratic apparatus in general. NAPR represented a new direction guided by the ICTs in the process of the modernization of Georgia. Tbilisi received hefty assistance from the US, as well as, the EU in this process. Another key contributor was Estonia – the success story in the digital world. There are number of projects Estonia has helped Georgia with since the Rose Revolution (*e-Governance Academy, 2017*).

Creation of the NAPR was a huge step at eradicating the petty corruption. When, the education system was plagued with bribes, all the other interactions with the state officials were done through bribery as well (*Rostiashvili, 2004*). It was almost impossible to do any simple operations like registering a car, applying for the driver's license, applying for the ID without bribery. The NAPR was the answer to this problem. It also marked the start of ICTs in the agenda of the UNM government to reform Georgia. The sheer introduction of the ICTs with this action signaled the willingness of the government for the change and their understanding that providing services in the electronic format also severely reduced the state expenses (*Napetvaridze, 2014*).

All these positive things did indeed have a groundbreaking effect on the country and its corruption (*Organization for the Economic Co-operation and Development OECD, 2005*). However, at the beginning the system was severely limited. Thus, it only translated to the Cataloguing phase identified by Laune & Lee as the start of the government's presence in the online sphere without any further possibilities for the interaction between the society and the state (*Laune & Lee, 2001*).

One of the reasons why it was impossible to evolve to the higher phases (at least initially) was the poor internet penetration levels of Georgia, which never really went past 45% during the Saakashvili rule (*IDFI, 2014*). This was not taken into account by Mr. Saakashvili's government simply because they were pushed by others to pursue this agenda. The outsiders involved in this process of Georgia's modernization had their say in the projects and Tbilisi was more than once forced to abide by their

rules if it wanted to keep the financing for the completion of the project. This has been the case almost with every reform in Georgia, as financial restraints and the ever growing need for more money, made Saakashvili's government to play by the rules imposed by the donors (*Monson, 2009*).

This reason alone was sufficient enough to undermine certain efforts of the UNM government as it did not take into account the Georgian reality. Thus, it can be argued that at its inception the involvement of the ICTs in the reform of the state was not successful. This is a fact for Georgia. Since, it considers the start of its successful e-Government policies something relatively late. This is supported by the e-Government Guideline, which later on puts 2010 as "the starting date" (*e-Government Guideline, 2014*). The guideline/guidebook does not explicitly name it but 2008 August War against Russia was one of the factors postponing the progress in the ICT realm.

Moreover, for the success of the ICTs it is necessary that both state officials and citizens have a good grasp of the concept and are armed with the skills necessary to deal with it (*Napetvaridze, 2014*). However, neither has received any significant training, unlike Estonia for instance. There the state initiated the "Look @ World" program designed to raise the readiness levels of its citizens for the new e-Governance era. After this project was complete approximately 102 000 people were trained and supplied with the computers (*Ehandi, 2001*). This was done to prepare the society for the changes. Georgia never really went into this direction. Thus, undermining its own efforts.

Before 2008 there were other important changes though. In 2006 Business registry was established. It was all part of the action plan which included:

- Creating the information centers
- Digitalizing internal information resources
- Automating information flows
- Creating data centers

- Establishing connections between agencies and regional offices (*DEA, 2014*).

Business Registry was the leading component out of all of these; as it allowed to design online procurement later on. European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) looked closely into the case of Georgia and concluded that the efficient implementation of the procurement and the centralized purchasing as well as the successful utilization of ICTs throughout this process contributed greatly to the success of the country in this sector (*EBRD – Georgia and Kazakhstan Case Studies, 2013*). Before the August War these were the major advancements made by the UNM government with the help of the ICTs.

