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## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GEORGIA'S EUROPEAN INTEGRATION POLICY DURING THE PRESIDENCY OF M. SAKASHVILI AND AFTER THE CHANGE OF POWER OCTOBER 1, 2012**

The article analysis foreign policy of Georgia towards EU integration since 2003. Georgia's EU integration policy was activated after the "Rose Revolution". New President of Georgia M. Saakashvili enjoyed strong support of the West, but Russia-Georgia war in 2008, unsuccessful reforms, high level of unemployment made his policy unpopular within Georgians and in October 2012, people voted against the ruling party. Defeat in parliamentary elections was a negative turning point for Saakashvili and his supporters. They started discreditation of the new coalition government policy (especially foreign policy) claiming that aim of Georgia's foreign policy is not European and Euro-Atlantic integration anymore, that representatives of the new government are agents of the Kremlin. An analysis of Georgia's foreign policy in the context of EU integration shows that the priorities of Georgia's foreign policy are unchanged. The goal of Georgia's foreign policy is membership of the EU.

**Key words:** *Georgia; Foreign Policy of Georgia; European integration of Georgia.*

### **Introduction**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia, like other post-Soviet states, faced with the need to build its own foreign policy, determine the goals and priorities of foreign policy, the strategy of relations with leading powers and international organizations (*Leushkin, Sukhiashvili, 2019: 38*).

The purpose of the paper is to analyze the foreign policy of Georgia in the field of European integration during the presidency of M. Saakashvili and after the 2012 parliamentary elections. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that, despite the change of power in 2012, in spite of the discrediting of the foreign policy of the new government by the former president and his supporters, official Tbilisi continues to pursue foreign policy oriented on further EU integration. Changing political orientation of Georgian government is impossible as in a political life of Georgia dominates only one - pro-Western political force, which is currently represented with two political parties: "United National Movement", "Georgian Dream" and with the variety satellites of these parties. Such a political conjuncture creates the illusion of political pluralism, in reality West controls the whole political spectrum of Georgia.

Georgia, which locates at the crossroads of two continents - Europe and Asia, between West and East has always stood and now faces need of choice of its political orientation (*Sukhiashvili, 2012: 18*). In the early years of independence, Georgia's foreign policy shifted from anti-Russian (anti-Soviet) sentiments that existed under Z. Gamsakhurdia (1991) to building more or less balanced relations with Russia and the West during the era of President E. Shevardnadze (1995-2003) (*Melikyan, 2014: 78*).

Shevardnadze created a semi-democratic state with a high level of corruption and unemployment, which was the cause of high labor migration. Shevardnadze's government took advantage of the fact that there was no competition

within the political system of Georgia. It provided stability, but not reforms. Shevardnadze's political team cared about its own profits, but did not understand how to contribute to long-term economic growth. Reforms were purely superficial (*Lucas, 2009: 253*).

The pro-Western foreign policy and "reforms" conducted by the Georgian authorities in the 90s were declarative because the fulfillment of EU requirements threatened the internal power of the ruling elites of Georgia. The point is that for some ruling elites, internal losses from the implementation of the EU rules were much higher than for other (*Vachudova, 2009: 94*) (for example political elites of some Central European states).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea and South Caucasus region has become the focus of considerable international attention, primarily because it is one of the oldest and potentially the richest oil and gas producing areas in the world. Surrounded by the three powers Iran, Russia, and Turkey and located on the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the South Caucasus has also been at the center of post-cold war geopolitical rivalries (*Kakachia, 2011: 15*).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a need to form new agreements on cooperation with the new independent states of the region. In January 1992, the EC made a proposal to the Council to replace the Trade and Cooperation Agreement which was signed in 1989 with the Soviet Union, for agreements that would take into account new political and economic realities, including the process of democratization and the transition to a market economy (*Kopiika, 2008: 248-249*).

