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CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN GEORGIA-EU RELATIONS AND THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

The presented article provides an analysis of Georgia-EU relations and the impact of Russian military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine in accelerating the process of Georgia's European integration. This topic is a defining issue of Georgia's political agenda at the modern stage, as integration into the main European institutional structure is a political priority for Georgia which has no other alternative, that, accordingly, is reflected not only in the resolution of the Parliament of Georgia and the government program, but it has also become a constitutional obligation.

The paper briefly discusses the dynamics of the development of Georgia – EU relations – starting with agreements on partnership and cooperation and ending with giving Georgia a European perspective, and identifies the factors causing the problems during Georgia's relationship with the European Union;

Difficulties in the process of Georgia's European integration are highlighted and Georgia's efforts are presented to ensure that the European Union pursues an individual policy towards itself.

When the European Union defined priorities in the Transcaucasus, Georgia's self-identification, according to which it culturally and historically belongs to Europe, was not taken into account.

Georgia has always distinguished itself among the states of the South Caucasus with its European aspirations, and since the day of independence, the European idea has never devalued; While the other two states of the South Caucasus – Armenia and Azerbaijan – were very inconsistent in defining their self-identification: Armenia was officially a strategic partner of Russia, and Azerbaijan maintained balanced relations with both Russia and the West. Among the modern challenges of Georgia's integration into the European Union, in addition to the Russian factor, such issues as the absence of a single consensus in the European Union, and the current inefficient format, which needs to be replaced by more flexible mechanisms, are discussed;

The role of Russia's military intervention in Georgia and Ukraine in increasing the degree of "securitization" of foreign policy in the European Union and promoting geopolitical priorities is evaluated;

The prediction of new perspectives on Georgia's European integration related to the Russia-Ukraine war is given, which is linked with the further evolution of the European Union and the possible impact of this evolution on Georgia's EU accession policy.

Keywords: *European integration process; Neighborhood Policy, Association Agreement; military intervention; European perspective.*

The origins of Georgia – EU relations. Formal relations between Georgia and the European Union began in the 90s of the twentieth century, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia becoming an independent state. In May 1993, trade and transport ministers of the South Caucasus and Central Asian states, together with the leaders of the European Union, adopted the TRACECA declaration on the implementation of the transregional transport corridor development program. It should be noted that the initiator of the adoption of the 'Brussels Declaration', specifically the use of the transit potential of the newly independent post-Soviet countries with joint forces, was Georgia, which needed to make some diplomatic efforts to convince the Europeans and some regional partners that such close cooperation was appropriate. At that time, the European Union did not formally exist yet, since the "Maastricht Treaty" entered into force a few months later, in November.

In 1996, the first step was taken to establish contractual relations between Georgia and the European Union – the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed, which entered into force in 1999. This is

the period when Georgia made strategic choices and took the first modest steps towards the West. However, the partnership and cooperation agreement was aimed more at assisting Georgia in the process of post-Soviet transformation, rather than anything more ambitious. The attitude of donor and recipient continued until 2004. During this period, the European Union has already allocated 450 million EUR in aid to Georgia and was the largest donor along with the USA (Gegeshidze, 2007, 14). In 2004, Georgia's invitation to participate in the European "neighbourhood policy" was largely a result of the „Rose Revolution“. Although the main foreign-political priority of the new government was membership in NATO, institutional integration in the European Union was also clearly on the agenda. The Office of the Minister of State for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration was created, which was called upon to provide inter-departmental coordination in the direction of relations with the European Union.

At the same time, many loud statements were made by top leaders: for example, President Saakashvili directly announced that Georgia would join the European Union within the next presidential term, i.e. in 2009-2013 (Gegeshidze, 2006, 10). The European flag began to wave over all state institutions. It is worth noting that while working on the "Neighborhood Policy" action plan, the Georgian side insisted on indicating the prospect of EU membership in the preamble. Indeed, this did not happen at that time, but later it was written according to the new edition of the Constitution of Georgia in Article 78 of the Eleventh Chapter of the Constitution, "Constitutional bodies shall take all measures within their powers to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=36>). This process was nurtured by the established support based on the increased expectations in the society, but despite this, the European Union did not show any special interest in our country, because Europe was more interested in the entire South Caucasus region than Georgia (Kopiters, 2000, 65), which, according to political scientists, can become the main source of world energy after 40-50 years.

For this reason, when the European Union was defining its priorities in Transcaucasia, the organization considered its relations with Georgia only in the context of the South Caucasus for a very long time, not taking into account Georgia's self-identification, according to which it culturally and historically belongs to Europe, it was always distinguished among the South Caucasus states with European aspirations and since the declaration of independence, there has never been a devaluation of the European idea; While the other two states of the South Caucasus region – Armenia and Azerbaijan – were quite inconsistent in defining their self-identification – Armenia was officially a strategic partner of Russia, while Azerbaijan maintained a balanced relationship with both Russia and the West.

