

Georgia Beyond “Radical Europeanness”: Undiscovered Directions of Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

Georgia's turn to the West significantly affected its geopolitical and foreign policies. The author shares the view expressed by Georgian scholars that the country's continued commitment to the Western vector is a direct consequence of ideas expressed by political elites (constructivist theory) and their self-identification as “European,” coupled with Western-style liberal democracy as a social order preference (liberal theory).

Georgia's political elites are driven by the concept of “Europeanness” and thus focus primarily on the state's aspirations to be integrated into the “Western world,” which is pushing the state towards European and North-Atlantic integration. Georgian elites believe that institutional reunification with “European family” under the NATO defence shield will not only deter Moscow but will finally put an end to Moscow's attempts to bring the post-soviet state under its control. Moreover, due to the tensions between the generalized West and Russian Federation, the Kremlin's aspirations to stop what it perceives as a geopolitical expansion of the West to the east, Georgia's approach has become even more radical.

The paper argues that the concept of “Europeanness” has been transformed into “radical Europeanness,” meaning that the political elites maintain economic cooperation with non-Western countries, but there is no proactive foreign policy beyond that, even with its most important strategic partners, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. In spite Tbilisi enjoys trade relations with these countries, the existing level of political and military cooperation between them conceals significant bilateral challenges.

Additionally, this approach is perfectly reflected in Georgia's relations with China, when the country's political elites pushed for free trade, without attention to the political and geopolitical aspects of economic cooperation. Thus, Georgia – China relations are also the part of research interest in this paper, as the free trade regime between the two countries is subject to serious scrutiny after the Donald Trump administration made it clear that Washington would not welcome Chinese economic and geopolitical expansion in Georgia.

KEYWORDS

Georgia, “radical Europeanness”, identity, foreign policy, elites, social order

Identity, Ideas and Social Order as a Foreign Policy

The vast majority of scholarly papers on the Republic of Georgia focused on the aspiration of the state to join the “Western world” and the attempts of the Kremlin to stop it with emphasize on the East-West rivalry, the clash of interests of the United States¹ and the European Union in their support for Tbilisi’s course towards democracy on the one hand, and the desire of Moscow to keep its southern neighbour within its political, geopolitical and economic orbit on the other. In addition, NATO with its new term “Black Sea region security” and European integration is the core of the most debates.

Generally speaking, both Georgian and international scholars are obsessed with the East-West paradigm, frequently without attention to lesser, but still significant, issues. In particular, the question of whether Georgia has a more or less adequate and clear foreign policy concerning those states that do not fall within the framework mentioned above is extremely important. To be more precise, there are doubts that the state has proactive, well-structured and understandable foreign policy strategy and tactics at the inter-state (bilateral) level. Moreover, the Velvet Revolution in Yerevan (which came as a complete shock for Tbilisi),² as well as the tensions with Baku surrounding the David Gareja monastery complex, the ongoing diplomatic tensions with Kyiv, and the frequent misunderstandings with Ankara, all strengthen the assumption that Georgia needs to finally take care of its political interests in the “near abroad” and beyond. Some Georgian scholars argue that a combination of liberal (social orders) and constructivist theories (ideas and identities) can fill the gap.

In their analysis of Tbilisi’s foreign policy, K. Kakachia and S. Minesashvili challenged the materialist theories of international relations, arguing that they are unable to fully explain Georgia’s stubborn devotion to the integration with the West.³ According to them, despite the Kremlin’s aggression and the West’s unwillingness to balance it on the ground, Georgia continues to be loyal to the political, economic and geopolitical idea of reintegration with its “European family”. In particular, Georgian political elites associate themselves with Europe and see the future prosperity of the country as being inextricably linked with Europe.⁴ Thus, they are carriers of European identity and ideas that directly affect the course of Georgia’s foreign policy. The concept of “Europeanness” has become an inherent part of their political agenda. What is more, these elites justify Tbilisi’s pro-Western stance from the social order standpoint, meaning that Georgians would like to see a Western-style liberal democracy as a political model, as its everyday lifestyle. Following “Europeanness,” Russia, due to its revisionist approach and different political system, is perceived as “other” and “alien.”

In a later paper, K. Kakachia, S. Minesashvili and L. Kakhishvili reiterated general statements when analysing change and continuity in Georgia’s foreign policies in the wake of regime transfer that took place in 2012 – 2013. They argue that despite the softer approach of Georgian Dream, the state remains devoted to its initial goals and the concept

1 Markedonov et al. 2020.

2 Mane Babajanyan, “Nikol Pashinyan’s Recent Visit to Georgia: Prospects for the Development of Bilateral Relations,” *Caucasus Watch*, May 25, 2020, accessed August 17, 2020, <https://caucasuswatch.de/news/2733.html>.

3 Kakachia, Minesashvili 2015.

4 Vasilyeva, Bakhturidze 2015.

of “Europeanness” is more relevant than ever.¹ Sharing the notion of “Europeanness,” I argue that the deepening sense of European identity and the affinity for European ideas, coupled with the desire for a Western-style social order, led to the country becoming alienated not only from Russia but from all those states that do not share the preferences of the country’s elites. Furthermore, the constant inability to “join the West” – ostensibly due to opposition from Moscow – has caused them to become radicalized. “Europeanness” has thus transformed into “radical Europeanness,” meaning that Tbilisi puts all its efforts into a highly proactive foreign policy to further its Western aspirations while ignoring the need to build strong bilateral relations with other countries, especially with “near abroad” states.

On the whole, Georgia has followed an ill-advised strategy in its quest for “Europeanness,” and its foreign policy approach in the framework of “radical Europeanness” concerning those states that do not fit the European identity or do not share its social variables. The Georgian political elites are interested in cooperation with countries only in the context of liberal democracy and in the spirit of European identity. This is typically reflected in economic cooperation, while political and military partnerships became mostly declarative. As a result, the state suffers from pragmatic, bilateral political vision beyond the civilizational choice, leaving gaps in foreign policy and letting challenges on the ground grow. And this trend continues regardless of who is in power because the Georgian elites are steadfast in their desire to be European and develop a European social order in their country.