It should be noted that the foreign relations of Georgia and the European Union was based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Georgia and the European Communities on the one hand and their member states on the other hand (Association agreement which

was signed in 2014 replaced the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement). Document was signed in April 1996 in Luxembourg (Luxembourg). The agreement came into force on July 1, 1999, after its ratification by the Parliament of Georgia, the European Parliament and national parliaments of the EU member states. The agreement contains a preamble, 105 articles, five applications and a protocol. The PCA is a framework agreement that laid the foundation for the development of a dialogue between the parties on political, economic and cultural issues at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The agreement is basic and contains general provisions on cooperation between the European Union and Georgia.

### Materials and Methods

Such methods as system analysis, normative-value methodology, and content analysis were used to implement purposes of the research. The system analysis as the basic methodological approach promotes the disclosure of the internal organizational structure, environment and dynamics, which occur at the present stage at the Georgian political space about European integration processes. The normative-value method gives an opportunity to figure out the significance of political phenomena for the society and the individual. Traditional (qualitative) and formalized (content analysis) types of analysis were used for analysis of documents on the research topic, what provided an opportunity for determining the Georgia's policy on the European Union. Comparative method, essential for comparing similar phenomena of life, different variations of social and political development, was widely used in order to identify their common features and specifics, to search for the best ways of solving the problems of foreign policy for Georgia in the context of its European integration. This method was also used to study the experience gained by other countries to achieve geopolitical goals, which allowed avoiding unacceptable failures in determining the foreign policy strategy of Georgia at the present stage of the process of its "promotion" to Europe, involvement in the European political process, development of its current foreign policy strategy.

### Results and Discussion

#### **Foreign Policy of M. Saakashvili's government in the context of EU integration**

European integration policy of Georgia was intensified after the "Rose revolution". Former president of Georgia - Saakashvili enjoyed huge support of Western governments. Saakashvili's presidency coincides with the period when the EU begins a new phase of enlargement policy in the East. EU enlargement at the expense of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe puts on the agenda the need for policy development for neighboring countries.

In 2003-2004 the Commission put forward a proposal for a new EU foreign policy - the European Neighborhood Policy. Neighborhood Policy aimed at creating a basis for relations with new neighbors, which at the intermediate stage did not mean the prospect of EU membership for these states. Words of former president of EU Commission - R. Prodi helps us to understand better the aim of the Neighborhood Policy: "The goal of the Neighborhood Policy is to create a circle of true friends, with whom the European Union proposes to share their own values and wellbeing". The aim of the Neighborhood Policy was not only to share values and wellbeing of EU countries, but also to have influence and control of political processes in neighboring regions.

One of the main effects of the "Rose Revolution" for Georgia was the inclusion on its own initiative in the

European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2004, along with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Saakashvili declared European and Euro-Atlantic integration top priority of Georgia's foreign policy. This position was enshrined in the documents defining Georgia's foreign policy.

In 2005, for the first time, Georgia adopted the most important document defining the state's foreign and security policy: National Security Concept of Georgia. The National Security Concept of Georgia is the keystone document that presents a vision of secure development of the state and of fundamental national values and interests. It describes threats, risks and challenges to national security and sets major directions of national security policy. The National Security Concept of Georgia underlines the aspiration of Georgians to achieve full-fledged integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), and to contribute to the security of the Black Sea region as a constituent part of the Euro-Atlantic security system (*National Security Concept of Georgia, 2005*).

One of the provisions of the National Security Concept of Georgia declared that, integration into European and Euro-Atlantic political, economic and security systems is the firm will of Georgian people. Georgia welcomed NATO and EU enlargement and believed that integration of the Black Sea states into NATO and the EU will significantly reinforce the security of the Black Sea region as the South-Eastern border of Europe. Integration to NATO and the EU represents a top priority of Georgian foreign and security policy (*National Security Concept of Georgia, 2005*).

One year later was adopted Georgian Foreign Policy Strategy for the years 2006 - 2009. A separate paragraph was dedicated to European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. The aim of foreign policy during the period 2006-2009 was declared establish of Georgia's place in the common European family by deepening integration with the EU and joining NATO (*Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia, 2006-2009*).

