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Europeanization in the "Wild East"? Analyzing higher education governance reform in Georgia and Armenia

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Abstract The authors examine higher education developments in two peripheral post-communist countries—Georgia and Armenia, whose education systems have previously received little attention in the literature. They focus on how both countries' models of higher education governance have evolved through the phase of political transformation and recent period of geopolitical tensions and more intense Europeanization and internationalization. Based on a series of empirical indicators for three ideal-types of higher governance derived from the previous literature, the authors assess the transformed relationship between the state and higher education institutions. Specifically, they focus on the extent to which both systems have converged on a market-oriented model of Anglo-American inspiration. The empirical analysis shows that following western practices has become a common *leitmotiv* of policy-makers in both countries and that new forms of "co-governance" between the state and university management have emerged. However, the authors argue that policy learning from the West has taken place in a very selective and tactical manner, as market-oriented steering instruments are only being adopted to the extent that they do not undermine the state's means for political control over higher education.

Keywords Higher education governance · Armenia · Georgia · Europeanization · Convergence · Post-communist higher education

Introduction

This article examines current developments in higher education (HE) in two post-Soviet countries located at the edge of Europe—Georgia and Armenia. Not surprisingly, both

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countries have attracted little attention in previous research due to their size and peripheral location. Nevertheless, their HE systems have undergone turbulent changes and been shaped by a myriad of conflicting factors. After the re-establishment of a new HE framework in the early 1990s, HE policy was profoundly impacted by the economic collapse and fragility of newly established political institutions. At the same time, both countries have been at the apex of a clash of geopolitical interests between Russia and the West and struggled to fully uphold their political sovereignty. However, amid increasing institutional interlinkages with Western Europe, active participation in the Bologna Process, and close collaboration with international organizations (IOs), policy-makers in both countries have more recently promoted a stronger orientation towards western HE models—at least at the rhetorical level.

Against this background, the article addresses the following research question: how have the HE policies of Armenia and Georgia changed since regaining political sovereignty in 1991 and what internal and external factors have impacted developments? Our analysis focusses exclusively on HE governance and, in particular, the transformed relationship between the state and HE institutions. We restrict ourselves to public HE, which—despite the emergence of a large private sector—still caters to the overwhelming majority of students. This approach enables us to explore the changing role of the state in contexts of fragile statehood, while examining the re-establishment of university autonomy in situations of incomplete political democratization.

Along these lines, we address to what extent both systems are converging towards a model of Anglo-American inspiration. In most European countries, an increased use of competitive, market-based steering instruments can be observed (Dobbins 2011; Ferlie et al. 2008). Previous research has shown that the Europeanization and internationalization of HE have provided a further significant impetus to this trend (Martens et al. 2010; Dobbins and Knill 2009). In this regard, we explore the interplay between the Soviet legacy of heavy state regulation and the increasing exposure of both countries to western policies. Has a market-oriented model asserted itself or are HE structures still shaped by the functional logic of the previous system?

Despite their currently weak prospects for European Union (EU) membership and persistent Russian intermingling into domestic politics (see German 2011), Georgia and Armenia can be regarded as favourable cases for the alignment with western HE policies. Education plays a crucial role in the transformation to a knowledge- and service-based economy. This applies all the more to our case studies, which lack a significant industrial base and natural resources. Both countries have thus actively strived to expand ties with international policy platforms to ensure the sheer survival of their HE systems. In addition to long-standing cooperation with the World Bank and EU's TEMPUS[1] program, Armenia and Georgia have been active members of the Bologna Process since 2005 and are thus exposed to strong external pressures for change. These pressures have been compounded by the chronic underfunding of HE and the fragility of state institutions. Hence, we can assume strong reform dynamics, although the policy outcome remains entirely unclear.

The article is structured as follows: we first provide a short overview of previous research on post-communist HE policies, while taking into account the unique circumstances of our case studies and the central historical, domestic, and geopolitical factors influencing their HE systems. Then we elaborate on three ideal-types of HE governance, which serve as our basis for comparison. The indicators we develop enable us to distinguish between actual policy change and potentially artificial pro-western rhetoric of policy-makers. In the empirical

[1] TEMPUS: Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies.

analysis, we examine the underlying tensions between internationalization processes and embedded policy legacies, while tracing the political logic behind the reforms. While our main focus is on internationalization effects on existing policies, we also touch on how different political regime types (Georgia under Saakashvili—more democratic, at least on the façade vs. Armenia—more authoritarian) have shaped the reform trajectories and the introduction of market-oriented mechanisms. To conclude, we compare and contrast national developments and discuss whether a common governance model has emerged.

State of the art and framework of analysis

In the past 20–25 years central and eastern European (CEE) HE systems have undergone a development, which Offe (1993) described as "simultaneous transformation". They are struggling not only with the same difficulties as their western European counterparts, such as underfunding, lacking transparency and international competitiveness (Neave 2003: 20), but also with numerous additional challenges due to their precarious socioeconomic and political situation. Beyond securing their mere survival, these include the liberation of HE from ideological control, the restoration of academic self-administration, and coping with the rapidly expanding private HE sector.

In the past 10–15 years, eastern and western HE systems are also increasingly embedded in a transnational environment framed by organizations such as the OECD, World Bank and EU (Martens et al. 2007). It is frequently argued that such transnational platforms can strongly influence national policies and even lead to political and institutional convergence (Witte 2006; Dobbins and Knill 2009). At the same time, a culture of "international comparison" fostered by Europeanization and internationalization is making national HE systems more aware of their global position (Martens et al. 2010).