However, Georgia experienced many pitfalls throughout this initial process. Firstly, the country had no online security standards (*Napetvaridze, 2014*). For a country without any prior expertise of the field this was unavoidable. This made Georgia extremely vulnerable to the hackers and was a flaw to the ICT design in the country which could have been minimized during its inception. This vulnerability was later exploited by the Russian hackers during the 2008 August War. Resulting in the immediate shutdown of all Georgian governments' webpages in the duration of the conflict. This external control over the Georgian web portals was part of the "cyber war" allegedly waged by Russia to accompany its military efforts in 2008 (*Swaine, 2008*). This cyber-attack had 3 main directions:

- Attack on governmental web resources
- Shut down media, forums and blogs in Georgia
- Block and cut off Georgian internet resources (*Lomidze, 2011*).

One of the reasons why Russia (allegedly) was so successful in the cyber-attack according to one of the interviewees was the shortage of the qualified personnel in Georgia. This was a problem for the successful ICT development in general. Georgia received numerous support from the outside, but the issue with the qualified personnel was never really dealt with. Another, great example demonstrating

the scope of this problem is the fact that most of the Georgian state agencies were not able to provide any statistical data on the usage of their e-portals by the public, simply because they did not have sufficient manpower to set up and manage such data (*IDFI, 2010*).

The absence of the qualified personnel led to another problem – absence of standards. Although, European Union did fund number of projects to assist Georgia in this direction. The assistance designed to eradicate this problem only came in the later years of the UNM rule (*Rostiashvili, 2014*). No standards hindered any possibility of successful development of the ICTs and showcased the initial fragile nature of the Georgian reforms using this new medium before the 2008. Standardization meant introducing new regulations and with Georgia already reforming almost all the aspects of the state it was almost impossible to expect that Saakashvili's government would succeed in every direction. Although the governmental commission supporting e-Governance development was created in 2007 (*IDFI, 2010*), administered directly by the Government chancellery and involving experts of the field. It was not enough to mitigate consequences of the problem.

The core of these problems was the limited budget. In a country where everything had to be reformed, finding funds was not easy. After the Rose Revolution Georgia was still struggling to deal with the 1991-1994 economic catastrophe (*Namchavadze, 2018*). Saakashvili's government had to find other markets for Georgian goods after the strained relationship with Russia even before 2008 August War. As a result of the Russian 2006 embargo, Georgia had no other way but to find new markets and decrease dependency on Russia (*Bochorishvili, 2015*). For a country locked in the Soviet economy for decades it was no easy task. Thereby, the funds available for the UNM government were limited for quite some time. This in turn implied that it was not possible to allocate much funds to the ICT development.

The shortage of funds coupled with the above mentioned issues limited the success of the ICTs in Georgia. Thus, before the 2008 August War the situation in the prospects of e-Governance under the UNM rule did not seem great. However, in the aftermath of the conflict everything changed.

### ***5. e-Governance in Georgia after 2008***

The 2008 August War was a watershed for the Saakashvili's government. Georgia had demonstrated its willingness to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EU on numerous occasions after the 2003 Rose Revolution (*Paul and Shiriyev, 2012*). This clear message did not go unnoticed by the West or by Russia. Although, there are various claims who started the war (*Cheterian, 2009*). One thing can be said with greatest assurance, Georgia suffered the most. The two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Samachablo region) gained independence supported by Russia and Georgia lost some additional territories (*Nichol, 2009*). However, Tbilisi received hefty support from its allies to cope with the aftermath of this five-day conflict (*GCSD, 2017*). Resettling all the internally displaced persons (IDPs) was no easy task, but Georgia managed to do it. This took great effort and attention of the state. Georgian state budget had to accommodate these changes as well. Consequently, the state budget after the Conflict allocated hefty amount to the IDPs (*Parliament of Georgia, 2009 State Budget, 2009*). Thereby, any serious development in the ICT realm did not start until 2010.

2010 is a highly important date for the e-Governance in Georgia. In previous section we discussed that the creation of the business registry led to the eventual formation of the e-procurement. This happened in 2010. The creation of this service was a great success for the elimination of the corruption (*EBRD – Georgia and Kazakhstan Case Studies, 2013*). In addition, it marked the first big change in the use of ICTs for the reforming and modernization of the country since 2006.