Georgia had to go through a long and difficult path for the European Union to conduct an individual policy towards the country. It should be noted that the most outstanding barrier in this process was and still is the Russian factor, which created many obstacles to the detriment of the European integration process of Georgia, although its aggression became one of the most important reasons for the activation of the European Union. As in the case of the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, as well as the Russia-Ukraine war. Russia's military intervention in both cases led to the acceleration of the integration process with the European Union (Imedashvili, 2022).

Based on the risks of Russia, the European Union made certain conclusions, and the level of "securitization" of foreign policy in the European Union (more emphasis on security) was increased, and geopolitical priorities were raised.

Activities carried out by the European Union as a result of the Russia-Georgian war. In response to the August war, the European Union implemented several activities in Georgia: an extraordinary session of the European Council was held on September 1, 2008; By the decision of the European Union Council of September 15, 2008, the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was established, which has been present in Georgia since October 1, 2008; On September 25, 2008, by the decision of the Council of the European Union, the post of the Special Representative of the European Union for the Crisis in Georgia was created; On October 22, 2008, a donor conference organized by the European Union and the World Bank was held in Brussels, at which the aid allocated to Georgia for 2008-2010 amounted to 4.5 billion dollars (<https://mfa.gov.ge/European-and-Euro-Atlantic-integration/Georgia-European-Union.aspx>). As a result of the 2008 war, we also consider the positive response of the European Union to the Eastern Partnership initiative, which was approved in 2009 and in which an action plan with the countries of the South Caucasus region, as well as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, was developed, where the priority directions of cooperation are outlined.

An important fact was also the "European Neighborhood Policy Review" document published by the European Commission on November 18, 2015, in which emphasis is placed on the countries of the Black Sea

basin – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine; on their gradual integration into the European Union and comprehensive political, economic and social modernization of these countries. On July 1, 2016, the Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union entered into force, thereby opening qualitatively new economic and political perspectives for Georgia (Namoradze, 2021, 69).

The Russia-Ukraine War and New Perspectives of Georgia-EU Relations. One day after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, on November 23, 2022, the European Parliament heard the report of the Croatian MEP Tonino Pikula "On the new strategy for the enlargement of the European Union" and adopted the text of the resolution with a large majority of votes. It is a fact that the adoption of this type of resolution was determined by the ongoing war in Ukraine and the consolidated position of the West regarding this war.

There are many moments recorded in the resolution, which even more widely opens the window of opportunities that Russia's aggression in Ukraine has created for Georgia.

On March 3, 2022, Georgia applied to join the European Union in an accelerated manner (as it is known, the Georgian government was planning this for 2024), where it requested to be granted candidate status together with Ukraine and Moldova. A country with the status of a candidate goes into the mode of integration with the European Union, not just cooperation. It receives increased assistance in the form of EU support programs and projects, greater access to financial instruments and full political support from the EU.

The cooperation format of these three countries – "Associated Trio" was created in 2021 and planned to advocate for further integration in the EU institutions in a coordinated manner. They were on the path of integration with the European Union at about the same pace – they signed association agreements at the same time and also received the right to travel without visas to the European Union; But in this case, by the decision of the European Council of June 23, 2022, Ukraine and Moldova were granted the status of candidates for EU membership, and Georgia was granted the European perspective. Although Georgia would not fall behind Ukraine and Moldova in terms of "approximation" (legislative rapprochement), the European Commission noted regarding Ukraine and Moldova that it trusts their governments and finds it easier to cooperate with them, while in the case of Georgia, the European Commission did not express such an attitude (Gogolashvili, 2022). Some conditions were imposed on Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, and accession negotiations will not begin until they are met. Even though Georgia has not yet received the status of a candidate, the "European perspective" itself means standing on the path of institutional integration in the European Union. A potential candidate enjoys approximately the same privileges (financial package, political dialogue, participation in EU programs) as the candidate state (Gogolashvili, 2022).

Further evolution of the European Union and its possible impact on Georgia's accession perspective. After the Russia-Ukraine war, the European Union also revised its internal policy. If the enlargement process was slowed down for two decades, the EU member states seemed to be overwhelmed and tired of the enlargement process, after the war the organization tried to change within itself the mechanisms that hinder the enlargement of the European Union. These mechanisms are:

1. Decision-making rules. Decisions in the European Council and the Council of the European Union are made by full consensus, which hinders the process of EU enlargement. Even if one country is against the granting of candidate status to a particular country or the initiation of negotiations on granting, no decision will be made. As was the case with North Macedonia, it was denied candidate status for a long time due to Greece's position that North Macedonia had appropriated the name of its province. For the second time, North Macedonia found it difficult to start accession negotiations because of Bulgaria's position, which it disputed on language issues. Bulgaria believes that North Macedonia speaks Bulgarian because there is no Macedonian language, so it requires written confirmation of this fact.

In order to avoid problems related to EU enlargement, the European Union is actively talking about establishing the rule of majority decision-making, when decisions will be made by 65% of the population of the EU countries. This rule does not apply to foreign relations and security issues. If the European Union adopts the rule of simple majority decision-making, it will also benefit Georgia and it will be a kind of insurance against risks, because such problems may arise regarding the country as well. It is not excluded that some countries will turn out to be against Georgia's accession to the European Union.