“Radical Europeanness” as a Foreign Policy

On January 27, 1999, prominent Georgian politician Z. Zhvania said at a meeting of the Council of Europe, “I am Georgian, and therefore I am European.” On April 10, 2019, Prime Minister of Georgia M. Bakhtadze repeated these words, saying “I would like to reiterate Z. Zhvania’s words spoken here in the Council of Europe – I am Georgian, and therefore I am European.”² The statement perfectly encapsulates the “European” nature of the state’s foreign policy, a doctrine that has dominated for at least the last two decades. It also determines the political thinking of the Georgian elites, who consider comprehensive reintegration with the “European family” under the NATO defence as a key goal, a grand mission that must be achieved by all means. Z. Zhvania, who was famous for his strategic thinking, did not mean “radical Europeanness.” However, his statement turned into a firm and unshakable foreign policy doctrine due to internal (political elites), as well as some external, factors, including the rivalry between Moscow and Tbilisi,³ and the global confrontation between East and West.⁴

After the Colour Revolution of November 2003, a triumvirate of Georgian politicians consisting of Z. Zhvania, N. Burjanadze and M. Saakashvili announced

1 Kakachia et al. 2018.

2 “PM: I Would like to Reiterate Zurab Zhvania’s Words – I Am Georgian, and Therefore I Am European,” InterPressNews, April 10, 2019, accessed August 20, 2020, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/101560-pm-i-would-like-to-reiterate-zurab-zhvanias-words-i-am-georgian-and-therefore-i-am-european/>.

3 “Saakashvili Slams Russia in ‘Harvest Speech,’” Civil Georgia, September 8, 2006, accessed August 20, 2020, <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=13502>.

4 Pavel K. Baev, “Tenth Anniversary of Putin’s Munich Speech: a Commitment to Failure,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, The Jamestown Foundation, February 13, 2017, accessed August 20, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/tenth-anniversary-putins-munich-speech-commitment-failure/>.

that the country would undergo a comprehensive nation- and state-building process, promising to make Georgia a democratic country. Furthermore, the post-revolutionary government ensured the country's strategic partners in the West that it would re-join its European family.¹ Upon his election as president in January 2014, M. Saakashvili launched comprehensive reforms in an attempt to transform Georgia into Western-style state with a Western-minded society. M. Saakashvili argued that the European flag was Georgia's flag too, "as far as it embodies our civilization, our culture, the essence of our history and perspective, and our vision for the future of Georgia [...] Georgia is not just a European country, but one of the most ancient European countries [...] our steady course is towards European integration."²

Analysing the revolutionary movements in the post-Soviet space, professor A. Ohanyan³ argues that Colour Revolutions differ from the Velvet Revolution as they not only change regimes but, more importantly, push the state to comprehensively reorient its political and geopolitical vectors. Thus, comparing the revolutions in Armenia and other post-Soviet states, A. Ohanyan assumes that Tbilisi experienced a Colour Revolution that pushed it to break away from the post-Soviet region and associate itself with Europe or, to use a term that is actively being introduced by the liberal elites, the "Black Sea region."⁴

The desire to distance itself from Russia and its "spheres of influence" was further strengthened after Saakashvili's failure to "restart" bilateral relations with the Kremlin in the early years of his presidency.⁵ Aware that Moscow had a different standpoint about NATO – EU expansion, Tbilisi became even more radical in its policy, trying to decrease dependency on the post-Soviet region to a minimum⁶. Georgia negotiated the closure of Russian military bases on its territory⁷ and, more importantly, left the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS),⁸ which scholars in the country and beyond tended to see as the successor of Soviet Union. This move meant that Tbilisi was leaving a geopolitical arena ostensibly dominated by Moscow and allowed it to develop relations with former Soviet republics on a bilateral basis. The belief that European integration and membership in NATO would draw a line under the state's centuries-long fight for independence, freedom and sovereignty was paradoxically only strengthened by the Russo–Georgian War of August 2008.

The war made it clear that neither the United States nor the European Union was ready to balance Moscow on the ground, nor are they now. Thus, according to the balance of power theory, Tbilisi should have become less inclined towards the West.⁹ However, the ideas expressed by the Georgian political elites, coupled with social order preferences, meant that those in power not only remained pro-Western

1 Mitchell 2009, 5.

2 "President Saakashvili's Inauguration Speech," Civil Georgia, January 25, 2004, accessed August 20, 2020, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26694>.

3 Anna Ohanyan, "Armenia's Democratic Dreams," Foreign Policy, November 6, 2018, accessed August 20, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/07/armenias-democratic-dreams/>.

4 Lasha Darsalia, "The Legacies of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War for Security in the Black Sea Region," RUSI, August 6, 2020, accessed September 2, 2020, <https://rusi.org/event/legacies-2008-russia-georgia-war-security-black-sea-region>.

5 Сихарулидзе 2019.

6 Trenin 2009.

7 Kakachia 2008.

8 "Georgia Finalizes Withdrawal from CIS," Radio Free Europe, August 18, 2009, accessed August 20, 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/Georgia_Finalizes_Withdrawal_From_CIS/1802284.html.

9 Kakachia, Minesashvili 2015.

but pursued an even more radical policy. Former Ambassador of Georgia to the United States and Deputy Secretary of Georgia's National Security Council B. Kutelia summed up the rationale perfectly when he argued that Western integration, in this case, NATO membership, would mark the end of Georgia's transition to democracy and make Georgian statehood fully formed.¹

Table 1.

**REGIONAL REPRESENTATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA'S EMBASSIES
РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЕ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЕ ПОСОЛЬСТВ РЕСПУБЛИКИ ГРУЗИЯ**

EU countries (23 out of 27):	Post-Soviet space (excluding the Baltic states):	Others:
Austria (1996)	Armenia (1995)	China (2005)
Belgium (1994)	Azerbaijan (1994)	Turkey (1994)
Bulgaria (2004)	Belarus (2008)	US (1993)
Cyprus (2005)	Kazakhstan (1993)	
Czech Republic (2006)	Moldova	
Denmark (2006)	Russian Federation (1993)	
Estonia (2009)	no diplomatic relations	
Finland (2011)	Turkmenistan (2002)	
France (1993)	Ukraine (1994)	
Germany (1993)	Uzbekistan (1997)	
Greece (1995)		
Hungary (2009)		
Ireland (2010)		
Italy (1994)		
Latvia (2006)		
Lithuania (2004)		
Netherlands (2007)		
Poland (2004)		
Portugal (2012)		
Romania (2004)		
Slovakia (2006)		
Slovenia (2014)		
Spain (2006)		
Sweden (2006)		

Source: "Embassies and Representations," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2020, accessed June 5, 2020, <https://mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/EmbassiesRepresentations/GeorgianMissionsAbroad.aspx>; "Bilateral Relations," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, accessed June 5, 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20110828104207/http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=61.

Note: The table compares a network of Georgian embassies and consulates in the European Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Also, there are dates on which the first ambassadors were appointed in the respective countries, including Turkey, the United States and China. The list shows that, compared to the CIS states (with the exception of Belarus and Turkmenistan), Georgian ambassadors were generally assigned to Europe after the Rose Revolution.

