

**Development of the Code of Ethics of the Parliament of Georgia: Historical and
Political Context**

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Abstract

This article explores the issues of development and effectiveness of the Code of Ethics of the Parliament of Georgia between 2004 and 2024. The aim of the research is to identify the institutional, social, and cultural factors that hindered its practical implementation. The findings indicate that the lack of political will, deep political polarization, lack of trust among political actors, and the devaluation of moral and ethical values rendered the Code merely formal and non-functional. Consequently, it has not become an effective mechanism and does not have a substantial influence on parliamentary activities.

Keywords: Code of Ethics, Parliament of Georgia, Responsibility, Ethics Council

Introduction

Parliament's accountability to the public and its functioning based on trust are key preconditions for the sustainable development of democracy and the legitimacy of power. In turn, legitimacy depends on many factors, including the extent to which members of parliament place state interests above personal and party interests, and how society perceives the institution of parliament and its members (King Prajadhipok's Institute, 2008).

Numerous studies conducted across Europe reveal that public concern and distrust toward parliamentary activity are often associated with abuse of power by MPs, financial misconduct, conflicts of interest, misuse of privileged information, and low attendance at plenary or committee sessions. Such violations hinder the smooth functioning of parliament, create rifts between voters and elected representatives, and deepen mistrust in the effectiveness of the democratic system (OSCE/ODIHR, 2012).

Parliaments are often associated with corruption in the public mind. This includes Eastern Partnership countries and, among them, Georgia. According to Transparency International's 2017 Global Corruption Barometer, 31% of respondents in Europe and Central Asia identified elected representatives as the most corrupt group (Council of Europe, 2023). Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for Georgia fluctuated between 49 and 58 points from 2012 to 2024. In the past few years, the score has dropped to 53, the lowest level since 2015. This figure represents an average result and indicates that petty corruption is not widespread in Georgia. However, it should be noted that the index does not measure forms of corruption such as kleptocracy and state capture, which, according to Transparency International's reports, constitute the main corruption challenge in Georgia (Transparency International, 2025).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) points out that, in developed democracies, public trust in parliamentarians and governments is significantly declining, while in some developing democracies such trust has not yet been established (King Prajadhikok's Institute, 2008). In Georgia too, trust in political institutions is low. Public opinion surveys published by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and its partner organization CRRC show that parliament does not fulfil its responsibilities and does not respond to citizens' needs and interests. Moreover, MPs and even the parliament building itself are perceived as inaccessible to the public. According to the survey, 64% of the population believes that their representatives in parliament mainly serve their own interests (NDI, 2016).

The behavior of MPs in most democratic states is regulated by constitutions and legislative norms, including administrative and criminal codes, ethical norms set out in various laws, rules of procedure, and parliamentary regulations. Nevertheless, there is a growing trend toward codifying ethical standards directly, i.e., establishing clear definitions of MPs' professional and ethical standards (OSCE/ODIHR, 2012).

Codes of ethics are seen as instruments that foster political culture and strengthen democratic systems (OSCE/ODIHR, 2012). Moreover, the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) often emphasizes in its reports that codes of ethics can significantly improve parliamentary activity and help MPs determine the right course of action in situations where legal norms are not sufficiently clear (Council of Europe, 2023). It should also be noted that codes of ethics are not limited to prohibitions: they also establish positive norms aimed at promoting high ethical standards in parliamentary activity and fostering a culture of accountability (OSCE/ODIHR, 2012).

A code of ethics is considered most effective when it takes into account the political and institutional conditions of the country, international standards, the constitutional context, and existing laws (OSCE/ODIHR, 2012). The Parliament of Georgia adopted its first Code of Ethics in 2004; nonetheless, violations of professional and ethical standards by MPs remain a major challenge to this day. Verbal and physical confrontations, misuse of administrative resources, conflicts of interest, extreme political polarization, and an inability to reach consensus on issues of national importance hinder the proper functioning of parliament and ultimately obstruct the country's legal and democratic development.

In recent decades, academic research has increasingly emphasized the importance of codes of ethics in both established democracies and transitional democracies. However, the situation in Georgia has been relatively underexplored from this perspective. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the development and effectiveness of the Georgian Parliament's Code of Ethics from 2004 to 2024, as well as to identify the factors and root causes that impede its practical implementation.

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

- a) How was the Georgian Parliament's Code of Ethics developed and implemented between 2004 and 2024?
- b) What factors hinder the effectiveness of the Code of Ethics of the Members of Parliament, and how do politicians assess the practical significance of codes of ethics?

Objectives:

- To study the stages of adoption and implementation of the Parliament of Georgia's Code of Ethics (2004-2024)
- To analyze the content and evolution of parliamentary codes of ethics (2004-2024)

- To assess the mechanisms of practical implementation of the parliamentary Code of Ethics and identify major problems
- To examine the functioning of the Parliamentary Ethics Council
- To analyze the views of politicians and experts on the significance and effectiveness of the parliamentary Code of Ethics.

Studying Georgia's experience as a transitional country, particularly with respect to the effectiveness of its parliamentary Code of Ethics and the identification of specific social, cultural, and institutional challenges, will enrich both theoretical and practical knowledge in this field.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

In recent years, the academic literature has actively discussed the problems associated with representative democracy and the effective functioning of the parliamentary institution. Disillusionment with political processes and the loss of citizens' trust in the conscientious functioning of parliament remain significant challenges (Assembly, 2012; France, 2022). Citizen satisfaction with democracy has declined in developed countries. This is driven by many factors, including the irresponsibility of politicians and the lack of accountability. Society has developed a sense that they have lost influence over political processes and that politicians are interested only in power (Pelizzo, 2004).

