

GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN SHAKE: APPEASEMENT VS EURO-ATLANTISM

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Abstract: *The parliamentary elections in Georgia on October 1, 2012 marked a turning point in the country's foreign policy, as it moved towards the European integrationist space. The resizing of Georgia's foreign policy vector is due to the new pro-European government that won the elections. The annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, as well as the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation conditioned the irreversible orientation of Georgia's foreign policy vector towards the Euro-Atlantic space.*

The purpose of this article is to highlight the main aspects of Georgia's foreign policy versus the Euro-Atlantic structures.

Keywords: Georgia, European Union, NATO, foreign policy, Constitution.

POLITICA EXTERNĂ A GEORGIEI: ALINIERE/NEALINIERE VS EURO-ATLANTISM

Rezumat: *Alegerile parlamentare din Georgia din 1 octombrie 2012 au marcat un punct de cotitură politică externă a țării, aceasta orientându-se spre spațiul integraționist european. Redimensionarea vectorului politicii externe a Georgiei se datorează noii guvernări proeuropene, care a câștigat alegerile. Anexarea peninsulei Crimeea în 2014, cât și invazia Ucrainei de către Federația Rusă au condiționat orientarea ireversibilă a vectorului de politică externă a Georgiei- cea versus spațiul euroatlantic.*

Prezentul articol are drept scop relieffarea principalelor aspecte ale politicii externe a Georgiei versus structurile euroatlantice.

Cuvinte-cheie: Georgia, Uniunea Europeană, NATO, politica externă, Constituție.

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After the Georgian Parliamentary elections on 1st October, 2012 when the political leadership completely changed, the foreign policy orientation toward Western Community has remained untouched. It occurred due to the Coalition principle that was key provision in forming the ruling party won the elections. In aegis of the Political Coalition: “The Georgian Dream of Georgia” out of the sixth political parties and movements, four of them reflected pro-Western foreign policy approaches. During the 2012-2016 period of time, Georgia achieved much more success rather than it was before. The main indication was improving relations with the EU. The EU-Georgia Association Agreement entered into force in July 2016 and strives for political association and economic integration between the EU and Georgia. The EU and Georgia have also entered into a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), while Georgian citizens have benefitted from visa-free travel to the Schengen area since 28 March 2017. The EU is Georgia’s largest trading partner and provides over €100 million to Georgia annually in technical and financial assistance [6]. In addition to that the Georgian Constitution adopted in 2018 acknowledges a trend of pro-Western foreign policy. According to the Constitution, article 78 in the transitional provisions stipulates that “the constitutional bodies shall take all available measures within their competence to ensure Georgia’s full integration into the EU and NATO [5].

However, the date – 2016 could be considered as starting point when incumbent authority began to divert from the Pro-Western foreign policy and steadily directed toward the “Northern” and “Oriental” ones. In this respect it is to be outlined three phases when incumbent Georgian ruling party “The Georgian Dream” and its government left positions on the Western foreign policy flank and launches so-called “appeasement foreign policy” implementation, more getting close to “neutrality” status-quo or so-called “Moldovization” modality (accept more or else, pro-EU orientation but reject pro-NATO trend):

- **First Phase (2016-2020)** – *dissolution of the political coalition “The Georgian Dream” where several political parties reflected pro-Western foreign policy orientation adherence (for instance, “Republican Party of Georgia”) and taken over the authority by the political party “The Georgian Dream” itself ruled by the Georgian well-known tycoon Bidzina Ivanishvili who by that time used to be the Chairman of the political coun-*

cil of the party. The multivectoral foreign policy was declared by then ruling party as one of the priority missions to be achieved, i.e. balance policy between West and Russia;

- **Second Phase (2020-2022)** – “Covid- pandemic” period when the foreign policy was slowing down and the Georgian then government canceled so-called “Anaklia” sea port construction in favor to USA involvement and during the period of time were created several anti-Western oriented political movements, like “European Socialist” and “People Power” and later pro-Western Prime-minister George Gakharia was forced to resign and supporter to so-called “multivectoral foreign policy” supporter was appointed to the position – Mr. Irakli Garibashvili who started its anti-Western rhetoric;

- **Third Phase (2022- up to date)** – starting war in Ukraine and Russia’s brutal intervention into the country. During the period of time, the Georgian incumbent government officially declared its neutrality policy toward the war-game in Ukraine and stated not join anti-sanctionary policy against Russia. The prime-minister Irakli Garubashvil at Bratislava Security Forum even blamed the NATO for the war scenario occurred in Ukraine. When asked by the moderator why he thinks Russia strated the war with Ukraine in 2022, the Georgian Prime Minister replied: “I think everybody knows the reason. One of the main reasons was NATO, NATO enlargement” [4]. Hence, the shifts from the pro-Western foreign policy orientation is vivid fact as well as performing anti-Constitutional behaviors.

