



Visegrád School

of Political Studies



2015

The project is cofinanced by the European Academy of Diplomacy, the Council of Europe, the International Visegrad Fund and the Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland within the frames of “Public Diplomacy Cooperation 2015”.



Ministry
of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland



The Eastern Partnership: an opportunity and instrument for Georgia to become a part of Europe

In the early period of its independence, Georgia was not accepted as an European state, but cooperation between Georgia and the European Union began in 1992 (when the EU recognized Georgia's independence), never went beyond the established framework and was determined by the geopolitical realities. The EU, however, did not look at Georgia as a full-fledged partner, was not interested in political cooperation, and limited itself to humanitarian and economic aid. Between 1992 and 2004, for example, its aid amounted to about \$450 million.

In 1999, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Georgia and the EU (developed since 1996) came into force; it is based on regional approaches, which means that the European Union has its representative in the region (since 2003), but not in any of the three states. In fact, the ambitious Georgian political establishment is not entirely satisfied with this: there is a firm conviction that Georgia should become an EU member earlier than its Caucasian neighbors. Europe was never much interested in Georgia as a separate country: it would have been much easier to join the EU together with for instance Ukraine, an obviously European country. The EU's unprecedented involvement during and after the Russian-Georgian war.

The first step towards Europe

In 1999, the republic joined the Council of Europe; this was, in fact, the first institutional recognition of Georgia as part of the European civilization. The historic phrase: "I'm Georgian, and therefore I am European!" said by then speaker of the Georgian parliament at the PACE session, that admitted Georgia as its member, meant that Georgia had returned to Europe. It turned out that the Council of Europe became a sort of a "preparatory structure" in which the post-communist countries are taught to respect democratic standards and values; the best pupils are moved to the European Union.

According to the last survey which was conducted in 2013 on the question: Do I agree or disagree with the statement by a Georgian politician in the Council of Europe: I am Georgian, and therefore I am European?

Frequency distribution (%)	
Agree	56
Disagree	32
DK/RA	12n, ¹

The European Neighbourhood Policy

In 2003, the European Union offered a new program called the European Neighborhood Policy, which covered all the countries bordering on Europe either on land or sea. (Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia were excluded). At the first the program related to Algeria, Belarus, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Moldova, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

The Caucasian states were left out, but their rising importance for fuel transit finally got them an invitation. Russia refused to be involved in the program and is now engaged in the so-called strategic partnership within the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union.² Willing to become a full-fledged EU member, Georgia did not like some of the provisions which were prohibited, among other things, barriers and other obstacles between the expanding European Union and its members. The very term "neighborhood" indicated that Georgia was not regarded as a potential member, which contradicted Tbilisi's European ambitions.

In 2006, the twelve-month long consultations with the EU produced the Plan of Action of the European Neighborhood Policy Program, which still did not guarantee EU membership. Significantly, before the war it was expected that Georgia would get \$120. 8 million of aid within the European Neighborhood Policy Program. However, the war changed the situation to the extent that the conference of donors held in Brussels on 22 October, 2008 and which involved the U. S. and EU, decided to increase the economic aid to approximately \$4. 5 billion.

It should be said that after the Rose Revolution, EU and NATO membership became an officially declared foreign policy course.

During the so-called Rose Revolution, the enthusiastic crowds waved the EU official flag and those who represented the European Union in the republic looked at it as a revolutionary banner. After the revolution, it became a ruled that all state structures should display the EU flag. It can be seen in front of the Georgian parliament and in the offices of the top leaders, together with the national flag. A new post, that of minister for European integration, created said that the authorities busied themselves with a set of documents and decisions which were needed to draw closer to Europe.

After the revolution, the public service broadcaster of Georgia joined the Association of Public Service Broad-

casters in Europe, which gave the country the chance of competing in the annual Eurovision Song Contest.

To accelerate integration, education was announced to be one of the priorities, even though young Georgians were very much interested in higher education in Europe. Recently, student exchanges became part of the state strategy in this sphere.

Georgia was one of the first to join the Bologna Process to become part of the single European expanse. This means that everything which is going on in many spheres of public life in Georgia (politics, the economy, and culture) is associated, in one way or another, with Europe.

A Signed Eastern Partnership treaty

On 7 May, 2009, the EU signed the Eastern Partnership Treaty with 6 Soviet successor-states (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus). The Eastern Partnership program was initiated by Sweden and Poland (two of Georgia's most enthusiastic supporters).

The Russian-Georgian war urged the EU to accelerate the Eastern Partnership program. According to the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso, the war served as an impulse; he went on to explain that the program was not intended to create new spheres of influence and draw new dividing lines in Europe: it merely demonstrated the "soft power" of the European Union.³

Nearly 60 percent of the Georgians believe the country should join the European Union (EU) rather than the Eurasian Customs Union and are highly supportive (78 percent) of the Georgian government's stated goal to join the EU.