An increasing array of literature has analyzed post-communist HE, while elaborating on the tensions between historical traditions and internationalization. For example, Dobbins and Knill (2009) show that CEE systems are moving at different speeds towards "market-oriented governance" and that this development has become more consistent since Bologna (see also Leisyte and Kizniene 2006).[2] However, one should by no means neglect the institutional heterogeneity of post-communist HE. While most CEE countries (e.g. Poland, Czech Republic, Baltic States) have a longer pre-war legacy of democratic, academic self-rule and research-oriented universities, the Southern Caucasian countries are arguably modernizing their HE systems from a much more challenging starting point. The loss of statehood for many centuries resulted in unfavourable conditions for developing national education traditions. The impact of Sovietization was much more pronounced than in Central Europe, as the foundation of the first Southern Caucasian universities roughly coincided with Soviet annexation and implantation of Soviet ideology.[3] Moreover, the Georgian and Armenian HE systems were rattled by the collapse of the economy and public administration after the wars in Abkhazia[4] and Nagorno-Karabakh. This opened

[2] They argue that countries which were more deeply entrenched in the Humboldtian model of governance (e.g. Poland and the Czech Republic) have only sluggishly followed this trend, while countries with stronger state-centered traditions (e.g. Romania) have moved more swiftly towards market-oriented steering.

[3] e.g. Tbilisi State University 1918, Yerevan State University 1919.

[4] The War in Abkhazia (1992–1993) was fought between Georgian government forces and Abkhaz separatist forces. The Abkhaz separatists were supported by Russian armed forces and hired North Caucasian fighters. Most ethnic Georgians were expelled from Abkhazia, while Georgia lost control over the breakaway region. It is now a non-recognized independent territory and de facto Russian protectorate. The

numerous avenues for corruption (see below). Importantly, the Central European HE systems—in contrast to Georgia and Armenia—greatly benefited from their geographical proximity to Western Europe, which functioned as a "reform anchor" (see Dobbins 2011). This pertains, in particular, to the public sector reforms undertaken for EU accession. The prospect of EU accession enhanced the reform capacity of governments and public administration, including HE providers (Bouckaert et al. 2011). The Southern Caucasian systems, by contrast, had no viable pre-communist traditions to draw on and are at best only marginally included in the trans-European integration process. Moreover, Georgia and Armenia are geographically more vulnerable to power-seeking ambitions of the Russian Federation. Although Russian influence has primarily concerned foreign, energy and trade policy—most notably the potential creation of a Eurasian Customs Unions –, it is plausible that the restoration or intensification of ties with the Russian Federation may counteract pro-western reform ambitions in the area of education.

Despite these challenging circumstances, HE in the southern Caucasus remains severely under-researched. Aside from a few scattered studies on the implementation of the Bologna Process, privatization (Sharvashidze 2005; Pachuashvili 2008; Sargsyan and Budaghyan 2008) and new quality assurance (QA) systems, little previous research exists on the forms of governance which have emerged in post-Soviet Georgia and Armenia.[5]

The Bologna Process as a convergence-promoting force?

To compare and contrast our cases with broader European developments, we draw on the concept of *convergence*. This strand of research (Knill 2005) addresses whether national policies have become more similar due to increasing global interlinkages. Besides conditionality and legal harmonization, recent research has pointed to intensified *transnational communication* as an important convergence mechanism. International integration and exchanges may lead to similar perceptions of problems and the development of common policy models, which are diffused through policy networks (Holzinger and Knill 2005).

One very significant platform for transnational communication and European "soft governance" is the Bologna Process. Research has shown that Bologna has increased pressure on HE systems to legitimize themselves vis-à-vis their counterparts, potentially leading to the approximation with external policy models regarded as successful (Dobbins and Knill 2009; Witte 2006; Martens et al. 2010). This phenomenon defined as "isomorphism" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) can be facilitated by situations of uncertainty. This applies, for example, when organizations are confronted with new problems or face ambiguous goals. Instead of tediously searching for own solutions, organizations strive to assert their legitimacy by means of emulation (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). In this regard, one may argue that post-communist HE—and in particular Georgian and Armenian HE—is in a situation of extreme uncertainty due to the simultaneity of political, socio-economic and education policy transformations, which are compounded by the reality of "brain drain", competition from private providers, and their precarious geopolitical position.

Footnote 4 continued
Nagorno-Karabakh War was waged between the late 1980s and 1994 between Armenia and Azerbaijan in an enclave in southwestern Azerbaijan inhabited primarily by the ethnic Armenian majority. Like the Abkhazian War, it led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons and is considered a frozen conflict up to the present day. Like in the case of Abkhazia, Russia is widely perceived as capitalizing on the conflict to advance its interests in the region.

[5] For the case of Russia, see Bain et al. (1998).

Although the main thrust of Bologna lies in study degree harmonization and the expansion of QA, there are grounds to assume that it may also affect HE governance. For example, after assuming a more central role in the 2000s, the European Commission has consistently advocated market-oriented, entrepreneurial governance approaches, which strengthen university autonomy. Along these lines, previous research has shown that Anglo-American HE models have increasingly functioned as a "reform template" (Hoareau 2009; Dobbins and Knill 2009). The upcoming analysis thus focuses on whether tighter transnational integration has triggered convergence in the HE models of Armenia and Georgia, which—despite their "latecomer status" to the Bologna Process—have taken extensive efforts to align their HE systems with what are perceived as western, market-oriented forms of governance.