2010 was remarkable for another reason – the formation of the Data Exchange Agency (DEA) under the ministry of Justice. This was the evolution of the abovementioned governmental commission working to support the e-Governance, as the establishment of the DEA greatly facilitated the formation of the standards (*Napetvaridze, 2014*) and eased the cooperation between various state agencies. The formation of DEA was supported financially by the EU and administered by Estonia under the project “Twining” (*e-Governance Academy, 2017*). This single fact helped Georgia to eliminate almost all the problems that ICTs suffered from, before the 2008 (actually 2010).

The pioneer in the introduction of the e-Services has always been Ministry of Justice of Georgia. However, this ministry has had a troublesome history. This ministry always pushed for the modernization. Yet, there was never a single strong figure at the head of the organization. Throughout the UNM rule it changed the total of five ministers. Two of which reappeared as the ministers one time and two times respectively. Thus, this ministry had total of eight ministers during Saakashvili’s rule (*Ministry of Justice of Georgia, History of the Ministry, 2019*). This should not come as a surprise taking into the consideration the fact that Mr. Saakashvili was a rather eccentric personality himself, often in charge of all the important projects throughout the country (*De Waal, 2019*). This constant change meant that the actual reforms were coming from Saakashvili directly in a top-down manner rather than any individual minister in charge of the Ministry of Justice. As a result, his personal ideas and characteristics often influenced the success of the projects he managed. In the scopes of this paper it means the success of the e-Governance.

As the DEA was created under the Ministry of Justice it signaled the new wave of changes using ICTs. However, the progress did not stop here. Applying the “one-stop” principle – when all the major services can be obtained in one area (like webpage) (*Shakya, 2017*); Georgian government launched a major project of creating Public Service Halls (PSH). The PSH operates under the Ministry of Justice and offers all the major state services like issuing ID; registering the land; registering marriage etc.

All in one place. Although, the PSH is a physical space it incorporates all the characteristics of great usage of the ICTs into its web-portal. This innovation has been highly praised worldwide. Georgia even received the UN public service award for the groundbreaking innovation in the public administration (*UN's web-portal news release, 2013*).

Part of this innovation was the introduction of the electronic IDs. This was a rather complicated process for Georgia, as it sparked controversy from the clergy claiming it was not in Christian nature to have such cards (*Netgazeti, 2013*). This process started in the August of 2011 and despite some setbacks it was a great success. Currently, this is one of the major duties of the PSH. The introduction of the e-IDs was a great step at incorporating more and more ICTs in the governance process. Streamlining this process also promoted the sense that the state was taking steps in the right direction and for the convenience of the public.

The PSH has been the success story of the bureaucracy and the ICTs working together. However, this is a service-delivery oriented mechanism with minimal possibilities for the citizen input. Thus, it represents the e-Government area rather than e-Governance. This problem has been persistent in Georgia since the very inception of the ICTs: the fact that the emphasis is on the service-delivery rather than implementation of the innovative e-Governance solutions, that would change the game (*IDFI, 2016*).

Previously, this study mentioned Laune and Lee and their scheme for defining various levels of the e-Government. Based on the abovementioned it can be said with the greatest assurance that with the PSH Georgia managed to achieve the final fourth phase Horizontal Integration: which includes various functions and services provided by the state (*Laune & Lee, 2001*). The PSH as a hybrid system employing ICTs and bureaucracy indeed created the specific situation described by these very authors. Although, this is an isolated instance when Georgia managed to achieve this phase, it is still a great

achievement. This is a clear signal of Georgian success, but success of e-Government not e-Governance. This, alongside with the pockets of the successful ICT uses is the characteristic of the state of the ICTs in the UNM Georgia in general. They were employed but not successfully in every sphere. For instance, with the education it was mentioned that the UNM government did not evolve beyond publishing or cataloguing phase. The limited capacity of the web-pages addressing this sphere as well as no vision by the state are obvious reasons. In addition, in the previous section, it was already discussed that the donors like the World Bank in the case of the education did not consider ICTs as the vital tool in the process of reforming this sphere, but rather viewed it as added bonus (*Rostiashvili, 2011*). This in turn, gave less incentive to the Georgian government to employ the ICTs heavily in this particular field. The trend is obvious, no outside incentive or support, no push for the use of the ICTs.