A Signed association agreement

After Georgia signed (On 27 June 2014) the Association Agreements with the EU, the Euro-Atlantic integration became one of the major issues for Georgia (as in foreign policy, even in domestic policy discourse). A significant number of Georgians, 79 percent, are aware that Georgia signed an association agreement with the EU on June 27. Sixty-nine percent of respondents approve of this development, with 8 percent disapproving and 22 percent with no opinion.

After the Vilnius Summit and initiating the agreement with the EU, Georgia went into a very important stage of its post-soviet transformation and state building. Accordingly, the next period for Georgia will be a crucial and critical.

This, however, caused a lot of concern in the Kremlin. Indeed, in the event of NATO's expansion, Russia can be concerned about its national security, but the fact that former Soviet republics want to draw closer to the EU cannot be viewed as hazardous. After all, Russia is maintaining close economic contacts with the EU: 60 percent of its

fuel exports go to its members. Everything said in Russia about closer cooperation between NATO and the Soviet successor states brings to mind the aggressive Soviet rhetoric. The Russian establishment is irritated with the prospect of the former Soviet republics drawing closer to the EU. Russia's concern albeit unfounded about NATO's expansion is understandable: it does not want to see the Alliance's military infrastructure at its borders. It is not so understandable, however, why its main economic partner is unwelcome at its borders. Today, the program envisages closer cooperation rather than full EU membership for the former Soviet republics.

The answer is obvious: on the one hand, Russia does not want to lose the post-Soviet countries, which in the 1990s were its satellites; on the other, it fears being left outside the European community.

The events in Ukraine dictate Russia to increase pressure on Georgia. Georgia will have several major problems: Russia now seeks to strengthen its position in the two occupied regions – in Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia. At this time Russia is realizing the process of the so-called "borderization". After the Georgian-Russian war (2008), Russia lost the economic levers to influence Georgia. In the first place from Russia can be expected to attempt to create new spots of separatism in Georgia. Georgia can also expect that some of the Georgian media and NGOs (sponsored by Russia) will start anti-Western propaganda. For instance they can start propaganda of that every "evil" comes from Europe, that "Europe threatens our religion and our traditions" and so on.

Besides this, new Georgian government is very unstable and inexperienced, and therefore there is a great danger that they will make some mistakes, such as arrests of former officials, which would entail the bad effects.

New window of opportunity

Until now Georgia's geographic distance from many of the EU member states was one of the most "painful" issues. The EU membership of Romania and Bulgaria brought Europe to Georgia's borders across the Black Sea; the regional geopolitical balance had changed accordingly. By the way, when Georgia's neighbor -Turkey officially began negotiating with EU for accession in 2005, geographic distance was also problematic issue. But in the case of Turkey, there were and are other objections on the way to EU. The nature of those objections range from the EU being a "Christian Union" and a reluctance to include Turkey's predominantly Muslim population, to the issue of Turkey's size, which would command a sizeable portion of parliament seats. What about the Georgian case: Georgia is a small sized country, with 4 490 54, (as of 1 January 2014), and Georgia is a Christian state and Georgian political elites hope that it might be granted EU membership ahead of Turkey.

But on the other hand, the rapid convergence with the EU, Turkey, on the contrary creates a positive effect for Georgia, because in this case in the future Georgia will get the land border with the European Union via Turkey. The fact is that since, Georgia signed the Association Agreements with the EU, Integration processes are activated. 15 September 2014, Turkey announced a reformed plan⁵ to gain membership into the EU, which includes an increase in the dialogue between the EU and Turkey and significant social, economic and political reforms.

Why do the Georgians want to join Europe?

Quite often Europe means the European Union, which means that Georgia's potential EU membership is closely connected with the fact that it be accepted as a European country. The most important question is: Why do the Georgians want to join Europe? Most of the liberal-democratic countries are found in Europe. In Georgia, Europe is associated with civilization, democratic values and economic prosperity. 58% of the Georgians believe that signing an association agreement with EU, will improve Georgian economy, by 35% – it will lead to visa free travel in EU, by 33% – it will provide greater security for Georgia, by 17% it will strengthen democratic development, by 13% – it will create more jobs, 10 – it will improve the chances to restore territorial integrity, by 1% – other, by 6% – DK, by 1% – RA⁶. After Georgia signed (on 27 June 2014) the Association Agreements with the EU, Georgia started a new stage of full modernization of state. The EU-Georgia Association Agreement counts about 1000 pages and is comprised of: Political Dialogue and Reform, Cooperation in the Field of Foreign and Security Policy; Justice, Freedom and Security; Economic Cooperation; Other Cooperation Policies; Trade and Trade-related Matters (DCFTA); Financial Assistance and etc.

Compared with the Eastern European and Central European countries, Georgia up to the collapse of communism in Europe belonged not only to the so-called communist camp, but 23 years ago, Georgia was not a sovereign state. Accordingly, Georgia was forced from scratch to build a state and its institutions and at the same time tried to transform the political and social-economic system, change the ideology and etc.