Empirical indicators

To assess changes in governance and the degree of convergence, we propose a selection of indicators for three prototypical HE models (1) the *state-control model*, (2) the *academic self-rule model* and the (3) *market-oriented model*. The classification integrates key insights from previous studies, most notably Clark (1983), Braun and Merrien (1999), Olsen (2009), Jongbloed (2003), and De Boer et al. (2007). We look at three areas of HE governance that directly reflect the changing role of the state: the *overall regulatory framework, funding policy*, and *quality assurance*.

An extreme form of the *state-control model* was prevalent in all former communist countries. Here, universities were essentially state-regulated institutions (Clark 1983; Olsen 2009), as the state exerted control over admissions and academic profiles, often with the aim of coordinating university programmes with economic manpower. In state-centered arrangements, universities are granted relatively little autonomy, while the role of the "academic oligarchy" and markets is limited (Clark 1983). The state functions as a "guardian" and actively influences internal university affairs, e.g. personnel policy (Neave and van Vught 1991: xi–xxii). QA generally lies within the responsibility of the Ministry, which focuses on the *ex ante* capacity of HE providers to carry out programs.

According to Olsen (2009), universities are rational instruments employed to meet national priorities. The state engages in *process control*, which involves the shaping, regulating and approval of study programs, admissions procedures, and expended resources. State-centred systems tend to link funding to indicators such as staff and student numbers (i.e. *input-based* funding), while universities have little freedom to use funds at discretion (Jongbloed 2003, 122). However, even in the extreme Soviet state-control model, HE providers and rival regions engaged in heavy competition over resources from the "party-state".

Labelled by sceptics as academic oligarchy, the model of *academic self-governance* is marked by weak university management and strong professorial dominance and collegial control (Dobbins and Knill 2009; Clark 1983). Founded upon Humboldt's principles of intellectual freedom through research, the model is based on a state-university partnership, in which academic and governmental policy-makers collectively negotiate policy frameworks, while the professoriate generally has more discretion over funding allocation than in state-centered models. The state nevertheless remains a potent actor with its legislative and financial authority, but exerts little or no influence over teaching and research. Instead, universities are committed to the search for truth through intellectual freedom—regardless of its immediate utility or political convenience. A crucial element is the professorial chair system, in which powerful chair-holders engage in collegial self-governance and can block

initiatives of the government or university management (Clark 1983, 140). Most Humboldtian-oriented systems have historically lacked QA systems and instead relied on academic peer-review.

Market-oriented models are based on the assumption that universities function more effectively when operating as economic enterprises (Marginson and Considine 2000; Dill and Van Vught 2010). Jongbloed (2003, 113), for instance, defines marketization policies as those "aimed at strengthening student choice and liberalizing markets in order to increase quality and variety of services offered". Thus, universities compete for students and financial resources.HE institutions are not the result of state design, rather *entrepreneurial institutional leadership*. Ideas based on New Public Management (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000; De Boer et al. 2007) and private enterprise (e.g. performance-based funding) are supposed to foster rapid adaptation to new constraints and opportunities (Braun and Merrien 1999; Ferlie et al. 2008). High institutional autonomy enables universities to strategically design study programmes and set accession conditions. Instead of academic self-rule, university management takes decisions in consultation with academic and external stakeholders. Nevertheless, market-oriented models generally offer academics more opportunities to engage in entrepreneurial activities with the private sector.

Instead of "designing" the system, the state tends to promote competition and transparency. Thus, the state generally functions as an "evaluator" through quasi-governmental QA agencies (Neave 1998). Governments also tend to provide lump-sum funding, often at a reduced level (De Boer et al. 2007). This increases the budgetary discretion of university management, while reduced state funding makes universities financially dependent on third-party funding and tuition.

Following these distinctions, we break down HE systems into the dimensions *regulatory framework, funding policy,* and QA. Like Clark (1983), our schemes are based on the premise that HE systems combine a combination of three core centers of gravity—the academic "oligarchy", the state and the market (as reflected in competitive, entrepreneurial governance instruments). Thus, our models are not necessarily "contrasting", rather merely reflect different thrusts of decision-making power. Although these indicators only provide a snapshot of complex empirical realities, they are a useful instrument for tracing policy developments (Table 1).[6]

We define 1991, 2001 and 2011 as benchmark years for our empirical analysis. The year 1991 reflects the situation upon the collapse of the communist system, while 2001 reflects the status quo after 10 years of political independence and before Europeanization/internationalization exerted any significant impact. The year 2011 reflects the situation after nearly 10 years of European "soft governance". This approach enables us to determine whether integration into the European Higher Education Area has had an accelerating impact on reforms. Based on the method of process tracing (George and Bennett 2005), our findings are derived from the comparative analysis of legislative and policy documents and secondary literature. To compensate for the lack of written sources, we conducted several semi-structured interviews with HE policy-makers regarding the mechanisms of change.

The case of Armenia

The history of Armenian universities can be traced back to the middle age. Despite their short existence, the Universities of Gladzor (1284–1340) and Tatev (1384–1425) were

[6] For a more thorough description and explanation of the indicators, see Dobbins et al. (2011).