This is a clear reflection of the dramatic shift from the East to the West and the fact that the Georgian political elites invested, politically and economically, in the European Union and established and maintained a proactive foreign policy there. Interestingly, Georgia appears to be equally active on the Chinese vector. The arguments of oppositional forces within the country that the Georgian Dream party represents pro-Russian power and is led by the Kremlin² aside, there is little doubt that the country is generally focused on fulfilling its civilization choice and

1 Vasil Sikharulidze and Batu Kutelia, "NATO Must Set a Clear Roadmap for Georgia," Atlantic Council, July 7, 2016, accessed August 20, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/nato-must-set-a-clear-roadmap-for-georgia/>.

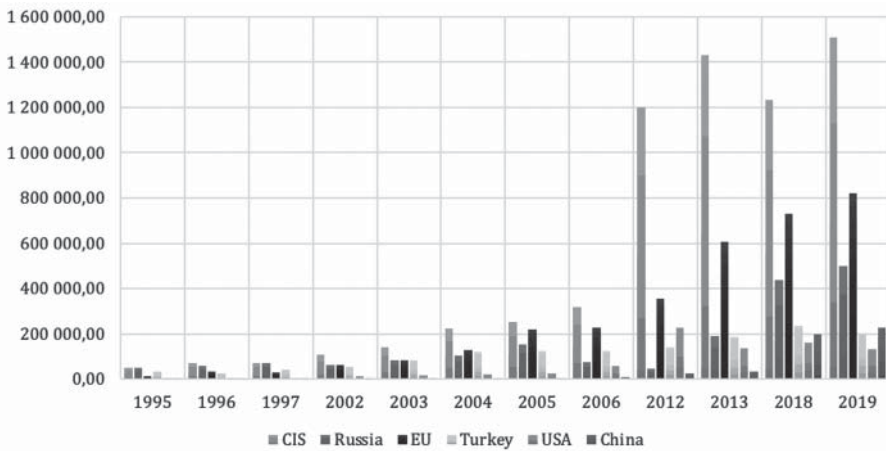
2 Archil Sikharulidze, "Who Do I Call if I Want to Speak to 'pro-Russian Forces' in Georgia?" OpenDemocracy, August 31, 2016, accessed September 2, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/who-do-i-call-if-i-want-to-speak-to-pro-russian-forces-in-georgia/>.

becoming a member of NATO and the European Union. It is generally reflected in trade relations.

The comparative analysis of bilateral trade (export-import) between the Republic of Georgia and its biggest economic partners for more than two decades shows the greatly increased trade with the European Union, Turkey, the United States and China. But despite this tendency, the former post-Soviet region is still important for Georgia's economic development. This is the result of at least 70 years of Soviet cohabitation and, consequently, the prominence of Georgia as a brand, including as a producer of wines and mineral waters.

Table 2.

TRADING PARTNERS BY EXPORTS IN THOUSAND USD (1995 – 2019)
ТОРГОВЫЕ ПАРТНЕРЫ ПО ЭКСПОРТУ В ТЫС. ДОЛЛ. США (1995 – 2019)



Source: "External Trade Tendencies of Georgia 2013 – 2019," National Statistics Office of Georgia, July 15, 2019, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/single-categories/99/external-trade-tendencies-of-georgia>.

At the same time, we see that the European Union takes on an increasingly important role, which is the result of a wide marketing strategy took by the Georgian side to break away from the Russian influence, meaning not only direct trade with Moscow but also with those states that are close to the Kremlin.¹ Generally speaking, liberal elites perceive even a slight increase in trade with Moscow and, sometimes, the former Soviet republics, as a very bad precedent that can give Georgia's northern neighbour additional political triggers to stop Tbilisi on its way towards comprehensive Western integration.² Members of the opposition at home and associated actors see the growing trade between Georgia and Russia as a sign that the Georgia Dream party has a pro-Russian disposition, and that Chairman of the party B. Ivanishvili would prefer to develop relations with Moscow. This although the country's strategic partners, especially in the European Union, support and even take part in this healthy economic partnership (for example, in the Karasin–Abashidze format).³

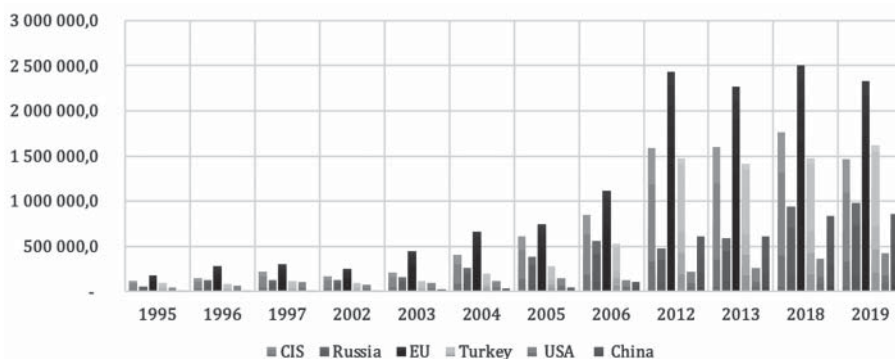
1 Livny et al. 2009.

2 "Georgia's Economic Dependence on Russia: Trends and Threats," Transparency International Georgia, May 4, 2020, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/georgias-economic-dependence-russia-trends-and-threats>.

3 Revaz Koiava, "Georgian – Russian Relations: Past, Present & Future," Emerging Europe, March 1, 2018, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://emerging-europe.com/georgia-2017/georgian-russian-relations-past-present-future/>.

Table 3.

TRADING PARTNERS BY IMPORTS IN THOUSAND USD (1995 – 2019)
ТОРГОВЫЕ ПАРТНЕРЫ ПО ИМПОРТУ В ТЫС. ДОЛЛ. США (1995 – 2019)



Source: "External Trade Tendencies of Georgia 2013 – 2019," National Statistics Office of Georgia, July 15, 2019, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/single-categories/99/external-trade-tendencies-of-georgia>.

It is clear that, while Russia's positions are weakened, we can observe increased trade with Turkey, the movement towards China, the growing role of the European Union and, much to the disliking of the Georgian political elites, a reliance on the CIS member states. Logically, it is hard to build bilateral relations with the Russian Federation due to the absence of diplomatic ties. However, disbanding the department for relations with Russia in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia emphasizes the shift in priorities. What is more, while many departments focus on the European Union and NATO, no agencies are working with the CIS, the Eurasian Economic Union, the South Caucasus, China or even Turkey, which is one of Georgia's most important strategic partners.

Table 4.

CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA
ИЗМЕНЕНИЯ В СТРУКТУРЕ МИНИСТЕРСТВА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ДЕЛ ГРУЗИИ

2000	2004–2006	2020
	<i>Departments:</i>	
US, Canada and Latin America	American	American
Asia, Africa, Australia and Oceania	Eastern Affairs (abolished in 2006)	Middle East and Africa Asia and the Pacific
European EU Affairs	European Affairs and EU Integration (later split into separate departments)	European Affairs General Directorate of European Integration Coordination of European Support and Sectoral Integration
Russian	Russian (abolished in 2006, restored in 2008)	
Agency for Commonwealth of Independent States (restored in 2009).	Neighbouring Countries (abolished in between)	Neighbouring Countries
	Defence Politics and Euro-Atlantic Integration	NATO Integration NATO and EU Information Centre (LEPL);

2000	2004–2006	2020
International Organizations	International Organizations	International Organizations (no CIS and EAEU divisions)

Source: "საქართველოს საგარეო საქმეთა სამინისტროს დებულების დამტკიცების შესახებ (On Approval of the Regulation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia)," Government of Georgia, Pub. L. No. 206 (2005), accessed August 23, 2020, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/10678?publication=0>; "საქართველოს საგარეო საქმეთა სამინისტრო, სტრუქტურა (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Structure)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/DiplomatService/Structure.aspx>; "საქართველოს საგარეო საქმეთა სამინისტროს დებულების შესახებ (On the Regulation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia)," President of Georgia, Pub. L. No. 337 (2000), accessed August 23, 2020, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1252685?publication=0>; "საქართველოს საგარეო საქმეთა სამინისტროს დებულების დამტკიცების შესახებ (On the Regulation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia)," President of Georgia, Pub. L. No. 53 (2004), accessed August 23, 2020, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1297013?publication=0>.

Note: Institutionally, the Parliament of Georgia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are responsible for the state's foreign policy – Parliament determines foreign policy while the Ministry implements it. The table shows structural development of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reflecting geopolitical reorientation of the state.

The very idea of the CIS has been erased, while EAEU is not recognized as a significant actor at all. The current structural changes in the Ministry are a clear reflection of a lack of interest in having a proactive foreign policy beyond "radical Europeanness." The same can be seen in the Parliament of Georgia, which was long neglected because of the presidential system that existed in the state but is now the centre of political life.¹ The 2011 constitutional amendments transformed Georgia into a parliamentary republic.² So far, the legislative body is a determinant of the country's foreign policy.

Table 5.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES OF REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA (1997 – 2018)
ПАРЛАМЕНТСКИЕ КОМИТЕТЫ РЕСПУБЛИКИ ГРУЗИЯ (1997 – 2018)

	Committees:			
	1997	2004	2012	2018
Agrarian Issues		V	V	V
Human Rights and Civil Integration		V	V	V
Education, Science and Culture		V	V	V
Environmental Protection and Natural Resources		V	V	V
Sector Economy and Economic Policy		V	V	V
Diaspora and Caucasus Issues		V	V	V (to be abolished)
European Integration		V	V	V
Defence and Security		V	V	V
Legal Issues		V	V	V
Regional Policy and Self-Government		V	V	V
Foreign Relations		V	V	V
Procedural Issues and Rules		V	V	V
Budget and Finance		V	V	V
Sports and Youth Issues		V	V	V
Healthcare and Social Issues		V	V	V

Source: "საქართველოს პარლამენტის რეგლამენტი (On the Regulation of the Parliament of Georgia (1997 – 2018)," The Parliament of Georgia, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://matsne.gov.ge/document/view/4401423?publication=9>; "Parliament of Georgia, Committees," Parliament of Georgia, accessed August 23, 2020, <http://parliament.ge/en/saparlamento-saqmianoba/komitetebi>.

Note: The table is a comparative analysis of the structural changes that the institution has gone through over the last two decades.

- Ghia Nodia, "Georgia Gets a More Democratic Constitution, though the Process is not Perfect," Radio Free Europe, October 19, 2010, accessed August 23, 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/Georgia_More_Democratic_Constitution_Process_Not_Perfect/2195251.html.
- "Georgia's Weekend Presidential Election Marks Transition to Parliamentary Republic," BNE IntelliNews, October 26, 2018, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.intellinews.com/georgia-s-weekend-presidential-election-marks-transition-to-parliamentary-republic-150858/>.

Since its establishment, the Parliament has focused on Europe and the Caucasus as crucial regions for the state's national interests. Although we may debate whether the Parliament's activities were ever effective or efficient in the past, still these two vectors were clearly outlined. The current structure will soon change, as the Committee for Diaspora and Caucasus Issues is set to be abolished. T. Baramidze, a member of the committee's Scientific Advisory Board, expressed her astonishment, arguing that only enemies of the state could have dreamt about such a thing happening. According to T. Baramidze, dismantling the only entity that focuses on this extremely crucial region will hurt the state's national interests, even in the framework on European integration.¹

Undiscovered "Others"

Analysing Georgia's foreign policy in the "near abroad," Georgian scholar D. Jishkariani,^{2,3} a researcher at the Soviet Past Research Laboratory, argues that there is no one in the country who could replace Special Representative of the Prime Minister of Georgia for Relations with Russia Z. Abashidze if he decides to resign and leave the diplomatic arena. D. Jishkariani further argues that the state forgot completely about the importance of having professional diplomats and analysts dealing not only with Russia but also with the former Soviet republics that do not fall in the framework of "Europeanness". According to D. Jishkariani, the central government is simply reacting to challenges that pop-up in neighbouring states and does not have a proactive and systemic approach. M. Manchkhavili,⁴ a Turkologist who heads the Institute for Georgia's Neighborhood Studies at Tbilisi State University, shares Jishkariani's views here, adding that the idea for establishing the institute came after she realized that neither the state nor the academic community is paying attention to those states that are not associated with the European future, including Turkey. Furthermore, M. Manchkhavili argues that Georgian politicians are frequently unaware of the processes that are taking place in Turkey and their dealings with the country do not extend beyond the scope of NATO cooperation and enlargement. On the whole, there is a lack of in-depth knowledge in Georgian political and academic circles of the political processes taking place in the "near abroad." What is more, this is a logical and intentional outcome of "radical Europeanness" – a lack of interest on the part of the Georgian political elites in focusing on and investing in these directions of foreign policy.

The Republic of Armenia

Perhaps the best example of Georgia's "negligent" policy towards its closest neighbours is the case of Armenia. To be sure, Georgians and Armenians have long-

1 "თსუ-ის კავკასიოლოგიის ინსტიტუტის დირექტორი დიასპორისა და კავკასიის საკითხთა კომიტეტის შესაძლო გაუქმებას დაუშვებლად მიიჩნევს (Abolishment of Committee for Diaspora and Caucasian Issues is Unacceptable Says director of Tbilisi State University's Institute of Caucasiology)," InterPressNews, May 27, 2020, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/601774-tsu-is-kavkasiologiis-institutis-direktori-diasporisa-da-kavkasiis-sakitxta-komitetis-shesazlo-gaukmebas-daushveblad-miichnevs>.