Alongside these major changes Mr. Saakashvili also launched „Computer and Linguist Revolution” (*civil.ge archives, 2010*). He supplied all the first-graders throughout Georgia with the laptop, so that the new generation would be prepared and skilled to form the “information society”. This project was a PR move, rather than a long-term solution. Previously, it was already mentioned how Estonian government trained more than 100.000 citizens to form the information society and raise their awareness. Choosing only one age-group, especially, so young cannot be regarded by any means as a sound strategy for setting up necessary environment for the successful e-governance.

Another argument in favor of the idea that Mr. Saakashvili did not plan at all promoting e-governance comes in the other activities linked to the awareness of citizens about e-projects. For instance, during this time was created the citizen portal [my.gov.ge](http://my.gov.ge). Citizen can find all the information about himself/herself here and interact with the state. However, no significant PR campaigns were conducted to promote its existence. DEA has stated that PR was not the priority, rather they were focusing on the introduction of the new services (*DEA, 2012*). Yet, the problem remains the same: in

a country where internet penetration levels as seen above are relatively low, how can anybody realistically expect that those who do have internet will be using new web-portals unless they are properly informed. Such decision leads to the assumption that these services were not created for the Georgian public, but international observant. This may sound as a bold statement, but the following developments will strengthen this argument.

To solidify the gains in this sector Georgia also joined the Open Governance Partnership (OGP). OGP is a multilateral initiative focusing on cementing the government commitment worldwide for the purpose of raising transparency and accountability of the state. It all started in 2011 with 8 founding countries: Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, South Africa, United Kingdom and US (*Opengovpartnership.gov*). Georgia joined in 2011 and started working closely with the organization. However, no actual progress was made through this medium during the UNM rule (*Transparency International, 2017*). Only after the change of government in Georgia and the rise of the Georgian Dream coalition replacing UNM did the country achieve any tangible progress. Yet, in the scope of this paper will be discussed the period covering the UNM rule.

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to look closely at the Georgian commitment towards the OGP. The first national action plan 2012-2013 was prepared in 2011 and presented to the OGP in 2012 (*opengovpartnership.org, 2019*). Thereby, it fits into the timeline of this research, as it was prepared during the UNM rule. The action plan was a joint product of an intense cooperation between various stakeholders, namely: the government of Georgia, the academic field and the civil society. The process was accompanied with the public consultations throughout the country. This action plan was praised by many, as well as duly criticized claiming that Georgia had “increased government’s accountability and citizens’ access to public information in the fields of public procurement and political party financing, for instance, however, it fell behind in creating accessible mechanisms for public participation in decision-making” (*IDFI, 2014*).

Georgia had strong claims before preparing the action plan. Throughout the UNM rule the country had transformed itself from one of the most corrupt states in the Eastern Europe with only 2% claiming to have experienced bribery in 2010 (*EBRD, 2011*). With the proven track-record of a country crusading against the corruption Tbilisi assumed that it was in full harmony with the accountability, transparency and open governance principles put forward by the OGP. However, corruption is not the only tool to measure the country's success. So, Tbilisi in its very first action plan for the OGP was highlighting the major improvements in the public service delivery by promoting its PSH innovation. The PSH and its innovative breakthrough have been already discussed in this paper. When UNM was developing the OGP action plan this project was in its early days of implementation, thereby, it should not come as a surprise that it was a great selling point for Tbilisi. The PSH signaled the unseen cooperation between ICTs and regular bureaucracy and Georgia claimed to continue working in this direction.