Table 1 Three models of HE governance

	State control model	Market-oriented model	Academic self-rule model
Regulatory framework for HE			
Core decision-making body	State	University management	Community of scholars/ Professional chairs
State control instruments	Manpower planning System design	Incentives for competition, quality improvements	Legal, financial framework
Sets academic profiles/ curriculum design	State/Academia	University management/ academia/external stakeholders	Academia
Sets strategic goals for HE institutions	State	University management with external stakeholders	Academia
Sets admission conditions	State	University management	State
Funding policy			
Main funding base	State budget (university budget part of state budget)	Diversified (tuition/ donations/research grants/ private entities/state)	State budget (with own university budget)
State funding approach	Itemized (low budgetary discretion for universities)	Lump sum (high budgetary discretion for university management)	Mixed-type (high budgetary discretion for university)
Mode of allocation	Input-based	Output-based	Input-based (objectives negotiated by the state and universities)
Strategic investments	State defined	Multi-faceted (undertaken by university management, faculties, via spin-off companies, technology centres)	Occasional, chair-based
Quality control			
Who controls/ evaluates?	Ministry	(state or quasi-governmental) Accreditation/evaluation bodies	Self-evaluation by academic peers
What is controlled?	Academic *processes* (legal compliance and institutional capacity)	Quality of academic *products*	Quality of research output
When does quality control take place?	Ex ante	Ex post	Not systematized

significant centers of education of their time. However, both universities were unable to maintain operations after the demise of the Armenian state (Simonyan 1998). The phase of national reawakening after World War I heralded the establishment of the first state university in Yerevan in 1919. During the Soviet era, Armenian HE was strongly oriented towards the state-centered model. All aspects of HE were planned and controlled by the Soviet Education Ministry. Moreover, teaching and research were functionally differentiated: while universities concentrated on teaching activities, research was concentrated in the Academy of Science and Research (Asatryan et al. 2005). Due to the institutional

differentiation of teaching and research and all-embracing control of internal affairs, there was little leeway for Armenian universities to develop along Humboldtian lines.

During the political and economic transformation, various aspects of the system were fundamentally restructured. Similarly to Georgia (see below), internal political and economic developments were the main catalysts. Amid declining state funding, most universities struggled to survive in the early 1990s. Tuition fees introduced in 1992 served as an important source of income, enabling many universities to further operate. The new and gradually introduced fee-paying study places also led to a rapid expansion of the system. Universities were able to successfully recruit students for high-demand subjects, e.g. economics, law, international relations, even though the high study fees and quality of teaching were not always compatible. This trend towards shifting costs to students continued relentlessly: according to statistic data for the academic year 1991–1992, 96 % of all study places were funded by the state and only 4 % by private sources and/or tuition fees. By 2001–2002 the share of private funding had increased from approx. 35 to 80 % (Armenian Statistics Agency 2001).

In addition to fee-paying study places at state universities, several private universities and were founded[7], which frequently catered to students who did not pass state admissions examinations. The rapid growth of the private sector posed several challenges to the state, most notably regarding the lacking quality of teaching, infrastructure as well as library resources and research laboratories, etc. During this phase, many Armenian (and Georgian) universities essentially came to function as "degree mills" plagued by heavy corruption. This included bribes to admission committees, mandatory books authored and sold by professors, the transfer of entrance examination fees to university administrators, and obligatory preparatory lessons for examinations (Höltge 2008: 100–103).

Hence, the state was compelled to re-intervene to limit the negative effects of deregulation (e.g. non-recognition of diplomas, corruption) and to thwart the perceived threat from private HE. By the 2000s it reasserted control by introducing accreditation procedures. This led to a significant decline in private HE institutions, as many of them lost their accreditation.

While Armenian HE policy in the 1990s was primarily impacted by the unbalanced relationship between supply and demand and quality concerns, IOs such as the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, and the EU also provided significant reform impetuses. These transnational actors made credits and grants available for carrying out reform projects (Kharakhanyan et al. 2011), which primarily concerned the improvement of teaching materials, training of administrative and teaching staff, and study visits.[8] Unlike some post-Soviet countries, which cracked down on international donors, the Armenian state generally actively supported such initiatives. Yet despite improvements to administrative structures and teaching programs, the measures did not result in fundamental changes to HE governance. Moreover, the programs were generally carried out in an uncoordinated fashion, while the lack of a uniform state HE policy posed an obstacle to effective implementation.

[7] According to the education law, the selection of the legal form of private HE institutions was left up to the institutions themselves (Art. 27). As a result, many private institutions functioned as limited liability companies or foundations. The teaching offer of the private schools primarily covered previously underrepresented subjects such as management, marketing, banking and financing.

[8] Two major programs were the Open Society Institute's Higher Education Support Program, which focused on policy development, upgrading and enhancing the quality of HE content, and the professional development of faculty (see http://www.osf.am/programs/higher-education-support-program), and the EU's TEMPUS program, which aimed to facilitate the transfer of credits with Western Europe.

Thus in the early 2000s, Armenia was still strongly aligned with the state-centered paradigm—with the exception of the wide-spread introduction of tuition fees. This falls in line with the general policy-making pattern of the increasingly authoritarian ruling elites. While nominally committed to reform, political elites under Robert Kocharyan's rule were simultaneously concerned with fending off any potential political challenges and upholding control over all social spheres (Ayvazyan 2013). Subsequently, the Ministry remained the central decision-maker and exerted strong process control, for example regarding institutional development strategies. Furthermore, the Ministry maintained responsibility for teaching standards and disciplinary profiles, as well as licensing, accreditation and admissions (Papyan 2012). The state's strong interest in upholding its patron-client networks was most prominently reflected in its far-reaching control over internal university governance structures. On the one hand, structures of academic self-governance existed, which were formally vested with decision-making authority. At most universities, a university council, academic council and rector jointly decided on the annual budget, development plans, personnel, study fees and teaching matters. Elected by the university council, rectors assumed everyday administrative matters. However, rectors and university council members had to be approved by the Ministry—with the effect that university councils frequently were dominated by high-ranking political officials. One striking example is the State University of Yerevan, whose council president was also the President of the Republic. Thus while the state indeed loosened its ideological control over HE, it still strongly asserted political influence over university governance (CEU 2013). Subsequently, Armenia strongly clung to its state-centered legacy for most policy indicators in 2001 (Interview Ministry of Education of Armenia 2012) (see Table 2).