The reading and analysis of these documents leave no doubt that the main priority of Georgia's foreign policy under President Saakashvili was deep and long-term European and Euro-Atlantic integration (*Leushkin, Sukhishvili, 2019: 39*).

Saakashvili's foreign policy was supported by controlled media and as a result most Georgians believed in the need of integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Confirmation of this fact is the results of the plebiscite, which took place in early 2008 and according to which 77% of Georgian's expressed support to Euro-Atlantic integration policy.

In 2004 and 2007 the European Union was enlarged by the entry of the states from Central and Eastern Europe. Due to the enlargement, the European Union's Eastern border was extended and pushed aside on the East. For new member countries of the EU from Central and Eastern Europe it has become vital to establish a close relationship with their Eastern neighbors.

In order to strengthen cooperation with new neighbors on the East in 2008 the EU approved implementation of a new initiative - Eastern Partnership. This project was an initiative of Poland and Sweden. It provided a framework for a more ambitious partnership between the EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Russian-Georgia war in 2008 accelerated adoption of the Eastern Partnership, as the EU was forced to react to the spread of instability in the region. After the 2008 war, the European Parliament called on the European Commission to present a new initiative earlier than it was

expected. As the development of the Eastern Partnership was intensified after the 2008 war, Moscow assessed it as anti-Russian initiative. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the Eastern Partnership initiative was an attempt by the EU to create a new sphere of influence in the region.

It is difficult not to agree with the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia. New initiative of the EU was important and expression of real support for Saakashvili's regime. After five-day clash between Russian and Georgia he needed such kind of support in order to prove, that war with Russia happened because Moscow was against of European path of Georgia's foreign policy.

In 2009, Georgia adopted a new foreign policy strategy for 2009-2012. According to the document, European and Euro-Atlantic integration remained the priority of Georgia's foreign policy. European orientation of Georgia's foreign policy was declared especially important after the 2008 war.

In 2011 Georgia published a new National Security Concept. Georgian government declares, that stage-by-stage integration into the European Union represents one of the most important directions of the nation's political and economic development... Broadening institutional frameworks of cooperation with the EU is important for Georgia. Georgia strives to achieve the Four Freedoms (free movement of people, goods, services, and capital) with the EU. Georgia considers the European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership as important factors contributing to Georgia's integration into the EU (*National Security Concept of Georgia, 2011*).

The National Security Concept also underlines the aspiration of the Georgian people to achieve fully fledged integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the EU, and to contribute to the security of the Black Sea region as a constituent part of the Euro-Atlantic security system (*Kakachia, 2013: 2*).

Saakashvili's liberal reforms, which aimed at overcoming poverty and unemployment in the country, did not bring results. The problems with refugees and the trade embargo with Russia further exacerbated the situation. Gradually was growing discontent in society. The opposition was without effective leadership. The government systematically used state resources against the opposition and representatives of uncontrolled media. Despite all this, foreign advisers either could not or did not wanted to criticize. Some, such as American Matthew Bryza, became paid lobbyists (in Brussels and Washington, the Georgian government hired expensive lobbyists) (*Rayfield, 2017: 502*).

The western governments have also realized that they already supported unpopular authoritarian regime of Saakashvili. It was also growing aggression of society against the "United National Movement" (UNM) was founded in October 2001 by Mikheil Saakashvili). Western curators of Saakashvili's regime came to the conclusion that in order to maintain influence over the political processes in Georgia, it is necessary to bring another player to the political arena (otherwise, outraged people could be go out into the streets and the processes could become uncontrollable). In elections 2012, Western curators supported coalition "Georgian Dream". It is not a secret to anyone that without the support of Western curators it is impossible in Georgia even to take part in the elections, not to mention winning this election. Thus, the victory in the 2012 elections by the Georgian Dream coalition was secured by the West.