Most Georgians feel that the European Union support contributes a lot to the development of their country. This is one of the key findings of the recently released Spring 2014 EU Neighbourhood Barometer for Georgia, conducted in the framework of an EU-funded opinion polling project for the Neighbourhood. The survey, based on 1,000 interviews conducted in May–June 2014, finds that 69% of Georgians feel that the EU is an important partner, with 56% believing the EU and Georgia share sufficient common values to be able to cooperate. Almost ninety percent of those polled (88%) saw the EU in a positive (40%) or neutral (48%) light, compared to just 9% for whom it

conjured up a negative image. More than half of respondents (58%) felt that the EU's support contributes a lot to Georgia's development. The majority of Georgians (68%) felt that the EU had good relations with their country (compared to 53% across the ENPI East region), while merely 16% felt they were bad.⁷

Georgia is in the process of transformation of its political system and economic system. During this process, Georgia uses of donors financial assistance and expertise assistance from the Western countries. Georgia itself, has not the resources to solve its problems. But on the other hand, there is disappointment in the relations between those organisations in Georgia, because these organisations are limited to humanitarian, educational and cultural programs for Georgia.

In Georgia there is an expectation that it should be a full member of the EU and NATO. But the more time goes by, the less in Georgia believe in this. And this situation hinders really transformation of the political and economic systems of Georgia. All these years the Georgian political elites have explained to the people that those reforms need quick integration to the NATO and EU.

Western policy towards Georgia should be directed to cooperate not only with the Georgian political elites, but also with the Georgian society. Because for example those with pro-Western sentiment and aspiration of transformation of political and economic system in Georgia are mainly not based on political elites's desire, it is based on society's desire. The desire to integrate into NATO and the EU is the not desire of Georgian political elite, this is desire of nation. For example, a public opinion poll conducted after the elections (and published in April 2013) are among the voters of the Georgian Dream and proved that most of the supporters of the new ruling party want to access to NATO and the EU. The West should actively use such institutions as the Council of Europe, the Venice Commission and so on, to help stabilize the unstable Georgian political system. It is essential that all legislative innovations were in line with European norms and values, but on the one hand, Georgia has to see from West that her every step is carefully watched, but on the other hand, Georgia has to show willingness to cooperate closely to the example of the EU, this attitude can effectively use the Eastern Partnership. Also, if in Georgia's political elite and society will be particularly pessimistic about the chances of the country ever to integrate into the EU, Georgia can slow down the pace of the transformation of the political system.

Conclusion

"A few years ago, I was writing an article and there was the question asked: Eastern Partnership: Surrogate or Real Integration?' because it was not clear outlines of this program. But now we can say: that this program after signature of the Association Agreement with the EU has become in real integration tool. With many economic

benefits and the imposition of visa-free travel in the future, for Georgia Eastern Partnership and the Association Agreement are the first projects the political area. Georgia starts an irreversible process of returning to Europe by Eastern Partnership program." The EU accession process is a significant reform project which facilitates adoption of global standards and best practices in Georgia. The process requires Georgia to change fundamentally in all fields of daily life from production to consumption, justice to security, health to education, agriculture to industry and energy to environment. Among the post-Soviet countries Georgia has always stood out because of its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Two states are already identified among the Eastern Partnership countries: Georgia and Moldova,

which successfully has used format of Eastern Partnership program. Moldova is on one step ahead, because this country already reached progress on visa liberalization issues, and Georgia hopes that issue of visa liberalization with the EU will be resolved in next year. Of course reforms are needed for the country, but on the other hand, the prospect of joining to the EU (progressive cooperation in the framework of the Eastern Partnership) gave a good incentive to Georgia and its pushed to accelerate the transformation of the country.

Annotations

¹ Full chart available at <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/eu2013ge/EUROPEAN/> (accessed 15 October 2015).

² www.delgeo.ec.europa.eu (accessed 15 October 2015).

³ See news for 4th December 2008, www.civil.ge (accessed 15 October 2015).

⁴ <http://www.geostat.ge/> (accessed 15 October 2015).

⁵ Republic of Turkey. Ministry for EU Affairs, Turkey's New European Union Strategy Announced (10 December 2014). Available at <http://www.abgs.gov.tr/index.php?p=49706&l=2> (accessed 15 October 2015).

⁶ National Democratic Institute, Public attitudes in Georgia: results of an august 2014 survey (August 2014), www.ndi.org/georgia-polls (accessed 15 October 2015).

⁷ EU Neighbourhood Info Centre, Georgians positive about their country's ties with the EU but deeply pessimistic about the future (September 2014), http://www.enpiinfo.eu/maineast.php?id_type=1&id=38355&lang_id=450&utm_source=Oempro&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=Subscriber%23416&utm_campaign=Georgians%20positive%20about%20their%20country%E2%80%99s%20ties%20with%20the%20EU%20but%20deeply%20pessimis12-09-2014 (accessed 15 October 2015).



Europejska Akademia Dyplomacji

ul. Oleandrów 6
00-629 Warszawa

tel. (+48 22) 205 06 18
faks: (+48 22) 205 06 35
e-mail: academy@diplomats.pl

www.diplomats.pl

Strategic Partners

European Academy of Diplomacy
Antall József Knowledge Centre
Prague Diplomatic Academy
Slovak Atlantic Commission