However, the PSH is the service-delivery mechanism. Although, it created the unparalleled level of transparency in the public administration, it did (does) not promote any input from the citizens. To address this issue, Georgia claimed in its action plan to promote the e-Governance in the local governments. Since December 7, 2011 Georgian Public Service Development Agency with the financial assistance from the EU has been implementing the project "Introduction of e-Governance in Local Self-Governments" (*Public Service Development Agency's web-page, 2019*). As mentioned above, the donor's participation and financing made Georgia to work in this direction, without any financial or other investments by UNM government. Although, in the action plan the government claimed to be the initiator of this idea and argued to work in this direction by establishing Village Development Centers. But, the whole idea behind those centers was to provide services in the rural areas not to promote any citizen participation in the local self-governments. Thus, it does not really serve the purpose of the OGP.

Addressing the citizen participation in the decision-making is really a low point in the action plan. Still it devotes several pages towards the issue. For instance, the government of Georgia claims to understand the need for the informed citizenry, arguing that public access to the government information is unparalleled. This is indeed supported by some studies (*Mendel, 2011*). However, the access was always limited, usually confined to the information on the budgetary expenses (*Mendel, 2011*). Still, the web-portal [www.data.gov.ge](http://www.data.gov.ge) has been created later on to gather all the public information for the ease of access. The creation of this portal was discussed in this action plan and is undoubtedly a great move forward. But, the UNM was not in power during its establishment so this study does not discuss it any further.

Another, goal according to the action plan was to create the portal [www.ichange.ge](http://www.ichange.ge). This portal would host the citizens' ideas about the necessary changes to the laws or specific project suggestions. It would be a place to “express [citizens'] opinions, criticism or ideas” (*Georgia Action Plan, 2012-2013*). However, this was not materialized neither during UNM rule nor afterwards. Again, demonstrating the lack of will to promote citizen input in the decision-making by Saakashvili's government.

The citizens did have certain level of participation though. And the action plan boasted about it. For instance, in the Justice field. In 2011, Georgian citizens were granted the possibility to participate in the administration of Justice through the jury duties. This was viewed as a positive development in the reformation of Georgia and highly praised by the civil society, but, they also criticized the fact that jury trials were conducted only in the capital and only one type of crime was covered during the UNM rule (*Shvangiridze & Chkaidze, 2016*). Unfortunately, action plan did not state any plans to develop jury trials further or use any form of the ICTs throughout this process. The sole purpose of writing this point was to say: we have some citizen involvement, nothing more than that. The rest of the document is very similar in spirit to the jury trial case. It tells about the introduction of certain

services, without any plans for the development of them and without any specific milestones: how to increase the citizen involvement in the decision-making. To understand why this document turned out this way, it is important to look at the reasons why Georgia joined the OGP in the first place.

There were number of reasons for the Saakashvili's government to join the OGP. Firstly, his rule was characterized as "ultimately authoritarian" (*Tamkin, 2017*). His crackdown on the opposition and subsequent monopolization of the power under the President's office did not go unnoticed and with the change of the Bush administration in the US the situation between Washington and Tbilisi were becoming increasingly "colder" (*civil.ge archives, 2012*). Mr. Saakashvili used the state apparatus and his office to neutralize opposition TV channel "Imedi" and currently there is a court case on this topic against Georgia's 3<sup>rd</sup> president (*imedinews.ge, 2018*).

This action did nothing good for his reputation. The US educated reformer was increasingly looking like Putin: with him flexing the muscles over media and business sector. The draconic rules against drug-crimes and his zero tolerance (*nulovani tolerantoba* in Georgian) campaign against any crime only worsened the social climate in the country (*intermedia.ge, 2012*). The civil society organizations were increasingly alarmed by this policy; claiming that if a person was accused of the crime there was only 0.1% probability that he/she would not be found guilty (*Transparency International, 2010*).

