FOREIGN POLICY OF GEORGIA AS SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ACCESION TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANISATION AND EUROPEAN UNION

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ABSTRACT
In the first part of the article, being the introduction to further considerations, the author familiarizes the reader with the political history of Georgia, predominantly by focusing on the origins of various conflicts, including those with the Russian Federation, which to a significant extent influence the foreign policy of Georgia even today. Within the scope of the next part of the dissertation, the current economic situation of the country in question is depicted, including its tendency to tightening bonds with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union, regardless of its presidents’ political views and the specificity of the ruling party. Finally, the author attempts to answer the question of what the likelihood that Georgia will join the aforementioned organizations is, especially while taking into account current geopolitical events that may have an impact on the “openness” policy of the European Union, as well as what the direction of further development of NATO will be after the recent change on the position of the president of the United States.

KEYWORDS: Georgia, Foreign Policy of Georgia, Russia, European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Mikheil Saakashvili, Giorgi Margvelashvili, president of Georgia
1. INTRODUCTION

Breathtaking history, heroism, and the urge for independence are indispensable factors that have been defining Georgia for thousands of years, so almost from the very beginning of the country. In order to properly present the current foreign policy of the country in question and assess the likelihood of its joining the NATO or EU, a comprehensive analysis is going to be carried out, starting from the considerations on the origins of Georgia, through its development and key historical events, up to modern times. In the context of foreign policy, the discussed country has remarkable ambitions to become a vital part of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Within the framework of this paper, the author will attempt to check what the current barriers are, what opportunities can be identified, and how the current foreign policy of Georgia develops.

2. GENESIS OF THE COUNTRY OF GEORGIA

Land historically owned by Georgia is situated on the western part of the Caucasian Pass, between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea, where most important trade routes leading from the Western Europe to Central Asia and Middle East, as well as from Russia to the Middle East all cross. Such a localization has always been both a development prospect and a real curse for the nations inhabiting the land, including the Georgian nation. The country in question has always been considered a treat by empires conducting active imperial policy within the borders of Transcaucasia.

The relatively small Georgian territory, spanning up to 70 thousand square meters in some historical periods, is exceptionally diverse geographically – it includes both coastlines and mountains, the highest of which reach even 5000 m ASL. (Shkhara - 5058 m, Kazbek - 5033 m).

2.1. Antiquity and Middle Ages

According to Greek documents from the 4th century B.C., antique Georgia was an amalgamation of two countries – Colchis and Iberia, which came into existence after the fall of the country of Urartu, around the 6th century B.C. In the 1st century B.C., the land was managed by Rome. The inhabitants did not manage to regain independence, even with several military uprisings that were attempted. In the 2nd century, Christianity was becoming a significant defining factor of the region. In the early Middle Ages, the direction of development of Georgia changed notably. Its western part (Lazica) was under the protectorate of Byzantium. The eastern part was at first managed by Persians and then – by Arabs, who moved out from Transcaucasia as late as in the 10th century. The period of ruling of the latter was characterized by a significant economic development, which was, however, strictly connected with bloody repressions. In the first half of the 13th century, Georgia was dealt a blow that changed its situation forever. Two Mongolian raids (in 1221 and 1231) damaged the country to a severe extent. 80 thousand Georgians were taken captive, the eastern part of the country was conquered by the invaders, and its western regions had to pay an overwhelming tribute. In the second half of the 14th century, Mongols invaded Georgia seven more times. During fights with the army of Mongolian chieftain, Timur the Lame (Tamerlane), approximately 700 towns and settlements were destroyed. What is more, the majority of
churches were burned to the ground, cultural achievements were stolen or destroyed, and centuries-old scriptures were lost forever. The heroism and determination of Georgian people made it possible to overthrow Mongolian ruling. It is believed that on his deathbed, in 1405, Timur the Lame said the following words: „I wasted all my power on conquering Georgia, but I have not achieved my goal: to ultimately tame its people”.