Victory of the Georgian Dream became a negative turning point for Saakashvili and his supporters. He began to discredit the coalition and the leader of this coalition by

any means. The main argument against B. Ivanishvili was, that once he lived in Russia, he is an agent of the kremlin. With such an accusation against Ivanishvili, Saakashvili tried to explain his defeat in parliamentary elections. Saakashvili did not recognize his own mistakes, which really caused the failure.

#### ***The Georgian Dream's Foreign Policy in the context of EU integration***

In the process of analyzing the foreign policy of the Georgian Dream coalition must be remembered, that the foundation of this policy was laid during the presidency of M. Saakashvili.

The policies of the coalition government led by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's party, Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (GD), are often described by its political opponents as the antithesis of the previous policies of the governments under Mikheil Saakashvili... However, in fact the new government has not slowed the pace of dialogue on an Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU (*Zasztołt, 2013*).

In condition of constant attacks from the oppositions (representatives of the UNM) in March 2013 new coalition government was forced to adopt a document: "Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy". It was done by Prime Minister Ivanishvili for the one hand in order to calm done political opponents and for the other hand to prove political lobbyists of Saakashvili in Western countries that he is not going to change basic directions of Georgia's foreign policy. The resolution reflected the attempt of Ivanishvili not to shake such a fragile situation in Georgia.

Third point of the resolution once again emphasizes, that the main priority of Georgia's foreign policy course is integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. For the purpose of achieving strategic priority and gaining membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Georgia will take further steps for building and strengthening democratic institutions; establishing a governance system based on the principle of the rule of law and supremacy of human rights; and ensuring their reversibility of sustainable economic development. Georgia will not join such international organizations, whose policies contradict these priorities (*Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy, 2013*).

The next point of the resolution emphasizes, that Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic foreign policy course, first and foremost, serves sustainable democratic development and the country security and is not directed against another state. This is an attempt by official Tbilisi to make sure officials in Russia that the European and Euro-Atlantic foreign policy of Georgia does not contradict the security policy of Russia. It can be interpreted as an attempt of Ivanishvili to obtain some concessions in trade with the Russian government (for example to be allowed Georgian wine and mineral water in Russian market). Besides, normalization relation with Russia was his pre-election promise, but in this path he did as much as was allowed by Western curators.

Relations with the EU were further advanced by the signing of an Association Agreement on June 27 2014 that includes creating a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The same rhetoric of "belonging to Europe" continued to feature in official discourse. Though the agreement doesn't guarantee Georgia's EU membership in foreseeable future, it recognized the ambition and aspirations of Georgian people to one day become a member of the European family. As Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili stated at the signing ceremony of the Association Agreement: "today Georgia is given a historic chance to return to its natural environment, Europe, its

political, economic, social and cultural space". President Giorgi Margvelashvili also made similar claims: "as an individual, a Georgian national is European in terms of self-awareness and an integral part of Western civilization by nature" (*Kakachia, Minesashvili, 2015: 175*).

For most Georgians signing of an Association Agreement with the EU and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area was really perceived as breakthrough of Georgia's foreign policy. Most of them believed that Georgia's membership in the EU automatically means that this is the shortest way to achieve a high standards of life (for example to live as well as Germans in Germany). Poor socio-economic situation in Georgia forced many to go abroad and for those who still wished to move abroad, achieved visa-free regime was perceived as an opportunity to start a new life in European cities. But soon it became clear to all, that a visa-free regime meant to stay and freely travel across Europe for no more than 90 days during any 180-day period. For most of them, this was a big disappointment.

Most peasants were also very disappointed. They expressed the hope that after the signing of an agreement with the EU on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, their products will be in demand in the European market, and this will give them the opportunity to earn more money. But it didn't happen. Europeans are not ready to open wide the door to manufacturers of Georgian wines, fruits and vegetables, honey etc. Main consumers of Georgian products still are people in post-Soviet countries.

Economic, trade and market determines foreign policy orientation of Georgians. Rapid European integration of Georgia is not any more associated with wellbeing of population. None of the political leaders were able to solve problems of the society. During thirty years Georgians vote for the promised better future, but the situation is getting worse every year. Growing number of people wish to start a dialogue and provide a new foreign policy towards Russia Federation. In April 2019 Transparency International published a result of a survey, according to which 44% of interviewed wish normalisation relations with Russia (*Transparency International, URL...*).