2 ბიძინა რამიშვილი, „დღევანდელი პოლიტიკური ელიტა ვერ გრძნობს, რა ხდება კონფლიქტურ ზონებში“ (Bidzina Ramishvili, "Current Political Elites do not feel processes on the ground in the conflict zones"), Radio Free Europe, September 24, 2018, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/დღევანდელი-პოლიტიკური-ელიტა-ვერ-გრძნობს-რა-ხდება-კონფლიქტურ-ზონებში/29506910.html>.

3 Zviadadze, Jishkariani 2018.

4 Manchkhavili 2020.

standing history of cohabitation and cooperation, as well as of direct military confrontation. Georgian politicians always emphasize that Yerevan is a strategic partner, but these are decorative statements that are not supported or strengthened by real work on the ground.¹ Georgian scholar G. Nodia summed it up perfectly when he noted that Georgian politicians and political analysts were taken aback by the peaceful Velvet Revolution in Armenia under the slogan *#RejectSerzh*, as they had failed to predict it.²

According to G. Nodia, Georgians “do not know” what is taking place in these countries because no research is being carried out into the South Caucasian region at all. Not only has the state’s geopolitical reorientation significantly affected political preferences, but academia is also suffering. This explains why Armenia, a country that falls within Russia’s “sphere of influence,” holds no interest for the Georgian political establishment. It is worth mentioning that the liberal political elites in Georgia who had barely given Armenia any attention in the past were suddenly inspired to contribute to the revolutionary spirit in that country.

Moreover, leading Georgian revolutionary M. Saakashvili immediately expressed his readiness to visit Yerevan and help the new political forces reshape the country, while his ideological allies saw it as a continuation of the wave of Colour Revolutions that have swept the region.³ But these attitudes disappeared as soon as it became clear that there would be no geopolitical shift in Armenia. As a result, Armenia remained beyond the framework of European identity and social order preferences.⁴

The issue of integrating ethnic minorities into the larger Georgian society is highly sensitive.⁵ We may argue that the way the central government deals with its predominantly “non-Georgian” regions perfectly matches its reactive approach to neighbouring states. This much was clear from the completely unexpected crisis in Georgia – Azerbaijan relations that erupted as a result of a monument to Mikhail Avagyan being installed in the Georgian village of Bugashen in the municipality of Akhalkalaki. The residents, mainly ethnically Armenians, have close ties with their historic homeland and thus decided to commemorate Armenian hero Mikhail Avagyan, who fought in the Nagorno – Karabakh War. While the name means almost nothing to most ethnic Georgians, Georgian Azerbaijanis, who represent the largest ethnic minority in the country, were angered because Azerbaijan sees Avagyan as a terrorist and separatist.

The Georgian Dream government had no idea that a monument to Avagyan was going to be erected and found itself in a highly unpleasant situation because, on the one hand, it should have respected the will of the residents of Bugashen,

1 Mane Babajanyan, “Nikol Pashinyan’s Recent Visit to Georgia: Prospects for the Development of Bilateral Relations,” *Caucasus Watch*, May 25, 2020, accessed August 17, 2020, <https://caucasuswatch.de/news/2733.html>.

2 “ნოდია, გ., სომხეთის რევოლუცია და ქართული პარალელები (Ghia Nodia, Armenian Revolution and Georgian Parallels),” *Tabula*, April 29, 2018, accessed September 2, 2020, <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/132125-somxetis-revolucia-da-qartuli-paralelebi>.

3 “რომან გოცირიძე - ის, რაც სომხეთში მოხდა, არის „ვარდების რევოლუციის“ გამოძახილი თანეთმეტი წლის შემდეგ (Roman Gotsiridze: “What Happened in Armenia is an Echo of the Rose Revolution 15 Years Later),” *InterPressNews*, May 8, 2018, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/491975-roman-gocirize-is-rac-somxetshi-moxda-aris-vardebis-revoluciis-gamozaxili-txutmeti-clis-shemdeg>.

4 Shota Gelovani, “3 Reasons why the Armenian Revolution Means Nothing for the Foreign Policy of the Country and 3 Reasons why we Thought it Would,” *Georgian Institute of Politics*, May 25, 2018, accessed August 23, 2020, <http://gip.ge/3-reasons-why-the-armenian-revolution-means-nothing-for-the-foreign-policy-of-the-country-and-three-reasons-why-we-thought-it-would/>.

5 Anastasia Mgaloblishvili, “The Future of Georgia’s Ethnic Minorities,” *New Eastern Europe*, December 18, 2018, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/12/18/future-of-georgias-ethnic-minorities/>.

while on the other, it wanted to avoid ethnic tensions and a confrontation with Yerevan and Baku. As a result, the incident provoked protest from ethnic Azerbaijanis, including the member of the Georgian parliament Azer Suleimanov, who argued that it was “a blow to our friendship, which the Georgian party is constantly emphasizing.” Meanwhile, the Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Georgia condemned the act, and the Georgian ambassador was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan for a meeting.¹ What is most disturbing about these events is that not only did the Georgian political elites overlook processes that were vital to both national and regional security, but they also attempted to hush them up completely.

The Republic of Azerbaijan

Georgian politicians talk about Azerbaijan as a “brotherly nation” with the same kind of zeal that they talk about Armenia. But Azerbaijan is, also, an extremely important strategic partner that helps ensure stability in the South Caucasus, as well as Georgia’s energy independence from the Kremlin.² Tbilisi maintains strong economic ties with its neighbour.³ At the same time, the Afgan Mukhtarli case⁴ and Davit Gareja monastery complex dispute⁵ provoked major scandals. Georgian political analysts are already arguing that dormant disagreements between Tbilisi and Baku finally reared their heads, putting the strategic partnership in jeopardy.⁶

Increasing tensions between Georgia and Russia meant that M. Saakashvili’s government required an alternative supplier of energy resources, one that would help the country achieve energy sector independence.⁷ The desire to no longer be reliant on the Kremlin was further strengthened by the massive explosion in North Ossetia in January 2006 that damaged the Mozdok – Tbilisi gas pipeline and left two-thirds of Georgian population without gas.⁸ This accident, which the M. Saakashvili regime claimed was intentional sabotage by the Russian side,⁹ accelerated the diversification process in the country and pushed Tbilisi to look to Baku for help. Azerbaijani was able to satisfy Georgia’s gas needs almost entirely, replacing the Kremlin’s monopoly with almost complete dependence on the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR).¹⁰

1 “Azerbaijanis in Georgia Demand to Demolish Monument to Mikhail Avagyan,” *Caucasian Knot*, February 9, 2019, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/46112/>.

2 Shiriyev, Kakachia 2015.

3 “External Trade Tendencies of Georgia 2013 – 2019,” National Statistics Office of Georgia, July 15, 2019, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/single-categories/99/external-trade-tendencies-of-georgia>.