International practice shows that it is common for members of parliament to misuse public resources for personal and party interests, engage in nepotism and corruption, or employ "ghost workers" who are registered in positions but do not actually perform official duties (France, 2022).

According to the latest studies of Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, parliaments are perceived worldwide as one of the most corrupt institutions, with low

levels of public trust. In Europe, 28% of respondents believe that most or all members of parliament are corrupt - the worst result among institutions. In Africa, 36% share this opinion. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 52% believe that most parliamentarians and senators are corrupt; in the Middle East and North Africa, 44%; in the Pacific region, 36%; and in Asia, 32% (France, 2022).

Rick Stapenhurst and Riccardo Pelizzo, in their work “Legislative Ethics and Codes of Conduct,” discuss how numerous ethical violations by parliamentarians have led to ethics reforms in many parliaments around the world. As a result, many legislatures have begun to establish ethical regimes to raise professional standards and instill ethical conduct among parliamentarians. Creating an ethical regime involves regulating members’ behavior and restoring society’s trust in the political system. However, it should be noted that strengthening ethical oversight in the public sector is not only a result of scandals; this trend is also connected with efforts to increase transparency and accountability (Van Hulten, Bentinck & ECPRD correspondents, 2011).

A parliamentary code of ethics is viewed as a mechanism to raise professionalism in parliamentary activities, to establish ethical values, and to prioritize public interest. At the same time, it aims to prevent unethical practices such as political patronage, corruption, and the misuse of public resources for personal or party benefit (Assembly, 2012; France, 2022). The document regulates issues such as asset declaration, conflicts of interest, gifts, lobbying, interest disclosure, transparency, and post-office obligations (Assembly, 2012; France, 2022). All of the above contributes to restoring public trust in parliaments, which in many countries has been fundamentally shaken. A code of ethics also serves as a guide for decision-making in ambiguous situations and enables parliament to effectively perform its functions (CPA, 2015). Although the conduct of parliamentarians is largely based on personal beliefs and attitudes, it is important that

it aligns with public expectations associated with elected representatives. Moreover, the willingness to adhere to a code of conduct initially depends on members' good faith (Assembly, 2012; Council of Europe, 1999).

The effectiveness of a code of ethics is not determined solely by its content; it is fundamentally important that the process of drafting the document be transparent, inclusive, and consultative. Such an approach lends legitimacy to the code and fosters the creation of an environment and culture in which the majority of MPs observe the norms of ethical behavior (OSCE, 2012; France, 2022).

Equally important for its implementation are training programs for parliamentarians, active involvement of the media, and communication with society. In order for the code of ethics not to be merely a formal, non-functional document, monitoring mechanisms, effective and transparent responses to violations, and the imposition of appropriate sanctions are required (France, 2022). While there is no guarantee of successful implementation of a code of ethics, there are a number of elements that facilitate the process. These elements include strong leadership, a participatory drafting process, and integration of the code into a broader institutional framework that serves ethical governance. Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, promotion of codes of ethics, training and awareness-raising, as well as encouragement of compliance, are also essential (Lindner, 2014; Jenkins, 2015).

A parliamentary code of ethics strengthens political culture, legitimizes the conduct of MPs, and ensures transparency and credibility. However, it is crucial that the code of ethics be part of a broader system of institutional transparency as one of its components. According to the CPA, the code must be embedded in a comprehensive system that incorporates other institutions and legislation and is oriented toward the establishment of transparent and conscientious approaches

(CPA, 2015). Numerous international organizations stress the necessity of a parliamentary code of ethics. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) regards codes of ethics as instruments in the fight against corruption and in fostering a culture of integrity, fairness, and accountability in public institutions. It stresses that every state should enshrine and implement rules of ethical conduct within institutional and legal frameworks to ensure that public officials perform their duties properly and with dignity. Organizations such as the UN and the Inter-American Convention against Corruption highlight the importance of adopting and implementing codes of ethics. Additionally, in 2006, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopted the Brussels Declaration, calling on states to publish official ethical standards for MPs and parliament staff (France, 2022).

In international practice, it is recognized that there is no universal model for improving the ethical environment of institutions, including parliaments (OSCE, 2012). Consequently, neither the drafting process nor the content of a code of ethics should be mechanically transferred from one country to another, though the sharing of recommendations derived from past experiences remains possible (France, 2022). Of particular importance is the existence of an institution responsible for monitoring and enforcing the code. Three main approaches are identified in this regard: 1. self-regulation, where the regulatory body is established within parliament; 2. external regulation, by an independent body separate from parliament; and 3. a combined approach, whereby elements of self-regulation are merged with an external oversight body (Chêne, 2016).

It is important to stress that in political environments where only a small number of MPs adhere to ethical standards, they are likely to face numerous challenges, including in the area of electoral financing. Therefore, it is essential to establish unified standards binding on all political actors (Legislative Openness Working Group, 2015).