Europeanization of Armenian HE policy?

The question now arises how Armenian HE policy has developed more recently amid new geopolitical opportunities and constraints. Armenia has become part of the European HE area, while at the same time pursuing a closer geopolitical approximation with Russia, as reflected in its pending membership in the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union (Grigoryan 2014). Thus, it is uncertain what type of HE reform dynamics will unfold amid these tensions. Although Armenia officially only joined Bologna in 2005, significant Europeanization effects already manifested themselves shortly beforehand. Immediately after the late ratification (2004) of the Lisbon Agreement (2000) regarding the recognition of HE qualifications in Europe, a new Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education (2004) was passed. Simultaneously to the expansion of the above-mentioned accreditation procedures, the law redefined the organizational and financial foundations of Armenian universities with direct reference to broader European developments. For the first time, universities were granted the status of public law institutions. While the law generally granted public universities substantial autonomy over internal organization and administration, the law more rigidly regulated property rights and entrepreneurial activities to generate additional income. For example, the law prescribed that the universities may only legally pursue economic activities predefined by the state (Art. 6.1) and that turnover must be distributed in a manner defined by the state (Art. 6.2). The sustained means for state intrusion do not come as a surprise, in view of the Kocharyan government's symbiotic relationship with Armenian "big business" and its coinciding efforts to prevent a "spill-over" of the Georgian "Rose Revolution" into Armenia (Grigorian 2004).

Armenia's Bologna membership provided a further strong reform impetus. First, the country adopted a series of resolutions regarding the introduction of further Bologna-related policies, e.g. ECTS.[9] Furthermore, the law granted equal rights to state and non-state (accredited) universities (Khachatryan 2009). External QA mechanisms and accreditation procedures based on European standards were also introduced. In 2008 a QA agency[10] was established with World Bank support (CEU 2013), whose task was to support universities in developing an internal quality culture and increasing the system's efficiency and competitiveness. Subsequently, universities were called on to introduce internal self-evaluation mechanisms and undergo both *ex ante* state accreditation and *ex post* QA. Although the agency is formally independent of the Ministry and HE institutions, the Prime Minister, the Education and Finance Ministers, as well as high-ranking governmental officials are represented in its administrative structures. In other words, it is not an academic-dominated body, rather can be seen as an extended arm of governmental control (CEU 2013).[11]

Armenia introduced several further governance-related reforms, which might convey the impression that it is converging on the market-oriented paradigm (Ministry of Education and Science 2011). For example, university management now bears responsibility for drawing up strategic plans and teaching programs (National Bologna Report Armenia 2004). However, these cannot be designed autonomously by academics, rather still require ministerial approval. Universities also remain bound to ministerial guidelines regarding admissions, as BA programs at state and private universities must be approved by the state (Art. 14, HE Law 2004), while the universities have greater autonomy over MA and doctoral admissions.

Regarding funding, no fundamental policy change occurred. It is particularly noteworthy that universities now bear the burden of essentially funding themselves through tuition fees or IO grants, but neither university management nor the professorial staff has acquired any significant financial autonomy. Despite wide-spread rhetoric on university autonomy (National Bologna Report Armenia 2004), financial activities are still strongly controlled by the state, even though the state only provides approx. 25 % of university income. Thus, global budgets—which are increasingly widespread in Western Europe (Jongbloed 2003)—have not been implemented. Moreover, state funding remains input-based, which weakens inter-university competition. Within universities, the financial distribution mechanism also is input-based, although university management increasingly allocates research funds to more experienced professors based primarily on subjective criteria (Tempus 2010).

Based on our empirical indicators, Table 2 reflects HE policy developments in Armenia over the past 20 years. The early communist phase (1991–2001) was marked by a paradoxical state strategy: although unable to fund universities, it did not grant them a substantial level of autonomy. In line with the historical steering tradition, numerous semi-authoritarian governments further attempted to assert comprehensive substantive and financial control over universities. However, the table also reveals that the pace of change

[9] European Credit Transfer System.

[10] Website of the agency: http://www.anqa.am/en/.

[11] Currently plans are being devised for a new accreditation procedure, which will be headed by the Agency in cooperation with the Ministry. By the year 2015 the Agency is expected to be able to carry out institutional audits and the voluntary program accreditation of HE institutions. A so-called pilot accreditation with funds from the World Bank will be carried in 2013 at 14 selected (7 public and 7 private) universities (World Bank 2013).