2. Dependence from Russia

In the last decade of the 18th century, Georgia was invaded by Persians led by Aga Mohammed Khan. A relatively small domestic army did not manage to hold off, even by defending their land ferociously. Persians fought violently, not to say – sadistically. In September 1795, after the conquest of the capital city, Tbilisi, they destroyed it and tortured the locals for the next long eight years. The discussed fights resulted in the death of one fifth of the entire population of Georgia and the devastation of numerous cities and settlements. Russia did not support its neighbor properly. Its rulers sent two thousand soldiers only, but even they quickly retreated. The weakening of Georgia was a part of Russian plans oriented towards its absorption. Heraclius II of Georgia received only a small support from Imereti, a small kingdom situated in western Georgia. Due to the said fact, he could not prevent the crushing defeat.

For the entirety of the 19th century, Georgia was to some extent politically dependent on Russia.

The said state of affairs started to change with the outbreak of the October Revolution. Events taking place in November (October in accordance with Julian calendar) in 1917 in Petersburg pushed the revolution on completely different tracks. Supervision over the region was granted to the representatives of the Committee for State Security. Their administration was supposed to be temporary in character and last till the election of Transcaucasia and Caucasian Front deputies of the Russian Constituent Assembly.

The election of the Transcaucasia Commissariat was noticed all over the world. During the Triple Entente meeting in Paris, the heads of governments of cooperating countries made a decision to support the said body and organize military missions in Tbilisi. Washington even decided to open a consulate in Tbilisi, which has been formally treated as a branch of general consulate of the United States in Moscow. On 25th November 1917, during the so-called international congress, the Georgian National Council was appointed. Similarly to two remaining ones, its representatives were not elected by the Transcaucasia Commissariat, but by an independent initiative of major politic forces in the country. During the conference, the leader of East Georgian gentry, prince Constantine Abchazi granted the Council „the entire wealth of this social class, worth 40 million ruble in gold”.

During the interwar period, Georgia managed to stay independent from Russia. The situation changed after the Second World War, when the country in question become one of Soviet republics. At the end of the 80s, in the USSR, there was a notable departure from the former thesis on the creation of a homogenous Soviet nation. Even Mikhail Gorbachev himself, during the meeting of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in September 1989, indicated the importance of reshaping the Soviet federation, as he noticed that it had been impossible to do so for the last seventy years. He also indicated that there had been numerous long-standing conflicts and deformations in national policies. Hence, it was pointed out that the status of Soviet republics was not clear and their rights, as well as responsibilities were not unequivocally specified.
3. ECONOMY AND FOREIGN POLICIES OF GEORGIA

Despite significant damages that Georgia, or rather its economy, experienced during the civil war in the 90s, it managed to develop economically thanks to the support of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank offered since 2000. Thanks to the aforementioned undertakings, Georgia managed to achieve a noteworthy increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and overcome inflation. Georgia moved from planned economy (similar to the one adopted in the USSR) to the free market scheme, based on private ownership. It has to be mentioned at this point that Georgian government has been constantly implementing new reforms thanks to the support of the IMF and the World Bank. Governmental bodies have managed to regain control over the rebelling province of Adjara, but the provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are de facto still under the control of Russian Federation and separatists. Despite the declaration on withholding military involvement in Georgia (lasting for over 200 years), Russia closed its last military base in the country, but failed to retreat its soldiers, still controlling Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