As the explanatory theoretical framework, this study employs the work of Rick Stapenhurst and Riccardo Pelizzo, “Legislative Ethics and Codes of Conduct.” The authors’ objective was to examine the creation of ethical regimes in legislatures and to demonstrate how such regimes can foster the development of good governance in developing or democratizing countries. The need for an effective ethical regime arises from the principle that in a democratic system, every citizen has an equal right to influence political processes and the composition of the legislature. Corruption and various forms of misconduct threaten democracy and undermine its legitimacy. Establishing an ethical regime entail regulating the conduct of members of parliament and restoring public trust in the political system. Research findings indicate that, following ethics reforms, citizens’ perceptions of the ethical conduct of public officials improve. When establishing an ethical regime and implementing ethical reforms, codes of ethics, ethical rules, codes of conduct, or a combination thereof are adopted. The creation of ethical regimes implies a dual strategy: on the one hand, legislatures must ensure publicity of the rules and demonstrate to society their serious commitment to implementing ethical regimes. As a result, citizens become familiar with the ethical framework that defines acceptable and unacceptable parliamentary behavior. On the other hand, within an internal strategy, legislatures must take effective steps to prevent violations by MPs and impose strict sanctions. The authors also examine the terminological ambiguities surrounding codes of ethics and codes of conduct. Drawing on previous research, they conclude that although the existence of sanctions may not directly determine the effectiveness of ethics reforms, political culture can play a decisive role in the success of ethical regimes. Thus, the success of a code of conduct largely depends on whether parliamentarians share a common political culture, values, and attitudes. The authors believe that if such common ethical values are absent, fostering a shared vision and a set of moral and value-based standards becomes essential.

The authors suggest that the promotion of a unified political culture is possible through legislative training. These issues receive significant attention from the international community, with numerous organizations actively engaged in promoting good governance - an important element in consolidating democratic regimes and ensuring sustainable democratic development. The authors emphasize that corruption and various forms of unethical behavior can be eliminated through successful ethics reforms, whose effectiveness depends on the existence of shared ethical values that can be promoted through legislative training. Rick Stapenhurst and Riccardo Pelizzo note that ethics reforms do not occur in a vacuum but in countries with histories where a plurality of political views and diversity of ideas is a condition of democracy and must be protected. However, this plurality should not be confused with a plurality of ethical standards, confused ethical standards, or the absence of ethical standards. Successful ethical regimes require clear and agreed standards for legislators, as well as understanding of what is proper conduct and what is not. Only on this basis can successful ethical regimes be built, with education and training playing a central role (Pelizzo, 2004).

For several decades, Georgia has been undergoing a democratic transition. Efforts to establish ethical standards in the governance system, including in parliamentary activities, often face institutional, political, and cultural challenges. In the process of introducing ethical approaches, it is important not only to adopt documents such as codes of ethics and conduct but also to promote value-based political dialogue, as well as raise awareness in society and among politicians regarding the significance of ethical, legal, and conscientious governance. Thus, the formation of ethical regimes is indispensable for the sustainable development of a legal and democratic state.

In line with the research topic, the study employs qualitative research methods, specifically document analysis, qualitative content analysis, and in-depth interviews. Through document and content analysis, data related to the research subject, including official documents, codes of ethics, and reports from local and international organizations, were processed.

As part of the research, in-depth interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2023, using a semi-structured questionnaire, with representatives of political parties and experts. During this period, the issue of a parliamentary code of ethics gained relevance, and corresponding changes were implemented. The majority of interviewed politicians were members of both the current and previous convocations of parliament. Consequently, their perspectives constitute an important source for assessing the challenges related to the development and implementation of parliamentary codes of ethics. In total, representatives of 11 political parties were interviewed: 1. Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia, 2. United National Movement, 3. European Georgia – Movement for Liberty, 4. Labour Party of Georgia, 5. Girchi, 6. Girchi – More Freedom, 7. Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, 8. Development Movement, founded by leaders from the Republican Party, and later joined Lelo in 2019, 9. Democratic Movement – United Georgia, 10. Conservatives, 11. Law and Justice. Additionally, to ensure a multifaceted understanding of the issue, nine researchers from political science, law, social sciences, and the humanities were interviewed using the in-depth interview method, which allowed the subject to be analyzed from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

Initial attempts to develop the Code of Ethics of the Parliament of Georgia

Since the restoration of Georgia's independence, when the country began to develop its own legislative framework, violations of professional and ethical norms by parliamentarians have

emerged as one of the major challenges. Verbal and physical confrontations among MPs, misuse of administrative resources, manipulation with voting devices, conflicts of interest, and other forms of misconduct significantly damaged the reputation of the legislature. As a result, public trust in parliament declined, manifesting in political disengagement and electoral apathy (Gogidze, 2012).

To address this problem, civil society, specifically Transparency International Georgia, took the initiative to develop a code of ethics (Gogidze, 2012). At the initial stage, meetings were held with the parliamentary leadership, factions, committee chairpersons, and independent MPs (Gogidze, 2012). Within the framework of the drafting process, a five-member working group was established, composed of MPs from all factions, while all interested MPs were free to participate. Transparency International Georgia studied European practices and provided research findings to the working group so that international best practices would be taken into account in drafting the code (Zedgenidze, 2021). The document was developed in consultation with civil society organizations, including Transparency International Georgia and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association.