Table 2 Reform dynamics in Armenian HE policy

	1991	2001	2011
Regulatory framework			
Core decision-making unit	State	State	State/university management
State control instruments	"Manpower-Planning" System-Design	"Manpower-Planning" System Design	Licensing, accreditation mechanisms, partial funding
Sets academic profiles/ curriculum design	Ministry	Ministry/university management	University management/ departments/approval by Ministry
Sets strategic goals for HE institutions	Ministry	Ministry	University management/ Approval by Ministry
Sets admission conditions	Ministry	Ministry	Ministry for BA programs/university management for MA/ PhD programs
Funding			
Main funding base	State budget (University budgets part of state budget)	State budget/tuition fees/IO Grants	State budget/tuition fees/ IO grants/donations/ state research funds
State funding approach	Itemized (Low financial autonomy for universities)	Itemized (Low financial autonomy for universities)	Itemized (Low financial autonomy for universities)
Mode of allocation	Input-based (some output-based funds within universities)	Input-based (some output-based funds within universities)	Input-based (some output-based funds within universities)
Strategic investments	State-defined	State-defined	Ministry/university management
Patterns of quality control			
Who controls/ evaluates?	Ministry	Ministry	QA agency closely linked to Ministry
What is controlled?	Academic *processes* (Compliance with laws and institutional capacity to carry out programs)	Academic *processes*	Academic processes, compliance with licensing requirements, institutional capacity, teacher qualifications
When does quality control take place?	*Ex ante*	*Ex ante*	*Ex ante*

has intensified, in particular since the 2004 HE law, which reinforces university autonomy and academic freedom. For example, university management is now mandated to develop its own academic programs and strategic plans. Nevertheless, in line with its overall authoritarian style (CEU 2013; Grigorian 2004), the state remains the central actor, as the law increases state regulation over admissions requirements (Art. 14, HE Law, 2004). Due to the purported lacking transparency in the management of funds by universities, economic activities of universities are still strictly state-controlled. Despite the formal increase of powers of university management, the state's influence is reinforced by its strong grip over the licensing and accreditation procedures.

How do we explain this outcome? First, it is safe to say that Armenia's geopolitical approximation with Russia has had little bearing on the structures and governance of HE. Russian involvement in HE in the Southern Caucasus is largely restricted to bilateral cultural exchanges, joint research projects and initiatives to promote the Russian language (Nixey 2011; Center for East European Policy Studies 2009). There is thus little evidence that Russian "soft power" has outflanked efforts to modernize HE along western lines. It instead appears that the modernization strategy of the semi-democratic Kocharyan and Sargsyan regimes has been primarily driven by domestic power-seeking motives. On the one hand, the state has actively expanded QA to meet the Bologna guidelines and ensure the inflow of western and IO capital. On the other hand, it has strategically crafted new HE institutions (e.g. accreditation, QA, university management structures) to uphold political control over universities. This leaves the academic research community few means for institutional self-determination.

The case of Georgia

Similarly to Armenia, Soviet-Georgian HE policy was characterized by its extreme centralization and rigid ideological orientation. The Soviet Education Ministry essentially regulated every aspect of HE and university autonomy was strongly limited. After 1991, Georgian HE policy initially remained highly volatile and unpredictable, while an overarching regulatory framework and a clear allocation of decision-making autonomy between the state, HE institutions, and academic profession were lacking. However, the state re-emerged as an important policy player in the mid-1990s and, like in Armenia, pursued a paradoxical strategy: while universities were essentially left to fund themselves amid drastic budget cuts and socioeconomic collapse after the Abkhazia war (see footnote 4), the state increasingly intervened into internal university affairs. Essentially, the government aimed to use universities to promote the Georgian culture, language and identity (Gvaramadze 2010). The result was the co-existence of state intervention and control regarding educational content and academic "anarchy" regarding personnel policy. At the same time, state guidelines for opening new HE institutions were lacking. This had the effect that the private HE market rapidly expanded (Sharvashidze 2005), while the public HE sector stagnated without a clear development strategy.

However, due to extreme underfunding and the collapse of the public bureaucracy, the first signs of "de-nationalization" of public HE became evident in the late 1990s. Like in Armenia, fee-paying study places were created in addition to publicly financed study places. This led to a moderate expansion of universities' capacity for action and enabled them to pay salaries to staff (frequently with delays). However, an overarching modernization strategy was still lacking. The state was more interested in exploiting universities to promote the formation and/or restoration of a Georgian identity (Interview Georgian university administration member, 2011). Thus, competitive mechanisms to increase research and teaching quality were completely absent. The state continued to control the allocation of the highly limited, input-based educational funding, while HE management structures were unable to make investments due to legal constraints.

During the unsuccessful transition to democracy and a market economy in the late 1990s, the public HE system became a victim of ineffective state steering. University autonomy remained highly limited to the extent that public universities were unable to detach themselves from the financially powerless state. Meanwhile, the academic profession was unable to reconstruct itself as a potent force, as academic research operations

essentially came to a halt after the Abkhazian War (see footnote 4). Amid economic collapse, it also became increasingly difficult for Georgian academics to access western or Russian literature and academic markets (Rörig 2006). Institutions of academic self-administration remained highly underdeveloped, while academic researchers were frequently at the mercy of state-appointed university rectors (Höltge and Lanzendorf 2008). In other words, there were few means for leading academics to assert their collective interests vis-à-vis the state (e.g. through a rectors' conference), as rectors were generally part of the ruling political elite.

Europeanization of Georgian HE policy?

What new impetuses have the Europeanization of HE policy and emerging *soft governance* mechanisms given to Georgian HE policy? As in the Armenian case, Europeanization effects already came to bear before Georgia joined the Bologna Process. These were flanked largely by the reformist Saakashvili regime, whose agenda to push through socioeconomic modernization through education reform attracted substantial amounts of international aid (Jawad 2005).