On the contrary to such sentiments in society Coalition government of Georgian Dream made an unprecedented step and in 2017 for the first time included in the Constitution of Georgia, that EU and NATO integration is the intact choice and will of the country and all the agencies and Governmental institutions shall ensure achievement of this ultimate goal (*Constitution of Georgia, URL...*). The government of the Georgian Dream coalition has done more to strengthen Georgia's foreign policy course conceptually than the Saakashvili regime. The strengthening of Georgia's foreign policy towards European integration was achieved only in official documents, because during the ruling of Georgian Dream more and more Georgians doubt that the policy being pursued reflects the national interests of our society.

In 2019 Georgian government adopted a new Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia 2019-2022. EU membership of Georgia is strategic aim of foreign policy, which fully reflects wish of Georgian society to become a worthy and full right member of the community. Significant efforts will be made, in order to recognizing the prospect of the EU membership. Active work will be carried out to effectively use existing formats and to for new proposals and initiatives (*Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia, 2019-2022*).

### Conclusion

Having considered the European vector of Georgia's foreign policy we can claim that since 2003 Georgia

conducts a foreign policy aimed to become an integral part of the EU. There is no reason to blame representative of the coalition government, that since 2012 they do less than Saakashvili's government for the EU integration of Georgia.

During last 2-3 decades, in a political life of Georgia dominates only one - pro-Western political force, which is currently represented with two political parties: "United National Movement", "Georgian Dream" and with the variety satellites of these parties. Such a political conjuncture creates the illusion of political pluralism, in reality West controls the whole political spectrum of Georgia.

From the analysis above, it can be deduced that even after the change of power in Georgia, the European integration vector of the country's foreign policy has not changed. The ruling party's foreign policy is supported by the parliamentary opposition and the majority of the young population of Georgia. Representatives of the Georgian government pursue a foreign policy aimed EU membership, it is one of the successful state of the Eastern Partnership program, but the future of Georgia's integration into the EU depends on many different factors.

Georgia's future EU integration also depends on the processes which take place within the EU states. There is a noticeable rapid change in attitudes within the EU towards future enlargement in the East. EU member states have their own challenges (socio-economic problems, immigration, trade disagreements with the United States of America, sanctions policy against Russia etc.), that effects on the position of future enlargement. At present, Georgia has reached the maximum possible effect on the path of rapprochement and EU integration. In short and medium term, Georgia's membership in the EU seems unattainable.

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### ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ ЄВРОІНТЕГРАЦІЙНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ ГРУЗІЇ ПІД ЧАС ПРЕЗИДЕНТСТВА М. СААКАШВІЛІ І ПІСЛЯ ЗМІНИ ВЛАДИ 1 жовтня 2012 року

У статті аналізується зовнішня політика Грузії щодо інтеграції в ЄС з 2003 року. Політика інтеграції Грузії в ЄС була активізована після "революції троянд". Новий президент Грузії М. Саакашвілі користувався сильною підтримкою Заходу, але російсько-грузинська війна в 2008 році, невдалі реформи, високий рівень безробіття зробили його непопулярним серед грузин, а в жовтні 2012 року люди проголосували проти правлячої партії. Поразка на парламентських виборах в 2012 р стала величезним ударом для Саакашвілі та його прихильників. Вони почали дискредитувати політику нового коаліційного уряду (особливо зовнішньої політики), стверджуючи, що метою зовнішньої політики Грузії більше не є європейська і євроатлантична інтеграція, й що представники нового уряду є агентами Кремля. Аналіз зовнішньої політики Грузії в контексті інтеграції в ЄС показує, що пріоритети зовнішньої політики Грузії не змінилися. Метою зовнішньої політики Грузії й надалі залишається подальша інтеграція в ЄС.

*Ключові слова:* Грузія; зовнішня політика Грузії; європейська інтеграція Грузії.

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