On 12 October 2004, the Parliament of Georgia adopted a Code of Ethics that was declaratory and non-binding in nature. This document remained in force until 2008 and was intended to reinforce the moral and legal responsibility of MPs (Gogidze, 2012). In reality, however, the code proved to be an ineffective instrument that failed to establish an ethical environment (Kharadze, 2012). It is notable that citizens were not granted the possibility of submitting complaints concerning specific violations. Thus, in the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms, violations of the code of conduct by MPs did not result in moral responsibility (IDFI, 2015). This clearly indicates that the code of ethics was perceived by the political elite as a symbolic gesture rather than as an effective mechanism for introducing ethical

standards. This hindered the institutional strengthening of parliament and impeded the development of a democratic political culture.

From 2008 onward, civil society actively urged parliament to draft a new code of ethics (Zedginidze, 2021). In the parliament elected in 2008, only a small percentage of MPs were aware of the 2004-2008 code (OSCE/ODIHR, 2012). Despite persistent calls from civil society, a new code was not drafted for eleven years due to a variety of factors. One of the main reasons was the absence of political will, which demonstrated that ethical issues were not a priority for the political class. Furthermore, most MPs perceived the code of ethics as a declaratory, formal, non-functional document without real influence on political processes and incapable of regulating parliamentary conduct in practice.

On 14 December 2017, members of parliament submitted to the Bureau of the Parliament of Georgia a draft resolution “On the Approval of the Code of Ethics for the Member of Parliament of Georgia” (Parliament of Georgia, 2017). The author of the code was the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Open and Transparent Governance, together with its consultative group. It is noteworthy that the drafting process was carried out with the active involvement of the NDI. The explanatory note emphasized that the adoption of the “Code of Ethics for the Members of Parliament of Georgia” stemmed from one of the commitments undertaken in the 2017 Open Parliament Action Plan, as well as from recommendations made by several international organizations (Permanent Parliamentary Council, 2017).

The Code of Ethics provided for enforcement and monitoring mechanisms. The document envisaged the creation of a new institution - the Ethics Council - composed of MPs. Complaints concerning violations of the code could be submitted both by MPs and by individuals who believed

that the norms of the code had been violated against them (Permanent Parliamentary Council, 2017).

Unlike the 2004 Code of Ethics, which contained no enforcement mechanisms and was a purely declaratory document, the 2017 draft sought to ensure effectiveness by introducing sanctions. Specifically, these included salary deductions (ranging from 10% to 50%), recommendation letters/warnings, and suspension from participation in official visits within the scope of parliamentary activity for up to six months. At the same time, the code stipulated that only one disciplinary sanction could be imposed for a single violation, in line with the principle of proportionality (Parliament of Georgia, 2018).

During the parliamentary debates, divergent views emerged concerning the substantive framework of the document, its enforcement mechanisms, and the composition and functions of the Ethics Council. Some argued that in its existing form, the code largely duplicated norms already regulated by the Rules of Procedure and other legislative acts. From this perspective, the Code of Ethics should provide a moral framework rather than carry the force of law.

It is especially notable that a majority of MPs opposed the imposition of sanctions under the Code of Ethics, pointing out that sanctioning representatives elected by the people would itself be unethical. In the course of debate, it was suggested that public shaming would suffice as a response to ethical violations. Accordingly, under this approach, the Ethics Council would review possible violations and present its assessments to the public, which, as the ultimate arbiter, would express its judgment through elections.

Concerns were also raised about the impartiality, objectivity, and quorum rules of the Ethics Council. It was argued that decisions adopted by a simple majority of members would not provide a sufficiently high level of legitimacy. Although both majority and minority MPs would have equal

representation on the council, there was no adequate guarantee that it would not be used as a punitive instrument against specific factions. Hence, doubts were voiced that the Ethics Council could become a subjective and politicized body, particularly when its members were required to evaluate their colleagues.

Taking these circumstances into account, on 19 April 2018, the Parliament of Georgia rejected the draft resolution “On the Approval of the Code of Ethics for the Members of Parliament of Georgia” in its first reading (Parliament of Georgia, 2018). The quorum requirement was 50 MPs present. The draft received 39 votes in favor and 9 against, with support coming exclusively from members of the ruling party (Parliament of Georgia, 2019).

The discussions on the Code of Ethics revealed a clear dissonance. While MPs rhetorically acknowledge the importance of European standards, democratic mechanisms, accountability, and the need to strengthen citizens’ trust in state institutions, when it comes to adopting concrete mechanisms, particularly sanctions, which are common practice in European states, the majority opposes them. This underscores the gap between declared political rhetoric and actual political decisions.

The study of the development and implementation of a parliamentary code of ethics highlights systemic challenges linked to the absence of political will, weak institutional mechanisms, and a lack of political responsibility. These circumstances represent major obstacles to the consolidation of democratic standards and the advancement of political culture. The experience of the Parliament of Georgia demonstrates that ethical issues have never been given due attention, as evidenced by the ineffectiveness of the 2004 code, the absence of a code from 2008 to 2019, and the rejection in 2018 of a draft code that envisaged sanctioning mechanisms. The research shows that for a significant portion of MPs, the introduction of mandatory sanctions

was unacceptable. All this indicates that the deputies were avoiding taking real responsibility for upholding ethical standards.

Adoption of the Code of Ethics by the Parliament of Georgia: The 2019 Experience

On 24 May 2018, the Parliament of Georgia was once again presented with draft Codes of Ethics. The key difference between the two versions lay in the issue of whether the Ethics Council would be authorized to impose sanctions. It should be noted that in both cases, the draft Codes of Ethics were prepared by the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Open Governance (Transparency International-Georgia, 2018).