4 Archil Sikharulidze, “The Problem with Georgia’s Political Brand,” *New Eastern Europe*, July 25, 2017, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/07/25/the-problem-with-georgia-s-political-brand/>.

5 В Грузии отмечают «Гареджоба» – в Баку предупредили о провокации // Информационное Агентство Эхо Кавказа. 4 июня 2020. [Электронный ресурс]. <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/30651996.html>. (дата обращения: 27.08.2020).

6 Давид Гареджи: трещина в стратегическом партнерстве // Информационное Агентство СОВА. 4 июня 2020. [Электронный ресурс]. <https://sova.news/2020/06/04/david-garedzhi-treshhina-v-strategicheskom-partnerstve/>. (дата обращения: 27.08.2020).

7 Newnham 2011.

8 “Mozdok – Tbilisi Gas Pipeline Restored,” *Pipelines International*, February 7, 2006, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://www.pipelinesinternational.com/2006/02/07/mozdok-tbilisi-gas-pipeline-restored/>.

9 «Газпром» призывает не искать подтекст в прекращении поставок газа в Грузию и Армению // *Lenta.ru*. 22 января 2006. [Электронный ресурс]. <https://lenta.ru/news/2006/01/22/repair/>. (дата обращения: 27.08.2020).

10 Vasilii Rukhadze, “Azerbaijan Becomes Monopoly Supplier of Natural Gas to Georgia,” *The Jamestown Foundation*, February 12, 2018, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-becomes-monopoly-supplier-natural-gas-georgia/>; “Georgia to Receive 92.7 % of Gas from Azerbaijan, 6.6 % from Russia in 2020,” *Neftegaz*, December 30, 2019, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://neftgaz.ru/en/news/Transportation-and-storage/516078-georgia-to-receive-92-7-of-gas-from-azerbaijan-6-6-from-russia-in-2020/>; Kamila Aliyeva, “Georgia to Completely Switch to Gas Supply from Azerbaijan,” *AZERNEWS*, April 12, 2017, accessed August 27, 2020, https://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/111345.html.

Georgia, which is pronounced *Sakartvelo* in the local language, was labelled *SOCARTvelo* in 2017 by cartoonist when Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Mukhtarli suddenly disappeared in Tbilisi and popped-up in an Azerbaijanian jail in Baku, having been sentenced to six years imprisonment. The investigation led by local and international organizations argues that the Georgian Dream government was pressured into taking part in the unlawful kidnapping and transfer of Mukhtarli by the Azerbaijani side.¹ What is more, there is strong evidence to suggest that Tbilisi went along with the plan because of its total dependency on Azerbaijani energy resources and the fact that SOCAR enjoys a great deal of political and economic clout.² SOCAR is generally seen as one of the most influential Azerbaijani lobbyists in Georgia and is involved in other highly appreciated, as well as highly questionable, activities.³ Afgan Mukhtarli himself, who was later pardoned, has said that he wants to sue Georgia for its part in the kidnapping and violation of his human rights.⁴

However, the best example of Georgia's poor foreign policy in the "near abroad" is the Davit Gareja monastery complex dispute.⁵ The complex, considered by Georgians and Azerbaijanis as a monument of national cultural heritage, has been the subject of controversy since the collapse of Soviet Union. In 1996, a special committee was established to finalize the borders process, including the issue of the Davit Gareja monastery complex. More than two decades later and still nothing has been done. There was a shaky "stability," with visitors from both sides being allowed to observe the cultural heritage site. But tensions flared up as soon as President S. Zourabichvili called on Tbilisi and Baku to make progress on the issue.⁶ Obviously, territorial integrity is an extremely sensitive and challenging issue for both Georgia and Azerbaijan due to the separatist movements they face at home. There are thus no easy solutions, although it is understandable that Tbilisi demonstrated absolutely no political will or interest to initiate a step-by-step process to resolve the dispute. The outwardly perfect relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan are particularly strained right now, with visitors not being allowed to observe some parts of the complex. Meanwhile, the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia has initiated a criminal case in connection with stirring up ethnical strife. At the same time, the political opposition in Georgia argues that the Georgian Dream government is giving up historically Georgian lands and cultural heritage to Azerbaijan behind the scenes.⁷

- 1 Leyla Mustafayeva, "Afgan Mukhtarli: After the Abduction," OpenDemocracy, October 13, 2017, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/afgan-mukhtarli-after-abduction/>.
- 2 Manana Kochladze, "Geopolitics of South Caucasus: Georgia and Oil Prices," Heinrich Boll Stiftung Tbilisi, April 1, 2016, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://ge.boell.org/en/2016/04/01/geopolitics-south-caucasus-georgia-and-oil-prices>.
- 3 Ulkar Natiqzizi, "Georgians Allege Azerbaijan Interfering in Their Local Elections," EurasiaNet, May 15, 2019, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/georgians-allege-azerbaijan-interfering-in-their-local-elections>; Нодиа, Г. Нариман Нариманов, грузинские азербайджанцы и православная церковь // Информационное Агентство Эхо Кавказа. 3 июня 2020. [Электронный ресурс]. <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/30651194.html>. (дата обращения: 27.08.2020); Erik Davtyan, "Trying to Find a Balance: Georgian Dream's Gas Diplomacy," Georgian Institute of Politics, December 12, 2016, accessed August 27, 2020, <http://gip.ge/trying-to-find-a-balance-georgian-dreams-gas-diplomacy/>.
- 4 Dilshad Aliyarli, and Asgar Asgarov, "Kidnapped, Blindfolded, Tossed in Jail: An Azerbaijani Reporter's Exclusive Tale," Voice of America, March 20, 2020, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/kidnapped-blindfolded-tossed-jail-azerbaijani-reporters-exclusive-tale>.
- 5 "Azerbaijan Warns of "Possible Provocations" at Disputed David Gareji Monastery Complex as "Garejoba" Holiday Marked," Agenda.ge, June 4, 2020, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/1754>.
- 6 Giorgi Lomsadze, "Georgia, Azerbaijan Feud over Border Monastery," EurasiaNet, May 2, 2019, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-azerbaijan-feud-over-border-monastery>.
- 7 Rahim Rahimov, "Georgian - Azerbaijani Monastery Dispute and the Intersection of Local, National and International Drivers of Conflict," The Jamestown Foundation, July 30, 2019, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/georgian-azerbaijani-monastery-dispute-and-the-intersection-of-local-national-and-international-drivers-of-conflict>.

The Republic of Turkey

Turkey is obviously one of Georgia's most important strategic partners as a result of both economic and political factors. The latest data shows that Tbilisi is highly dependent on Ankara for its imports.¹ Additionally, many Turkish businesses have representative offices in Georgia's leading tourist destination (Adjara). And, of course, Turkey is the only NATO member state that borders Georgia, which makes the country militarily and geopolitically important. At the same time, due to its North-Atlantic affiliation, Turkey is mainly considered by the Georgian political elites in the framework of "Europeanness" and the generalized East-West and NATO – Russia confrontation. And, as usual, important issues lie beyond economic cooperation that are being overshadowed or even ignored.