Saakashvili had shown early on in his presidency that his understanding of the strong ruler was dangerously close to the authoritarian one. This becomes clear, once his speech made shortly after the prison unrest is analyzed. After the 2006 riots in the Georgian prisons, which were put down immediately by the security forces president claimed that it was necessary to use fire against fire and he praised the extreme brutalities by the Police (*Civil.ge, Archives, 2006*). He made further claims in the speech, arguing for the necessity of the Zero Tolerance policy. This unrest served as a great

argument for the president. He blamed the organized crime in Georgia for this riot and vowed not to compromise in this fight. However, the president did not take into consideration the fact that not all criminals belong to the organized crime. Somebody who did not pay their taxes in time cannot be and should not be treated like the member of the gang. His attitude that it was necessary to clean the streets from the criminals and their political supporters (*Civil.ge, Archives, 2006*) served as a warning towards the opposition parties rather than criminals themselves. Saakashvili used this specific situation to enforce the powers of the state security forces and employed them for the tight control over the population. Nobody was safe if they were suspected in the criminal activities.

Such toxic environment did not promote any civil society input in the governance. On the contrary, citizens were becoming alienated from and afraid of the state. The state security agencies according to the prominent Georgian human rights activists operated with complete impunity and therefore without any accountability (*Dolidze, 2006*). Detentions for no obvious reasons became a reality. Under such circumstances Saakashvili's government had to do something; that would positively affect his prestige abroad and eliminate the chances of alienating foreign support. The solution was modernization and rapid use of the ICTs. This reasoning explains the increased state support for the implementation of the e-Governance in Georgia after 2010. However, as seen above the progress was solely directed at the service-delivery level, completely leaving out the governance – citizen input aspect.

The desire to maintain the reformer image in the eyes of the West and ease the tensions with the Obama administration pushed UNM to join the OGP. After the 2008 August War it became clear that Georgia would not survive on its own against Kremlin. Thereby, it was utterly important to be proactive in the international arena (*Bruszt, Laszlo & Holzhaecker, 2009*). Otherwise, it is almost impossible to explain Saakashvili's move to join OGP which promoted everything his government did not stand for. It was more of a platform to tell others about the success stories of the ICT

implementation in Georgia rather than implement its principles in the country. This is another reason why during the UNM rule no substantial progress was done through the OGP platform in Georgia and why Saakashvili's government missed the opportunity to develop e-Governance in Georgia.

## **6. UN e-Government Survey**

UN has developed excellent toolkit for measuring the e-Government and its success throughout the world. This survey has been used extensively by most of the authors discussed in this paper in their respective researches. Although the name only mentions e-Government it is important to note that this survey consists of two components: e-Government and e-Participation. The last aspect is very important to this research as it measures the effectiveness of the public involvement in the political life through the ICTs.

UN's e-Participation refers to the expanded opportunities provided by the ICTs for the successful participation of the people and civic sector in the decision-making process (*UN e-Government and e-Participation Survey 2016*); "connecting citizens with one other and their elected representatives" (*Macintosh, 2006*). As a result, it fits perfectly the concept of e-Governance used by this paper and UN's e-Participation Index provides excellent evaluation necessary for understanding the situation with regards to e-Governance in the context of this paper.

The UN has started this process as early as 2003. However, throughout this research it was already demonstrated that the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was rather low on the progress of ICTs in Georgia. In 2003 it ranked 99<sup>th</sup> in the UN's report. It is worth to note that after 2005 UN neglected the annual tradition of conducting this research and started doing it once every two years (although firstly

they took three years before making new report in 2008 and then following now regular once every two-year model).

Already in 2008 Georgia had moved up the ladder and ranked 90<sup>th</sup> on the e-Government Index (EGDI), which did not simply improve afterwards. In 2010 the country ranked 100<sup>th</sup> on the EGDI and 127<sup>th</sup> on the EPI. This was a clear downfall for Tbilisi. As demonstrated in previous chapters in the aftermath of the 2008 conflict Saakashvili's government was not paying much attention to this sphere; thus, the result should not come as a surprise.