The new document largely reiterated the spirit of the previous draft, with only minor changes. The preamble of the 2019 Code of Ethics placed significant emphasis on the need to strengthen MPs' accountability and responsibility and on the establishment of high ethical standards in their activities.

The Parliamentary Code of Ethics defines the basic principles of conduct, prohibitions, and obligations for MPs. It regulates issues of conflicts of interest, gifts, lobbying, and asset declarations. It prohibits entrepreneurial activities, the use of administrative resources for personal, group, or party interests, as well as discriminatory remarks or statements. It also prohibits the use of official secrets or confidential information for personal purposes. MPs are obliged to ensure the accessibility of their official contact information.

The Code also regulates the composition, monitoring, and complaint-handling procedures of the Ethics Council. Potential violations can be reviewed either on the Council's own initiative or on the basis of a complaint. According to the Code, the Council is chaired by two co-chairs -

one from the parliamentary majority and another from the minority or from a faction unaffiliated with either side.

The Code of Ethics requires that the names of MPs who have violated its provisions, together with a brief description of the violation and the sanction applied, be published on the Parliament's website. If the Council finds that no violation occurred, the MP's name, surname, and a brief description of the case are published only with the MP's consent, while the complainant is notified of the decision. The Ethics Council is also required to publish an annual report of its activities on the Parliament's website. According to the Code, the Parliament is obliged to organize training sessions for each new convocation to familiarize MPs with the Code of Ethics (Parliament of Georgia, 2018).

The Ethics Council is authorized to issue MPs a "recommendation letter." "No other response mechanism is envisaged in relation to violations falling within the Council's competence." (Transparency International Georgia, 2018).

On 22 February 2019, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the above Code of Ethics in the form of a resolution (Zedginidze, 2021). According to the voting results, 77 MPs supported the resolution, with only one voting against. It is noteworthy that support for the draft resolution came exclusively from members of the ruling party (Parliament of Georgia, 2018).

It should also be emphasized that the 9th convocation of Parliament failed to fully staff the Ethics Council, meaning that complaints regarding possible violations of ethical norms by MPs could not be reviewed (Transparency International-Georgia, 2020).

In February-March 2020, at the request of Transparency International Georgia, the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) conducted a nationwide public opinion survey. A total of 1,763 respondents were interviewed using random sampling. The questionnaire sought to

identify public views on appropriate responses to ethical violations by MPs. One question concerned the type of sanction that should be imposed in cases of verbal abuse by MPs (Transparency International Georgia, 2020). The responses are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Full Names of Parliamentary Factions

In your opinion, what sanction should an MP be subjected to for verbal abuse? (%)	
Fine	34
Suspension of mandate (temporary or permanent)	28
Warning	26
Expulsion from Parliament	24
Withholding of salary	17
Temporary restriction from participation in international visits	5
Other	2
No sanctions	1
Don't know/Refused	6

Source: Transparency International Georgia (2020). "The Code of Ethics of the Parliament of Georgia Is Not an Effective Document," CRRC Public Opinion Survey Results

Transparency International Georgia assessed the adoption of the Code of Ethics as a step forward but stressed that the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms and the Council’s reliance solely on issuing “recommendation letters” rendered the Code a formal, non-functional document. The organization recommended the development of clear enforcement mechanisms to ensure the Code’s effectiveness, including the introduction of financial penalties, a measure already in practice in many democratic states (Transparency International Georgia, 2020).

Issues Related to the Composition of the Ethics Council

In 2019-2020, the composition of the Ethics Council of the Parliament of Georgia changed several times, which was closely linked to the political instability in the country. Against the backdrop of factional dissolutions and regrouping and the entry of new political forces into the legislature, the number of members of the Ethics Council often changed to maintain proportional representation.

The table below, compiled on the basis of parliamentary decrees, illustrates changes in the composition of the Ethics Council by faction between 2019 and 2023.

Table N2

Fraction	30.04. 2019	09.12. 2019	10.03. 2021	24.05. 2021	25.06. 2021	02.12. 2021	27.12. 2021	07.03. 2022	14.11. 2022	19.10. 2023
GD	1	2	4	4	7	7	7	7	7	-
GD-Indst	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
GD-Cons	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
GD-DoR	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
GD-Grn	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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GD-StrEc	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
GD- PowGeo	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
GD-SD	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EurGe	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EurGe- MvFr	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EurGe- Reg	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
UNM	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ALPat-SD	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NonFacM Ps	2	1	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
IndMPs	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LePaGeo	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
UNM- StrUn	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	1	1	1
RefGr	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1
EurSoc	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1
Citiz	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1
Girchi	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1

GD- PeoPw	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
ForGeo	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Euroopt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Freed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
NatDemSt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

Note: The full names of fractions are listed in Annex N1.

After the 2024 parliamentary elections, however, no official statements or documents mentioned the renewal or operation of the Ethics Council in the 11th convocation of Parliament, suggesting that the issue was removed from the agenda and that political interest in it has waned.

As a result of amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia, the concept of the parliamentary minority was abolished and replaced by the term “opposition.” Consequently, the Ethics Council could no longer elect a chairperson and co-chairpersons. Amendments to the Code of Ethics for Members of the Parliament of Georgia therefore stipulated that one of the co-chairs of the Ethics Council must be selected from the opposition (Parliament of Georgia, 2021). Despite this change, however, the Ethics Council was never fully formed.

