

Introduction

After gaining independence in 1991, Georgia's foreign policy has never been linear. The foreign policy courses of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the Military Council, Eduard Shevardnadze, the United National Movement, and the Georgian Dream are essentially different from each other. If we look at it from a methodological point of view, after independence, it was Shevardnadze's administration that gave the start to the strengthening of the European orientation in the country's foreign policy in the last years of the 20th century. Justice demands to say that the mentioned European idea was nourished, and continues to be nourished, by centuries-old political-cultural ties of Georgia with European countries. As we wrote in our previous article, "For centuries, Georgian monarchs and princes actively pursued pro-European foreign policy and promoted European ideas and values within the country" (Javakhishvili 2022, 25).

It is especially interesting for us to show how the European idea was formed in the foreign policy discourse of Georgia's political leadership. For this purpose, we have chosen the periods of the administrations of presidents Eduard Shevardnadze and Mikheil Saakashvili (respectively, 1995-2003 and 2004-2012), since, in our belief, it was during these years that the European idea gained a place in the foreign policy agenda of official Tbilisi. The aforementioned methods of case-study and discourse analysis will give us the opportunity to show more clearly the contours of the shaping of Georgia's foreign policy orientation in the European direction during 1995-2012.

1. The European Idea in Independent Georgia

In the history of independent Georgia (here we mean the second republic since 1991; the first (democratic) republic of Georgia existed in 1918-1921), the formation of the European idea in its foreign policy agenda is not a simple process and had not been completed until now. The latest research of Nino Maisuradze (2023) emphasizes the modern Georgian nation's historical links with European values. This historical discourse is a long story, and we have already said a few words about it in the previous article.

In 2018, Gunnar Hökmar, Head of the Swedish EPP-delegation in the European

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Parliament, mentioned Georgia as an old part of Europe: "Georgia is a country of old Europe, with which we have a common history and which aspires to be more closely integrated with what we can call new Europe... Georgia has been the most successful country in the region in creating a more open society, through important reforms, but Georgians also know better than most not to take freedom for granted" (Hökmar 2018). Georgia's European path has been repeatedly proven to be difficult, especially when it comes to internal reforms (such as, for example, the judicial system and electoral legislation) and relations with its powerful neighbor (Russia).

Some authors pay attention to the non-uniform face of Europe in Georgia's official discourse for years. For example, one of them argues that from the very first days of independence "a dual perception of Europe was rooted in the Georgian official discourse – traditional, "civilized", old, morally sustainable Europe which we belong to vs the contemporary conspirator, depraved Europe without moral standards" (Chkhaidze 2017, 472). Such attitudes are often reflected in the moods of the population while "many Georgians also exhibit fears of a clash in social and cultural values between Georgia and Europe. The 2020 survey shows that a substantial minority of respondents (39 percent) believed that the EU poses a threat to Georgian traditions" (Lejava 2021, 5). There are frequent cases when different parties or groups use such sentiments of the Georgian population for their own interests.

2. Case I: Eduard Shevardnadze 1995-2003

In 1995, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, Eduard Shevardnadze, became the second president of Georgia, after Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Military Council. It is true that at first he implemented a policy of bandwagoning towards Russia – first, in 1993, he brought Georgia into the Commonwealth of Independent States (in 1992-

1995 he was the chairman of the Parliament of the Republic of Georgia), and then, in 1995, he allowed Russia to place military bases in the entire territory of the country.

From the second half of the 1990s, Shevardnadze's administration radically changed the country's foreign policy course and began a marked rapprochement with the United States and the European Union. In 1996, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was concluded between the European Union and Georgia. In 2000, one year after Georgia joined the Council of Europe, the latter supported Tbilisi, "allowing Georgia to become a full-fledged member of the European family" (Bibilashvili 2022, 136). One year earlier, Georgian prime minister, Zurab Zhvania declared in front of the Council of Europe that "I am Georgian and therefore I am European" (Mestvirishvili and Mestvirishvili 2014: 57).

This mood was further strengthened by the pro-European statements of President Shevardnadze; on March 18, 2002, at the meeting of the European Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, he stated that "since Georgia's independence I never thought of any other alternative than to be a European Union member" (Shevardnadze 2002). In his speech the Georgian president added that Georgia's membership would not be "tomorrow's perspective but not even in the very far future", and that "our aspiration to join the European structures does not mean that Georgia turns its back on Russia, who itself tries integration into Europe" (Shevardnadze 2002). It can be said that these last words were part of his usual diplomacy.