3.1. Tightening bonds between Georgia, NATO, and the EU

In 2007, Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili, was accused of corruption and incompetence and finally arrested. After paying a security deposit, he was allowed to flee to Germany, where he received political asylum. Saakashvili introduced the state of emergency in the entirety of Georgia and held early election, which was justified by the „risk of national unrest”. What is more, he frequently accused Russia of fuelling restlessness. From 20th January 2008 up until 17th November 2013, Saakashvili acted as Georgian president, continuing his policy of tightening bonds with both NATO and the EU. Since 15th August 2014, he has been wanted on an international bench. Since 2015, he has been the citizen of Ukraine. The successor of Saakashvili, Giorgi Margvelashvili has also been the proponent of the foreign policy pursued by his antecedent and has focused on the accession of Georgia to NATO and the EU, as well as on the engagement in the Eastern Partnership. In 2008, Georgia started actively negotiating its participation in NATO, which for many consecutive years had been a topic of discussions and disputes between Russia and the USA. The United States has been the supporter of accession, but Russia has been disagreeing with the proposed solution, justifying its position with the increased risk of invading its borders. In 2008, during NATO summit, it was agreed that Georgia would become a member of the Organization. Then, in 2012 in Chicago, officials stated that they were open to Georgia being in NATO. During NATO summit taking place in September 2014 in Newport, there was a statement that the Organization would help Georgia to adjust to the requirements of NATO. On 8th July 2016 in Warsaw, diplomats from NATO Member States expressed their approval for Georgia becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

3.2. Conflict between Georgia and Russia

While addressing the controversial issue of which party is responsible for starting the Georgia – Russia conflict, one should refer to the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia report of 30th September 2009, which was ordered and sponsored by the European Union and issued by an independent committee. To quote only the most important part of the document: „Open hostilities began with a large-scale Georgian
military operation against the town of Tskhinvali and the surrounding areas, launched in the
night of 7 to 8 August 2008.”. It is also added that: „There is the question of whether the use
of force by Georgia in South Ossetia, beginning with the shelling of Tskhinvali during the
night of 7/8 August 2008, was justifiable under international law. It was not.”.

3. 3. Georgia for accession

Opinion polls carried out within the borders of Georgia in 2012 showed that 66% of
respondents claimed that the involvement in NATO was of major importance for the future of
Georgia, followed by the accession to the UE, and the support of the World Bank. Nevertheless, the biggest group of surveyed individuals (41%) was of the opinion that
becoming a member of the EU was more important than joining NATO. What is even more
important, 88% of respondents stated that Georgia should become EU Member State.

Davit Bakradze, the current Secretary of European and Euro Atlantic Integration of
Georgia is of similar opinion. He has claimed that the support for the country in question
accessing the EU is strong, but if the citizens will not see any form of positive response from
the EU and NATO, the support is likely to become gradually lower.

The concept of maintaining proper relations with Poland and expressing willingness to
join the European Union and NATO is followed by the current president of Georgia, Giorgi
Margvelashvili, who has stated that he notices the importance of European commercial union
and would like Georgia to trade with others without taxes and custom fees. According to the
current president, the European Union guarantees a strong political relation that ensures the
maintenance of Georgian identity and nationality.

3. 4. Polish support

On 28th June 2016, Witold Waszczykowski, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs
stated during a press conference involving his Georgian counterpart that without Georgia,
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldavia, the European project will still be
unfinished. According to the head of Polish diplomacy, thanks to the accession of Georgia and
other countries situated in the same region, Europe could become a truly unified,
homogenous, and democratic entity. The fact that the EU supports tightening bonds with
Georgia is also proved by the fact that since 1st July 2016, an EU-Georgia cooperation scheme
was established, including complex and intensified free trade area.

4. CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, at the end a question has to be asked of whether or not the European
Union, dealing with one of its biggest crises in the form of Brexit, based on the UK, being the
most prominent paying Member Stat leaving the union, as well as with the increased right-
twing tendencies of other countries, oriented towards distancing from the UE, will be willing
to expand the borders of the union by allowing new countries to access it. It also has to be
asked if the foreign policy of Republican president of the United States, Donald Trump, and
the promised decreased involvement of the USA in NATO and the policy based on tightening
bonds with Russia will make it possible for Georgia to achieve its goal. From the current
point of view, it will be exceptionally difficult, especially due to the fact that the geopolitical situation nowadays is much more complex than it was even few years ago.

References


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