The frequent changes in the composition of the Ethics Council between 2019 and 2023 reflect the unstable parliamentary environment. These adjustments were largely formal, theoretical exercises in proportional representation and did not ensure genuine ethical accountability among MPs. Within the frameworks of the research, attempts to obtain information on the Council’s activities from the Parliament’s official website proved unsuccessful due to technical issues.

Efforts to contact MPs who initiated the Code and served as Council members also went unanswered. Media sources indicate that a few complaints were submitted to the Council, mostly concerning verbal insults, but no outcomes or responses are available either in the media or on Parliament's website.

According to the Code of Ethics, the names of MPs who violate its provisions, along with a brief description of the violation and the sanction imposed, should be published on the Parliament's website. If the Council determines that no violation occurred, the MP's name and case summary may only be published with their consent. The absence of such information on Parliament's website raises questions about the Council's transparency. It is possible that the Council found no violations and therefore published no results; alternatively, the complaints may not have been considered at all. Either way, such ambiguity undermines perceptions of the Council's effectiveness and public trust in it.

Georgia's political reality shows that ethics codes are created largely as formal, non-functional instruments. Their real impact on politicians' conduct is limited, and no robust moral framework has been established. Public and political institutions, as well as the media, fail to exercise effective oversight and accountability.

Politicians' and Experts' view on the Parliamentary Code of Ethics

The research data revealed that the majority of politicians assess the effectiveness of codes of ethics skeptically and view them as formal, non-functional instruments. According to respondents, the drafting of codes of ethics in Georgia is accompanied by the prior expectation that they will not be enforced in practice. Accordingly, we can conclude that when skepticism

comes from political actors, who should be the very ones to understand the importance of such a document and to commit to upholding the values it enshrines in practice, the code of ethics is doomed to ineffectiveness from the outset. The mere existence of the document does not guarantee that the code will function as a regulator of ethical conduct unless there is responsibility, will, and trust among political actors that everyone will observe common ethical standards. Respondents' attitudes reflect a deficit of trust within the political elite at both the institutional and individual levels. At the same time, politicians show a tendency to attribute the ineffectiveness of the code of ethics to the political environment and collective irresponsibility, thereby disregarding their own individual responsibility in shaping the political field.

In addition, the research shows that in Georgia, the drafting of codes of ethics is often driven by the initiatives of international partners. Therefore, rather than serving a value-based transformation and embedding parliamentary work within an ethical framework, the development of codes of ethics in Georgia often creates only the illusion of introducing ethical norms and ensuring formal compliance with international standards. Thus, when a code of ethics is perceived by politicians as an externally imposed initiative, rather than an expression of their own motivation and responsibility, it lacks full legitimacy in the eyes of political actors, and its effectiveness is reduced to a minimum. This confirms an idea shared in academic circles: that for a code of ethics to be functional, not only the content of the document but also the process of its creation must be transparent, inclusive, and consultative. Broad participation, engagement, and joint effort in the drafting process increase the likelihood that MPs will internalize ethical values and recognize personal responsibility. This grants the code greater legitimacy and contributes to the elevation of political culture.

Politicians' views also revealed that the effective implementation of a code of ethics in Georgia is hindered by the lack of consensus on fundamental values both within the political elite and in society at large, by value-related chaos, extreme political polarization, and deep mistrust between political groups. These circumstances echo the theory of Rick Stapenhurst and Riccardo Pelizzo that the success of a code of ethical conduct depends significantly on whether parliamentarians share a common political culture, values, and attitudes. Thus, the absence of shared values and political dialogue in Georgia - both within the political class and in relations with society - prevents the practical enforcement of the code of ethics and the establishment of an ethical political culture.

Politicians and experts interviewed explained Georgia's moral and ethical problems as the legacy of Soviet totalitarianism. The Soviet regime caused moral degradation in society, undermined trust in social values, and created a distance between citizens and state institutions. Added to this was the negative experience accumulated during the period of independence, which deepened distrust toward ethical principles and public institutions even further. The Soviet system established the practice of double standards, where the formal declaration of values differed dramatically from actual behavior and deviated from moral norms.

Most politicians and experts believe that in Georgian political life, the dissonance between ethical and moral issues on the one hand and real political behavior on the other remains a major challenge. One manifestation of this is the parliamentary code of ethics itself, which exists only on paper and has not become a regulator of MPs' ethical conduct.

Although it is important to consider the influence of the Soviet totalitarian system, as well as the social, cultural, and historical context, when analyzing today's political processes, politicians' references to the Soviet legacy as an explanation for current ethical challenges may be

seen as an attempt to evade personal political responsibility. Georgia has been independent for several decades. During this period, neither the state institutions nor the political elite have taken effective, systemic steps to overcome the moral crisis in the country and foster society's ethical evolution.

According to one politician, instruments like a code of ethics do not create a civilized society; rather, they are the result of one. In Georgia, the creation of formal, declarative documents such as codes of ethics by state institutions, combined with the existence of a paralyzed ethics council that does not consider MPs' ethical violations, produces negative consequences. In this respondent's assessment, it would be better not to have a code of ethics at all than to have politicians disregard the norms it prescribes, since this amounts to a public demonstration of the document's emptiness. Under such conditions, nihilism and distrust arise in society toward rules and state institutions, ultimately threatening the legitimacy of democratic governance.