The 2004 HE Law was passed with the explicit aim of creating a "European" HE system (Saakashvili 2010). Here the government primarily drew on British-inspired steering mechanisms to purportedly modernize Georgian HE. This was reflected in the recalibration of state influence, which now aimed to stimulate institutional competition and guarantee an adequate quality of "educational products". A key component of Saakashvili's reformist agenda was to turn the ministerial accreditation department into a separate National Education Accreditation Centre in 2006 (Bologna National Report Georgia 2007). Composed primarily of government-friendly layover ministerial staff, the formally independent body subjected public and private HE providers to mandatory accreditation. The accreditation takes place both *ex ante* (as in traditional state-centered models) as well as *ex post* (as in market-oriented systems) (Bologna National Report Georgia 2009).[12] If the Ministry determines the institutional capacity to be insufficient, the institution may lose its status as a university and can only further operate as a "college" (Glonti and Chitashvili 2006: 222).

During its HE modernization push, the government took measures to strengthen both the management capacities of universities as well as the academic profession. In line with market-oriented models, efforts were taken to separate administrative and academic management. Elected by academic staff and students, newly established *academic councils* were granted responsibility for institutional development and strategic management (Georgian HE Law, 2004). These bodies were transferred extensive authority over the administration of global budgets, study fees and IO grants. They also determine salaries levels of academic staff—generally on the basis of academic degrees (Interview Georgian university administration member, 2011). Following the British and German examples, university chancellors were entrusted responsibility for financial and economic matters and budget approval. In an effort to democratize university governance, the law created so-called *councils of representatives*. These bodies, which must be twice as large as the academic council, consist of democratically elected academic staff and students and oversee the activities of the chancellor (Georgian HE Law, 2004). The strong presence of

[12] In the first step, the state evaluates *ex ante* whether a university has the institutional, material and spatial capacity to carry out a study program. In a second step, research performance (e.g. research projects, publications) and courses offered during the past few years are assessed.

academic staff is also reflected in the new *academic senates*, consisting primarily of professors elected by secret ballot. Thus, the law strengthened both the steering capacities of university management and the position of the academic profession. One particularly instructive case of academic power in Georgia were the drastic staffing cuts, which the 2004 HE law aimed to impose. Here, senior academics succeeded shifting the burden to younger academics by capturing positions in the selection committees and lobbying for evaluation criteria favouarble to their interests, i.e. seniority and the numbers of publications. This had the effect that average age of a Georgian professor was over 60 years (Höltge and Lanzendorf 2008).

Besides this, the state maintains substantial leverage over HE policy. For example, university management operations are tightly monitored by the state, which also still significantly impacts curricular design. Most notably and similar to his Armenian counterpart, the Georgian President still influences the appointment of rectors at public HE institutions, who preside over elected academic councils. While the Armenian President and high-ranking government officials are represented in university councils, the Georgian President even has the authority to approve and dismiss public university rectors (Georgian HE Law, 2004).

Regarding curricular content, a shift has taken place. While teaching materials were previously provided directly by the state, curricula are now drawn up directly by professors in close cooperation with university management. However, contrary to classic Humboldtian systems, in which substantive matters are the prerogative of the academic community, Georgian university curricula require the approval of the Education Ministry and academic council (which is headed by state-appointed rector). However, the relatively standardized curricula and exams are not necessarily to the detriment of the academic profession, as many professors benefit from market schemes by providing additional individual classes and repetitoriums.

Particularly striking in comparison to Armenia is the strong competition- and demand-orientation of the 2004 law, which modifies admissions and tuition policy. Above all, the law sets new incentives for students and university management. Universities now may select their own students, which have passed state-regulated and discipline-related admissions exams. Heavily supported by western donor organizations (most notably the World Bank) (see Ministry of Education and Science—Georgia 2007), the reform introduced an additional competitive mechanism, which primarily affects students: those students with particularly good admissions exam results receive education vouchers which cover their study expenses to varying degrees. Thus, a shift away from a supply-based to a demand and competition-based admissions policy has occurred, as state funds are now brought to the universities by the "best students" (Samniashvili 2007).[13] Subsequently, the financial autonomy of universities is greater than ever, as they not only administer their own budgets, but are also compelled to attract the best students. This heavily contested policy fell in line with the Saakashvili government's agenda to impose neo-liberal "shock therapy" on numerous spheres of Georgian society and shake off Russian influence and Soviet legacies. While the measures may have succeeded in reducing corruption and injecting meritocracy into the HE system, there are concerns that the voucher schemes are too drastic to effectively function in an economically underdeveloped country (Interview Georgian university administration member 2011; Kim 2011).

[13] As a result of these reforms, approx. 25 % of all students receive competitive scholarships (so-called grants), which cover their entire tuition fees.

Drawing on our empirical indicators, we now measure Georgia's degree of convergence towards the market-oriented model as well as the situation in Armenia. We acknowledge that our indicators cannot capture all nuances of governance within individual universities. Nevertheless, they help us to better distinguish between potentially artificial policy rhetoric and the new reality. On the whole, a paradoxical picture emerges in Georgia, which—like in the Armenian case—falls in line with a general governmental strategy (see below). On the one hand, there are symptoms of increasing state steering, such as the state evaluation of research performance and, above all, the state's imposition of new administrative structures. On the other hand, the reforms partially break with the tradition of bureaucratic, procedural control and reinforce universities' capacities for autonomous action, while also strengthening structures of academic self-regulation (Table 3).