Paradoxically, the massive financial investments that the Turkish side pumps into the Georgian economy are troublesome for Georgian's given President R. Erdogan seemingly longing for the greatness and heritage of the Ottoman past.² The Autonomous Republic of Adjara, which the Russian Empire tore from the hands of the Ottoman Empire in 1878, has a strong historical memory with regard to the Turkish presence and its implications, including Islamization. Thus, since M. Saakashvili opened the region to the Turkish business and money (because Turkey is a NATO member state), an increasing number of residents of Adjara is concerned about the growing economic and political influence of Ankara. There are no precise numbers on how much Turkey has actually invested in Adjara, but, unofficially, it is believed to represent at least 80 per cent of the total foreign investment in the autonomous republic.

The situation is worsened by Ankara's active involvement in religious affairs in the region, in particular, lobbying for the building of a new mosque in Batumi. This move has been heavily criticized by the city's Christian residents, who regard it as an attempt to strengthen the positions of Islam once again.³ Local Orthodox Christian priests have been particularly vocal in their opposition, as they are busy pursuing proselytist approach in the mountainous part of Adjara, which is home to the largest Muslim community in the region. Specifically, they try to persuade young residents to convert to Orthodox Christianity and abandon Islam, which, as the narrative goes, was forced upon them by the Ottoman Empire's Islamization policy. On the whole, Georgia's central government is concerned about Ankara's involvement in the everyday lives of the country's Muslim community and is even trying to counter it.⁴

At the same time, Turkey is clearly intervening more and more in Georgia's domestic affairs, which is certainly cause for concern. In particular, following the failed coup attempt in Turkey in January 2016, a number of educational institutions in Georgia that had ties with prominent Turkish politician and Muslim cleric F. Gülen, who is based

1 "External Trade Tendencies of Georgia 2013 – 2019," National Statistics Office of Georgia, July 15, 2019, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/single-categories/99/external-trade-tendencies-of-georgia>; "Foreign Direct Investment," National Statistics Office of Georgia, accessed May 25, 2020. <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/191/foreign-direct-investments>.

2 Constantinos Papalucas, "Turkey's Erdogan: The Neo-Ottoman," The Washington Post, July 2, 2019, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jul/2/turkeys-erdogan-the-neo-ottoman/>.

3 Joshua Kucera, "Georgians Wary of Turkey's Rising Influence in Batumi," EurasiaNet, March 9, 2017, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/georgians-wary-of-turkeys-rising-influence-in-batumi>.

4 Sikharulidze et al. 2016.

in the United States, were closed down.¹ In 2017, a call from Ankara was enough to get the Head of the private Demirel College (PDC) Mustafa Emre Çabuk while the school was shut down.² This led to a massive outcry from human rights organizations and European politicians alike, who called for the ruling party to put a halt to its politically motivated persecution.³ Moreover, it was pointed out to Georgia that it pursues a pro-Western foreign policy and it should thus comply with European standards. Another “Chaghlarli” educational institution was shut down as recently as May 2020.⁴

As with Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Georgian political elites don't pay attention to these challenges, emphasizing the importance of Georgia – Turkey relations in the context of the latter's NATO membership and with due account of regional security. Hence, all the significant issues that Tbilisi has with regard to the “honeymoon” that Turkey and Russia are currently enjoying, as well as Ankara's economic expansion in Adjara and its intervention in Georgia's domestic affairs, remain unresolved.⁵

The People's Republic of China

The most out-of-character behaviour has probably been witnessed in Georgia's relations with China. Although Chinese civilization is markedly different from that of Georgia and is built upon a Communist social order, which the Georgian political elites were keen to avoid, the two countries nevertheless were able to sign a free-trade agreement (FTA).⁶ It would seem that the Georgian government hoped to attract more Chinese investments into the country and wanted to be a key partner in Beijing's grand economic and geopolitical project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁷ According to trade statistics, imports and exports have increased significantly since 2014, peaking in 2019. And, as is always the case, the South Caucasian state has a tremendous disbalance, making it increasingly dependent on imports.⁸ What is more, former Chief Specialist of Trade Negotiations at the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia Revaz Topuria argues that economic relations between Georgia and China are experiencing a sudden slowdown.⁹ The FTA did not live up to the lofty expectations of the Georgian side, while China is in no hurry to increase

- 1 Suzan Fraser, “Biden Calls on Turkey to be Patient in Gulen Case,” U.S. News, August 24, 2016, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2016-08-24/turkey-to-repeat-gulen-extradition-demand-during-us-vp-visit>.
- 2 “Turkey's Post-Coup Crackdown Hits ‘Gulen Schools’ Worldwide,” BBC, September 23, 2016, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37422822>.
- 3 “Georgia Should Not Transfer Mustafa Emre Cabuk to Turkey,” Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, May 28, 2017, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.gyla.ge/index.php/en/post/saqartvelom-mustafa-emre-chabuqi-turqets-ar-unda-gadascas>; “We Call upon the President of Georgia to Grant Mustafa Emre Çabuk Georgian Citizenship,” Transparency International Georgia, January 26, 2018, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.transparency.ge/en/post/we-call-upon-president-georgia-grant-mustafa-emre-cabuk-georgian-citizenship>.
- 4 “გვაძაბია, მ., საქართველოში “ჩაღლარის” ქსელის კიდევ ერთი სკოლა დახურეს (Gvazdabia, M. Yet Another ‘Chaghlarli’ Educational Network School Has Been Closed),” NetGazeti, June 4, 2020, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://netgazeti.ge/news/457687/>.
- 5 Peter Suci, “More S-400s? Is Turkey Moving Closer to Russia Again?” The National Interest, June 3, 2020, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/more-s-400s-turkey-moving-closer-russia-again-160176>.
- 6 Irina Lopatina, “Georgia: Georgia Signs Free Trade Agreement with China,” ITR, January 30, 2018, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.internationaltaxreview.com/article/b1f7n3d4sy1h2f/georgia-georgia-signs-free-trade-agreement-with-china>; Kenneth Rapoza, “Why Does Everyone Suddenly Want a Free Trade Deal With Georgia?” Forbes, March 5, 2020, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2020/03/05/why-does-everyone-suddenly-want-a-free-trade-deal-with-georgia/#326cff0150e6>.
- 7 Lily Kuo, and Niko Kommenda, “What is China's Belt and Road Initiative?” The Guardian, July 30, 2018, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer>.
- 8 “External Trade Tendencies of Georgia 2013 – 2019,” National Statistics Office of Georgia, July 15, 2019, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.geostat.ge/en/single-categories/99/external-trade-tendencies-of-georgia>.
- 9 Revaz Topuria, “Georgia Can Still Be a Hub for China, But Only if the Belt and Road Survives,” The Diplomat, August 27, 2019, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/georgia-can-still-be-a-hub-for-china-but-only-if-the-belt-and-road-survives/>.

its direct foreign investments, financing big infrastructural projects and thus, creating jobs. As a result, there is growing scepticism about whether cooperation between Tbilisi and Beijing will continue to benefit both sides, and, whether Georgia can play an important role in the BRI.