The last year of importance is 2012. Final year of the UNM rule. Georgia demonstrated extraordinary achievement by this time and reached the rank 72 for EGDI and 66 for EPI. By this time all the major innovations discussed in the previous chapter were put in place; subsequently, such results simply demonstrate that the UN did notice the progress. However, the UN's ranking is not the ubiquitous sign of progress. It simply demonstrates that certain achievements were made; yet, it cannot measure why this changes happened in the first place. Something that this research was able to analyze and fill the gap in the scholarship.

## ***7. Conclusion:***

After the Rose Revolution the UNM government was in perfect spot with unparalleled support from the citizens to reform and modernize the state. Yet, the poor expertise in the field, paired with the limited budget and constant tension with its superior neighbor in the North – the Russian Federation caused Saakashvili's government not to capitalize on the gains initially. Before the culmination of Russo-Georgian tensed relationship in 2008 Tbilisi had used ICTs in a limited manner at reforming the country. The poor internet penetration levels of the country had its say in this process.

However, throughout UNM's rule there was no clear intention to set up the environment necessary for the e-Governance to thrive.

Before 2008 UNM mainly focused on introducing the ICTs to fight the corruption. However, their limited nature in the UNM's agenda undermined these efforts at the very inception. Even for the most corrupt sphere of education – Saakashvili's government did not come up with the adequate strategy how to use ICTs in this sector. The steps they took were minimal and resulted in the simple creation of the web-portal for the newly formed National Examination & Assessment Center. It is true that insufficient funding due to the Russian embargo after 2006 played a major role in the general slow progress of the country. But, there were other factors as well. The UNM launched extremely aggressive campaign against its civil servants and despite this even president himself did not trust the "lower level officials". This alienation of the bureaucratic apparatus instead of its incorporation into the new e-bureaucracy was a major mistake. Although, the right steps were made like formation of the NAPR it did not become major thing before 2010-2011. In general, before the August War use of ICTs did not affect in any way the modernization of the country.

After the 2008 conflict things did indeed change. To be more precise the major changes started in 2010. As before that, Georgian government was busy handling the aftermath of the war. The major changes affecting the public administration did indeed garner much foreign attention and assistance in the elimination of the petty corruption. But, they did almost nothing at promoting e-Governance. The reason was simply in the nature of Saakashvili's rule. If before the August War the challenges to the e-Governance were more technical as described above, after 2008 it was the lack or even absence of the political will.

Current understanding of the ICTs is that they promote sustainable democracy and with the democratic regime they will undoubtedly bring more beneficial results. However, this research

demonstrated that the ICTs by themselves are not engines pushing forward democracy. And Saakashvili's "ultimately authoritarian" manner of ruling only proves this point. He did not create favorable environment for the e-Governance to thrive. On the contrary, he formed a regime with the least accountable state security agencies and if a person was pressed charges on he/she had 0.1% chance of not getting imprisoned. His regime violated freedom of media and alienated the citizens from any governance. Thereby, it was by nature impossible to create e-Governance during his rule; as citizen input is the vital component of any successful e-Governance and democracy in general.

Any major achievements in the implementation of ICTs were purely part of the e-Government game; focusing on the institutions rather than governance – approach. Mr. Saakashvili and his government only joined OGP to mitigate any bad reputation they were getting for the domestic politics. No actual effort went into promoting any state innovations like the my.gov.ge – a citizen portal; simply because the target audience were foreign donors. Nobody was trying to get public involved. Even the actions like introducing the netbooks for all the first-graders were part of PR rather than any meaningful way for the creation of the information society. Where citizens would be equipped with sufficient skills and tools to bring their input through the e-Governance. It was all a missed opportunity. However, it did lay a foundation which if used accordingly might be a key for the future success.

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