As shown, the preliminary reform outcome reflects a combination of market elements with new and old forms of state control, while also ensuring a moderate level of "academic democracy" with the heavy presence of high-ranking academics in administrative bodies. The new forms of state influence are aimed at stimulating competitive behavior among universities. It is also important to note that we could not discern any major Russian influence over contemporary Georgian HE. In fact, the opposite has taken place: Georgia has perhaps overzealously endeavored to purge itself of Soviet legacies and Russian influence by adopting numerous neo-liberal steering elements (Interview Georgian university administration member 2014). However, this can lead to manifold difficulties in an economically underdeveloped country like Georgia. Most notably, qualified university administration personnel with management experience are often lacking. Moreover, many students are unable to cover the study fees, which endangers the long-term funding of everyday university operations.

Comparative conclusions

We now return to our guiding research questions: how have the HE policies of Georgia and Armenia changed since regaining sovereignty and how have transnational stimuli affected the pathway of development? As shown in the empirical analyses, efforts to align both HE systems with western models proved to be an important policy-making *leitmotiv*. While reforms in both countries were primarily driven by western "soft power", efforts by Georgia to break with its Soviet heritage and Russian influence were much more pronounced.[14] Despite Armenia's closer geopolitical alignment with Russia, the evidence also shows that both Armenia and Georgia converged somewhat towards the market-oriented model. For the majority of indicators, new power-sharing arrangements between the ministry/state and university management have emerged, through which elites in both countries have upheld numerous avenues for political patronage and clientelism. However, the pace of convergence in Armenia has been much slower than in Georgia, where the stronger degree of marketization can largely be attributed to the ambitious overarching reform course of the Saakashvili government and its efforts to purportedly "westernize" Georgia (Kim 2011). This is reflected in the highly competitive funding system, which draws heavily on merit-oriented voucher schemes promoted by international donors, but also in its efforts to strengthen the academic profession.

[14] For example, the frosty relations between Georgia and Russia were reflected in the fact that not one single Georgian student was sent to study in the Russian Federation between 2006 and 2008 (Center for East European Policy Studies 2009, 139).

Table 3 Reform dynamics in Georgian HE policy

	1991	2001	2011
Regulatory framework			
Core decision-making unit	State	State	University management (with heavy academic presence) & State (through appointed rectors)
State control instruments	Manpower-Planning System-Design	Manpower-Planning System-Design	Accreditation; promotion of selected projects; approval of content
Sets academic profiles/ curriculum design	State	State	Academics with consent of university management; approval by ministry
Sets strategic goals for HE institutions	State	State	Ministry/university management (increasingly university management)
Sets admission conditions	State	State	Ministry/university management
Funding policy			
Main funding base	State budget	State budget/tuition fees/IO Grants	State budget/tuition fees/IO grants/donations/state research funds
State funding approach	Itemized (Low financial autonomy for universities)	Itemized (Low financial autonomy for universities)	Global budgets
Mode of allocation	Input-based	Input-based	Input-based for universities/ output-based for students
Strategic investments	State defined	State defined	University management
Patterns of quality control			
Who controls/ evaluates?	Ministry	Ministry	State QA agency
What is controlled?	Academic *processes* (Compliance with laws and capacity to carry out programs)	Academic *processes*	Academic *processes* + Academic *products*
When does quality control take place?	Ex ante	Ex ante	Ex ante and Ex Post

Nevertheless, both systems are characterized by a very paradoxical understanding of university autonomy. Public universities remain autonomous and self-reliant when it comes to their financial survival, but are still subject to substantial political influence and state intervention in terms of staffing and substantive matters. In both countries the semi-democratic political elite appears to be pursuing a dual strategy. On the one hand, they render the impression of pushing through dramatic reform to appease western observers and donors (e.g. in quality assurance, and funding in Georgia). On the other hand, both Armenian and Georgian governments have crafted new institutions for reasserting political control over universities. In other words, the new state-market arrangements should not be interpreted merely as a sluggish response to global policy trends. Instead, they are symptomatic of very selective or "slanted" policy learning and isomorphic processes, as market-oriented steering instruments are only being adopted to the extent that they do not

fully undermine the state's authority over HE. For example, in the name of university autonomy, university management structures have been enhanced in both Georgia and Armenia. Yet in strong contrast to most western HE models, both governments still strongly influence the selection of rectors. Both governments have also alluded to European developments to expand QA institutions, which—unlike in the British, German or Czech cases—are not independent agencies with strong academic and external stakeholder presence, rather are closely linked with the ministry. Thus, in addition to strong oversight over teaching and research content, the state has created new forms of intervention. One interesting example is a new Georgian HE law proposal, which would transfer the power to appoint university rectors away from the President to the Prime Minister. The bill was vetoed precisely by former President Saakashvili, who (quite ironically) characterized it as a potential government infringement on the independence of universities (Transparency International Georgia 2013). In either case this reflects unwillingness by the government to allow universities to fully autonomously appoint their own high-ranking management staff.

Final remarks

All in all, a unique model of governance has evolved in both countries, which seemingly deliberately mixes market-based and authoritarian elements. Despite the barrage of rhetoric about educational modernization, Georgia and in particular Armenia still experience a greater level of state intrusion than many CEE systems (CEU 2013; see Dobbins 2011). The above described remnants of the communist state-control legacy show that the state is pursuing a very selective and in some cases artificial Europeanization/internationalization policy and by no means wishes to relinquish its influence over educational content and the political orientation of universities. Future researchers may consider examining the extent to which these policy patterns can be generalized to the post-Soviet space (e.g. Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia) and focusing more on the driving forces behind policy convergence and divergence in post-communist HE on a broader scale.

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