According to Rick Staphenurst and Riccardo Pelizzo, creating ethical regimes requires a dual strategy: on the one hand, legislatures must ensure transparency of rules and demonstrate a serious commitment to implementing ethical regimes so that citizens can understand the ethical framework defining acceptable and unacceptable conduct for parliamentarians. On the other hand, within an internal strategy, legislatures must take effective steps to prevent violations by MPs and impose strict sanctions. The research revealed that neither strategy is being pursued in Georgia. MPs lack a serious attitude toward the code of ethics, and there are no mechanisms to prevent violations. As a result, the code of ethics does not work in practice.

The analysis of interviews revealed several additional factors further constraining the code of ethics in Georgia. These include the low level of ethical awareness within the political elite, the socio-economic situation, the lack of value-based education, and the low level of media

responsibility. Moreover, most surveyed politicians stressed that in Georgia there is no demand from society for ethical politics. In their view, the establishment of ethical norms in politics will only be possible if society develops a clear demand and exerts pressure on the political elite to respect moral-ethical norms. Some politicians, however, assign the primary role in strengthening ethical values to the state, arguing that the government provides the impetus and defines political standards.

It is important to emphasize that the introduction of ethical norms and fair practices in the state cannot be reduced to a mere supply-and-demand relationship between politicians and society. While everyone, including the media, civil society, and individual citizens, shares responsibility for ongoing processes in the country, decisive responsibility rests with state institutions and political parties, since they hold the power to define ethical-legal frameworks and shape political standards.

Politicians' views partially coincide with those of experts. The overwhelming majority of interviewed experts believe that modern Georgian politics is entirely devoid of moral standards and responsibility. Legal culture is poorly developed, and not only codes of ethics but also even written laws and the constitution lack substantive weight. According to experts, lawmakers do not possess a culture of legal reasoning. Since independence, the identity and competence of members of the legislature have been constantly questioned.

Most researchers point out that the system of values and ethical norms historically present in society was destroyed during the Soviet period. As a result, a political elite and public detached from tradition emerged, which is reflected in their behavioral norms. One expert noted that over the past three decades, although the composition of the elite has changed several times, recruitment still largely occurred from groups formed or raised within the value system of the Soviet era.

Improving the political environment and establishing ethical norms is linked to the renewal of the political elite. The entry of a new generation guided by higher ethical standards may lead to a shift in political culture.

Experts also noted that to ensure the effectiveness of the code of ethics, it is essential to raise the level of civic education and promote the civic code. However, they emphasized that its effectiveness is directly linked to the country's economic condition, which remains dire in Georgia. The political heritage is so weak that adopted laws and codes alone cannot remedy the situation, since what is needed is far more fundamental and substantive research into politics as a whole. Thus, in their assessment, Georgia still has a very long way to go before ethical norms can be genuinely embedded in political processes.

Conclusion

Parliamentary activity plays a decisive role in a country's democratic development. High professional standards of lawmakers, an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and a sense of accountability are vitally important on the path of legal development, which must ensure the establishment of a dignified existence for human beings within the state.

International experience shows that codes of ethics in parliaments play an important role in regulating the conduct of legislators. They contribute to raising professional standards, establishing fair practices, prioritizing the public interest, and strengthening public trust - conditions essential for the sustainable development and legitimacy of a democratic, rule-of-law state. Codes of ethics are particularly significant in states undergoing democratization, among which Georgia is included.

The effectiveness of a code of ethics is not defined solely by its content. It is crucial that the drafting process be transparent, inclusive, and consultation-based, which lends legitimacy to

the code and fosters the creation of an environment and culture in which the majority of members of parliament uphold ethical norms of conduct (OSCE, 2012; France, 2022). At the same time, the implementation of the code ultimately depends on the goodwill and responsibility of the MPs themselves (Assembly, 2012; Council of Europe, 1999). Georgia's experience shows that the development of codes of ethics has been more a result of initiatives by international partners than an expression of the will, internal motivation, and responsibility of members of parliament. This is confirmed by the attitudes of politicians: most are skeptical toward codes of ethics and consider such documents in Georgia to be mere formalities that cannot have real influence on the political sphere. The study revealed that the drafting of the parliamentary code of ethics in Georgia was not the result of broad political consensus, which significantly undermines its legitimacy and diminishes the prospects for effective implementation. It should be emphasized that the active participation and joint effort of parliamentarians in the drafting process would facilitate a stronger sense of ownership of the code, encourage political dialogue, strengthen ethical culture, and support its effective integration into parliamentary activity.

For ethical reforms to succeed, it is important for legislatures to ensure the publicity of rules and to demonstrate to the public a serious commitment to implementing ethical regimes (Pelizzo, 2004). This would allow citizens to understand the ethical framework and assess MPs' conduct according to ethical standards. However, in Georgia's case, the analysis of interviews reveals that politicians hold a dismissive attitude toward the code. They acknowledge that its drafting serves to create the illusion of introducing ethical norms and to ensure formal compliance with international standards, rather than to improve the political environment. The adoption of the code of ethics by parliament and its disregarding in practice sends a clear signal to society that adopting declarations and then ignoring them is considered normal for state institutions. Such

approaches foster nihilism in Georgia and deepen citizens' distrust toward state institutions, posing a serious threat to the country's democratic development. Considering all this, it becomes clear why state institutions neither promote the code of ethics nor work to raise public awareness in this regard.