Obviously, Shevardnadze realized well that this aspiration was not only one-sided, but also the European Union had its own political interests towards Georgia. In this regard, Dov Lynch (2006) mentioned two main reasons: first, "Georgia matters because of its importance as a transit route for energy goods from the Caspian Sea region", and the second, "Georgia matters for the Union because

it embodies the challenges – both positive and negative – that the EU faces as a security actor at the start of the 21st century”. In other words, Georgia was considered a part of the EU’s security concept and wider geopolitical interest.

3. Case II: Mikheil Saakashvili 2004-2012

After the “Rose Revolution” in November 2003, the foreign policy course of the Saakashvili administration became radically pro-American, although it continued the policy of rapprochement with Europe. On January 25, 2004, after being elected president, he delivered his inauguration speech in which he declared: “We are not only old Europeans, we are the very first Europeans, and therefore Georgia holds a special place in European civilization” (Saakashvili 2004), and added that Georgia had to “take its own place in the European family, in European civilization, the place lost several centuries ago. As an ancient Christian state, we should take this place again. Our direction is towards European integration. It is time for Europe finally to see and appreciate Georgia and undertake steps towards us. And the first signs of this are already evident. Today, we have not raised the European flag by accident - this flag is a Georgian flag as well, as far as it embodies our civilization, our culture, the essence of our history and perspective, and the vision of our future” (Saakashvili 2004). He meant the new five-cross flag of Georgia. Centuries ago, that was a symbol of the Georgian Kingdom, in the medieval period (especially in the 12th century).

Three days later, President Mikheil Saakashvili made his speech to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in which he stated that “Today is the beginning of a new era for Georgia – a new era of reform, stability and strengthened partnerships with our friends around the world, and particularly our friends in Europe. It is not by accident that my first official trip abroad as President of Georgia is to Strasbourg and the heart of Europe” (Saakashvili 2004b). Then he continued that “... it is clear to me and to all Georgians that our identity is fundamentally European. Today, Georgia is finally on the road home, once again integrating itself into a Europe with which it shares common values and a common history”, and “My vision for Georgia focuses on how Georgia can contribute to Europe as a partner, as an ally and as a member. Our single ambition today is no-

thing less than becoming a full member of the European Union” (Saakashvili 2004b).

After being elected for the second term, in his inauguration speech, Saakashvili again emphasized the historical and cultural ties between Georgia and Europe: “Georgia is forever yoked to Europe. We are joined by a common and unbreakable bond-one based on culture-on our shared history and identity-and on a common set of values that has at its heart, the celebration of peace, and the establishment of fair and prosperous societies” (Saakashvili 2008). As for future prospects, he clarified that “Together with our partners in the European Union we will continue to strengthen these historic ties” (Saakashvili 2008). Regarding those years, the commentator may have been right when he stated that “Georgians make a strong emotional commitment to the idea of Europe” (De Waal 2011, 31). During Saakashvili’s presidency, there was a really strong desire to get closer to Europe both in the Georgian political establishment and in society.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the European idea began to establish itself in the foreign policy discourse of the political leadership of Georgia during the time of President Eduard Shevardnadze, from the second half of the 1990s. This is the period when Tbilisi finally gave up on the strategy of bandwagoning with Russia and started to get closer to the West. It must be said that Shevardnadze always approached this issue (as well as all other issues in foreign policy) with high diplomatic skills. It was during his rule that Georgia joined the Council of Europe (1999) and expressed its desire to join NATO and the European Union too.

During the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, the pro-Western statements and policies of the political leadership of Georgia became much more radical; this was well felt in the inaugural addresses of the President himself. We have already seen that in his official speeches, Saakashvili always emphasized, on the one hand, the historical-cultural ties between Europe and Georgia, and, on the other hand, Georgia’s irreversible aspiration to join the European Union. Ultimately, the understanding of the European idea of both presidents was consistent and reflected the country’s foreign policy agenda, and of course, at the same time, it expressed the will of the Georgian people to join the European Union.

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