Meanwhile, the biggest blow to economic relations between Georgia and China was dealt with by Washington, Tbilisi's number one strategic partner. During an official visit of the Prime Minister of Georgia M. Bakhtadze to Washington, US Secretary of State M. Pompeo made a public statement with regard to the Anaklia Deep Sea Port project, arguing that it will "enhance Georgia's relationship with free economies and prevent Georgia from falling prey to Russian or Chinese economic influence. Those pretend friends do not have Georgia's best interests at heart".¹ The project, which is seen as crucial for Georgia's economic prosperity, has attracted investments from Chinese companies, and Tbilisi had hoped to build the port as part of Georgia – China economic cooperation.² Obviously, the "Russian hand" was not even considered, but Pompeo's speech has reminded Tbilisi that geopolitics lurks behind every grand economic project. And, as E. Avdaliani has noted, Washington made the issue of the port geopolitical, meaning that the United States will not welcome an increased role for Moscow and Beijing on Georgian soil.³ This, in turn, has postponed the successful completion of Anaklia Port, as Western companies are unwilling to invest heavily in an unstable region, especially in a country with separatist movements and phantom menace in the form of Russia.

Conclusion

Georgia's foreign policy is mainly focused on Western integration in its civilization choice to become a member of the European family. There is a firm belief among the Georgian political elites that only comprehensive integration will finalize the state's long-standing aspirations to be sovereign and independent from Russia's imperial intentions. This strife significantly affects foreign policy, as well as strategy and planning, making Georgia fully focused on the West, without attention to the "near abroad" and those states that are not in the framework of the "Europeanness". In particular, the term of "Europeanness" is introduced by Georgian scholars with the argument that the Georgian political elites are carriers of European identity and ideas, and the European future is an inherent part of elites' self-identity.

Additionally, Tbilisi's aspirations to pursue a pro-Western policy is legitimized by social order preferences, meaning that Georgian society would like to live in a Western-style liberal democracy. The European identity in combination with liberal democracy forces political elites to perceive Russia as the "other" and something "alien." With the concept of "Europeanness," this paper argues that the Georgian political

1 Emil Avdaliani, "The US Wants Chinese, Russians Kept Out of Anaklia," Georgia Today, June 13, 2019, accessed August 28, 2020, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/16008/The-US-Wants-Chinese%2C-Russians-Kept-Out-of-Anaklia>.

2 "Large Chinese Company Interested in Anaklia Port Project," Agenda.ge., February 8, 2018, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2018/294>.

3 Emil Avdaliani, "Geopolitics Doomed Georgia's Anaklia Project, But Can Also Resurrect it," The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, March 9, 2020, accessed August 28, 2020, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13609-geopolitics-doomed-georgias-anaklia-project-but-can-also-resurrect-it.html>.

elites have been radicalized due to both internal and external challenges, including the economic, geopolitical and military campaign against Tbilisi's North-Atlantic aspirations – Moscow's unwillingness to accept further NATO – EU enlargement. In the wake of what we may call "radical Europeanness," the state's foreign policy became even less proactive, structured and planned with regard to those states that are considered beyond the European framework.

Georgia's bilateral relations with its neighbouring states suffer the most. In particular, the Georgian political elites do not invest in foreign policy activities with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. This is reflected in the fact that Georgia trades actively with these countries, yet does not develop meaningful political and military cooperation. The concept of "radical Europeanness" can be summarized by the formula "we trade, but we do not talk about politics." As a result, we see an increasing financial flow with close to zero political debates and work on the ground. Hence, hidden bilateral challenges are slowly growing, popping-up out of the blue and pushing the Georgian political elites to undertake drastic measures in the short term, with no systemic approach being developed.

Recent events, such as the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, the Davit Gareja monastery complex dispute with Baku and increased concerns with regard to Ankara's geopolitical future, prove that Tbilisi needs to finally take care of the "near abroad," develop a proactive and well-thought-out foreign policy and build bilateral relations beyond trade and the European dream of its political elites. The attempt to use the "just trade no politics" formula failed in Georgia's relations with China in the context of strategic relationships with the US.

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Грузия за пределами «радикальной европеизации»: нераскрытые направления внешней политики

АННОТАЦИЯ

Поворот Грузии на Запад существенно повлиял на ее внешнюю политику. Автор разделяет мнение грузинских исследователей в том, что сохраняющаяся приверженность страны западному вектору является прямым следствием взглядов политических элит (конструктивистская теория), их европейской самоидентификации в сочетании со стремлением к либеральной демократии западного образца в качестве социального порядка (либеральная теория).

Политические элиты Грузии движимы концепцией «европеизации» и, таким образом, ориентированы в первую очередь на интеграцию государства в «Западный мир», способствуя европейской и североатлантической интеграции. Грузинские элиты считают, что институциональное воссоединение с «европейской семьей» под оборонным щитом НАТО не только поможет сдерживать Москву, но и окончательно положит конец попыткам Москвы поставить это постсоветское государство под свой контроль. Более того, из-за напряженности между Западом и Российской Федерацией, стремление Кремля остановить то, что он воспринимает как геополитическую экспансию Запада на восток, сделали подход Грузии еще более радикальным.

В статье утверждается, что концепция «европеизации» трансформировалась в «радикальную европеизацию», в рамках которой политические элиты поддерживают экономическое сотрудничество с незападными странами без активной внешней политики даже в отношении таких стратегических партнеров, как Армения, Азербайджан и Турция. Несмотря на то что Тбилиси поддерживает торговые отношения с этими странами, существующий уровень политического и военного сотрудничества между ними скрывает значительные двусторонние проблемы.

Кроме того, этот подход отражен в отношениях Грузии с Китаем, когда политические элиты страны настаивали на свободной торговле, не обращая внимания на политические и геополитические аспекты экономического сотрудничества. Таким образом, грузино – китайские отношения также являются частью исследовательского интереса в данной статье, поскольку режим свободной торговли между двумя странами подвергается серьезному изучению после того, как администрация Дональда Трампа ясно дала понять, что Вашингтон не будет приветствовать китайскую экономическую и геополитическую экспансию в Грузии.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

Грузия, «радикальная европеизация», идентичность, внешняя политика, элиты, социальный порядок

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