International experience shows that for the successful implementation of a code of ethics, it is essential to conduct training for MPs, ensure active involvement of the media and communication with the public, and to disseminate, teach, promote awareness of, and encourage compliance with the code. In the Georgian context, however, such practices are virtually absent. The parliamentary website contains no information about the organization of ethics training. Efforts to promote the code and raise awareness are limited, while the media rarely cover issues of ethics. As a result, neither society nor the media has any real influence on MPs' adherence to ethical norms.

Ensuring the effectiveness of the code of ethics requires the establishment of an institution responsible for monitoring and overseeing its implementation. One model is based on the practice of self-regulation among MPs. The self-regulation mechanism currently in place in the Georgian parliament fails to ensure ethical accountability of MPs' behavior. In 2018, parliament did not adopt a draft code that included sanctions. In 2019, a more lenient version of the code of ethics was adopted. The Ethics Council, responsible for monitoring ethical violations, is limited to issuing recommendation letters. Nevertheless, the study showed that the Council does not function in practice. It does not respond to complaints, and the parliamentary website contains no information about potential violations or the outcomes of their review. In Georgia's context, a more effective approach may be a combined model in which self-regulatory elements are merged with oversight by an external body.

In academic literature, it is widely argued that political culture has a significant influence on the implementation of ethical regimes. The success of a code of conduct largely depends on whether MPs share a common political culture, values, and attitudes. If common ethical values are absent, it is necessary to foster a shared vision and a set of moral and value-based standards (Rick Stapenhurst and Riccardo Pelizzo). The study revealed that in Georgia there is no consensus on fundamental values - neither within the political elite nor within society at large. The existing value chaos in the country, combined with extreme political polarization and deep mistrust between political groups, hinders the development of a shared vision and the establishment of common moral and ethical standards. Politicians and experts surveyed attribute these problems to the legacy of the Soviet totalitarian system, which promoted moral degradation, undermined trust in social values, and created a distance between citizens and state institutions - a situation further exacerbated by negative experiences accumulated during independence.

It is important to highlight that the extreme polarization among political forces in the 1990s split society and drove the country toward the radicalization of political processes. The search for enemies and mutual intolerance created significant obstacles to forming value consensus and a political culture based on compromise.

After independence, it was essential to achieve moral transformation and healing of society, as well as to establish a consciousness that would serve as the foundation for building a democratic and rule-of-law state. However, the political elite proved unprepared for this process then and remains so now. State institutions have not taken systemic and effective steps to overcome value chaos, lead the country out of moral crisis, and establish shared value standards.

In summary, the study identified many factors that hinder the effectiveness of the code of ethics and the establishment of moral approaches in Georgia. Among them are the deep mistrust

within the political elite and society, value-related chaos, and acute political polarization; the low level of legal thinking among political actors and their disregard for individual responsibility; the deficit of value-based education; low morality within both the political class and society; socioeconomic problems; the Soviet legacy; and the practice of double standards. The process is further hampered by formalistic approaches and the weak involvement of the media, civil society, and citizens in monitoring MPs' compliance with ethical rules.

In the process of introducing the Georgian parliament's code of ethics, international experience was to all intents and purposes ignored, which significantly reduces the chances of successful ethical reform. Specifically, the code was not drafted in an inclusive manner; genuine approaches have not been encouraged in practice; and the document has not been promoted. Effective enforcement and monitoring mechanisms are lacking, and adequate steps have not been taken to form shared values and improve political culture.

It should also be noted that mechanically transferring codes of ethics from one country to another is inappropriate. In Georgia, the development, implementation, and monitoring of political codes of ethics require not only the drafting of formal rules but also a deep and thorough understanding and consideration of the historical, social, political, and legal context. Otherwise, the code of ethics cannot take root in the local environment.

Achieving all the above is practically impossible unless the establishment of ethical norms and overcoming the country's moral crisis become a state priority. The introduction of honest approaches and moral standards within state institutions is an important but insufficient condition. It is essential for the government to take effective steps to achieve the moral improvement of society. Only educated citizens who think within ethical standards can make conscious and

responsible choices in favor of deputies committed to establishing the rule of law, prioritizing the public interest, and creating a dignified environment for every citizen.

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Fraction	
GD	Georgian Dream
GD-Indst	Georgian Dream - Industrialists
GD-Cons	Georgian Dream - Conservatives
GD-DoR	Georgian Dream - For Development of Regions
GD-Grn	Georgian Dream - Greens
GD-StrEc	Georgian Dream - Strong Economy
GD-PowGeo	Georgian Dream - For Powerful Georgia
GD-SD	Georgian Dream - Social Democrats
EurGe	European Georgia
EurGe-MvFr	European Georgia - Movement for Freedom
EurGe-Reg	European Georgia - Regions;
UNM	United National Movement
AlPat-SD	Alliance of Patriots of Georgia and Social Democrats
NonFacMPs	MPs who are not part of any faction
IndMPs	Independent MPs
LePaGeo	Lelo - Partnership for Georgia
UNM-StrUn	United National Movement - United Opposition “Strength in Unity”
RefGr	Charles Michel Reform Group
EurSoc	European Socialists
Citiz	Citizens
Girchi	Girchi

GD-PeoPw	Georgian Dream and Parliamentary Political Group “People’s Power”
ForGeo	For Georgia
Euroopt	Eurooptimists
Freed	Freedom
NatDemSt	For National and Democratic State