2. The European Parliament calls on the European structures that in the future regional conflicts do not prevent some countries from obtaining the status of a candidate country and the enlargement of the European Union. To resolve conflicts, it must take part and be intensively involved in this process, because it seems that the European Parliament understood that imposing such a condition makes the process of joining the European Union unfinished. We can cite the example of Serbia, which has been given a condition that until it resolves the conflict with Kosovo, it will not be accepted into the European Union.

Such an approach of the European Parliament will definitely have a great impact on Georgia, because it will be possible to accept Georgia into the European Union without resolving the conflicts, and after that, Georgia will continue to resolve these conflicts together with the European powers.

3. There is a conversation about allocating more aid to countries wishing to join the European Union from specific funds of the European Union (Gogolashvili, 2022).

After the end of the war in Ukraine, the European Union will most likely not stop the enlargement process. On the European continent, non-EU countries will have more opportunities to join the EU. In the case of Georgia, as a result of democratic reforms, it will be able to join the European Union much more easily than before; Otherwise, Georgia, like Azerbaijan, will remain a politically and economically (in the context of the Eurasian transit corridor) important partner country for the European Union, but without the prospect of joining the European Union.

Conclusion

Georgia-EU relations started in the 90s of the twentieth century, although these relations were not characterized by intensity. Because at the beginning of relations, Europe was more interested in the whole South Caucasus region than Georgia; Therefore, when the European Union was defining the priorities in Transcaucasia, they did not take into account the self-identification of Georgia, according to which country culturally and historically belongs itself to Europe, has always been outstanding among the states of the South Caucasus with European aspirations, and since the day of the declaration of independence, the European idea has never been devaluated; While the other two states of the South Caucasus region – Armenia and Azerbaijan – were quite inconsistent in defining their self-identification – Armenia was officially a strategic partner of Russia, while Azerbaijan maintained a balanced relationship with both Russia and the West.

Russia's military intervention in Georgia and Ukraine became the basis for a serious turning point in Georgia-EU relations.

Russia's military intervention in Georgia in August 2008 led to the acceleration of the integration process with the European Union and some extent led to the positive response of the European Union to the Eastern Partnership initiative; Also, in the modern context, the Russia-Ukraine war also conditions the further activation of the European Union, according to which the chances of Georgia's full integration into the European Union are much higher. The beginning has already appeared – new perspectives have emerged in Georgia-EU relations – in the form of Georgia's European perspective; In the organization, the level of "securitization" of foreign policy has increased, geopolitical priorities have been raised, and discussions on the improvement of the mechanisms of the European Union's expansion have begun.

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Джисейшвілі К., Хевциуриანი А. Сучасні тренди відносин ЄС-Грузія та російський чинник

Представлена стаття містить аналіз відносин Грузія-ЄС та вплив російського військового втручання в Грузію та Україну на прискорення процесу європейської інтеграції Грузії. Ця тема є визначальним питанням політичного порядку денного Грузії на сучасному етапі, оскільки інтеграція в основну європейську інституційну структуру є політичним пріоритетом Грузії, який не має іншої альтернативи.

У статті розглядається динаміка розвитку відносин Грузія – ЄС – починаючи від угод про партнерство та співпрацю і закінчуючи наданням Грузії європейської перспективи, а також визначаються чинники, що викликають проблеми у відносинах Грузії з Європейським Союзом;

Висвітлено труднощі в процесі європейської інтеграції. Обґрунтовано, що коли Євросоюз визначав пріоритети в Закавказзі, не було враховано самоідентифікацію Грузії, згідно з якою вона культурно та історично належить до Європи.

Грузія завжди виділялася серед держав Південного Кавказу своїми європейськими прагненнями, і з дня набуття нею незалежності європейська ідея ніколи не девальвувала; Тоді як дві інші держави Південного Кавказу – Вірменія та Азербайджан – були дуже непослідовними у визначенні своєї самоідентифікації: Вірменія офіційно була стратегічним партнером Росії, а Азербайджан підтримував збалансовані відносини як з Росією, так і із Заходом. Серед сучасних викликів інтеграції Грузії до Європейського Союзу, окрім російського чинника, такі проблеми, як відсутність єдиного консенсусу в Євросоюзі та нинішній неефективний формат, який необхідно замінити більш гнучкими механізмами. обговорено;

Оцінено роль військового втручання Росії в Грузію та Україну в підвищенні ступеня «сек'юритизації» зовнішньої політики в Європейському Союзі та просуванні геополітичних пріоритетів;

Подано прогноз нових перспектив європейської інтеграції Грузії, пов'язаних з російсько-українською війною, що пов'язано з подальшою еволюцією Європейського Союзу та можливим впливом цієї еволюції на політику вступу Грузії до ЄС.

Ключові слова: *євроінтеграційний процес; політика сусідства, Угода про асоціацію; військове втручання; європейська перспектива.*