Let starts our analyze with the “First Phase” period of time. The Georgian government has felt in quandary again but not from internal political consideration but from foreign policy priority shifting. The Georgian government has been reshuffled in how many times is another case for discussion. The changes have covered to key governmental positions in two important agencies: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economic Development. The Prime-minister Irakli Garibashvili announced about the cabinet reshuffle on September 1, 2015. Ex-Minister of Economic Development and incumbent Vice-Premier-minister George Kvirikashvili was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, replacing his predecessor Tamar Beruchashvili (who was simple so-called “technical Minister”), with preservation his high-level status-quo in the government

and ex-Deputy Mayor of Tbilisi Dmyrty Kumsishvili was appointed as Minister of Economic Development of Georgia (Kumsishvili was deputy general director of Ivanishvili's Cartu Bank in 1999-2011). The changes have been announced at the end of August of 2015 by the Georgian mass-media (notable "IMEDI" TV and internal portal "For.ge") and the Georgian society has been prepared to that shift in the governmental structures. As always, expectations on that shift among the various actors of the Georgian society – NGOs, mass-media means, business community, etc. was ordinary as the next shift in power. Actually the trend was supposed to be natural as it had happened before but some interesting implications taken into consideration in proper manner could be something different. Some rumors has been spurred from first comments by newly appointed Foreign Affairs Minister delivered in time when his candidacy had been proposed to the governmental session by the Prime-minister Irakli Garibashvili.

Here is his direct statement on foreign policy priorities and missions of Georgia in forthcoming period of time: "Georgia's agenda of European and Euro-Atlantic integration will be the main priority. A special focus will be made on economic relations in order to translate those excellent political relations, which Georgia has with the West, into the same level of economic relations – this will be the number one priority. **But along with the pro-western direction, lots of other interesting developments are taking place in the world, including of course in respect of relations with the east, new processes on the Eurasian continent**" [2]. His last part of the statement is sought to be very considerable and important because new Minister actually has proclaimed a bit alteration of foreign policy-making provision into more concrete directions – to Eurasia and to East (oriental) ones. Moreover, George Kvirikashvili noted that focus will also be made to intensify economic dimension of the foreign policy. The adherence to the priorities what he has outlined at first minutes of his appointment to the position has been repeated at the ambassadorial meeting, which was his first public address after taking foreign minister's post. At the meeting he has indicated the following: "*It should be noted that strengthening of Georgia's potential in terms of east-west transit and logistics and Georgia's integration into transport and logistics networks of region, as well as of our far and near neighbors, is vitally important to fully implement Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. East-*

west direction is especially important and a lot of efforts will be directed towards it. Currently it is an important task to successfully put the great Silk Road project. As you are aware, in October we will be hosting a high-level dialogue in frames of the “Tbilisi Silk Road” Forum. Making full use of the country’s transit potential and increase of our participation in regional energy and transport projects will be a priority direction” [1].

It is interesting to point out that these priorities that had been laid out by George Kvirikashvili, including “Eurasian” foreign policy shift indication was warmly supported by the Prime-minister Irakli Garibashvili and said the following: “Yesterday [after being appointed as the foreign minister] Mr Kvirikashvili mentioned that we will consider all the potential available on the Eurasian continent and I want to note that this is a right direction, right message; along with our main goal – the Euro-Atlantic integration, of course we should continue and further deepen relations with China and other countries in Asia as well as in the Middle East”. Later on, Prime-minister Garibashvili more specified his announcement into the following manner: “Pragmatic policy that we have towards Russia is important for us – it helped to increase stability for our country. It is of utmost importance for our government to maintain and continue our pragmatic and prudent policy towards Russia, because peaceful dialogue and this pragmatic policy have no alternative” [ibidem].

Hence, stemming from above-mentioned statements by Prime-minister Irakli Garibashvili and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ilia Darchiashvili, it makes clear that Georgia is in transition stage of transforming its foreign policy missions and priorities and with introduction already announced Euro-Atlantic Integration mission achievement more two additional foreign policy missions to achieve political and economic cooperation in aegis of the Eurasian and “Oriental” (China+Middle East) geopolitical configuration. By doing so, incumbent the Georgian government could amend the foreign policy missions amid goals are being declared as the same. In that way, the Georgian new foreign policy could be declared as so-called “supplementary foreign policy” configuration. The “supplementary foreign policy” could be composed and backed on the following geopolitical provisions:

➤ ***Political Content of the “Supplementary Foreign Policy” – continuation of approaching of Euro-Atlantic and European integration mis-***

sions with prominent membership opportunity in NATO and EU;

➤ **Economic Content of the “Supplementary Foreign Policy”** – *implication to fostering foreign economic relations with Eurasian Economic Union member-states and candidate members. The term “Eurasia” mostly in foreign policy jargon means notable linkage with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as the organization almost completely covers the area called “Post-Soviet” space and geopolitics. Despite of matter that Azerbaijan is not member of the EEU, however Azerbaijan joins the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a “dialogue partner” and due to geopolitical confrontation with EU and USA, Azerbaijan could more probably join the EEU too. In aegis of the “economic content” of the foreign policy would be including promoting negotiations on political and security issues will of course continue in frames of the Geneva International Discussions and special representatives will work on economic and humanitarian issues, referring to the bilateral format of dialogue between Georgian PM’s special envoy for relation with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, and Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin and the format could be more expanding. In that context due to the public “attire” or “attachment” to the “Eurasian” direction could be treated recent official visit to Russia in Moscow one of the opposition leader, Chairman of ‘Georgian Dasi’ political movement Jondi Bagaturia who has proposed some concrete project draft to the Russian Parliament, including possibility setting up Russian military bases in Georgia and setting up a “strategic partnership” relations with Russian Federation. Although it is a some kind hypothetical interpretation of the statements declared by the Prime-minister and Foreign Affairs Minister and nothing more, it is to be interpreted as a possible scenario to be developed in nearest future;*

➤ **Financial Content of the “Supplementary Foreign Policy”** – *attempting to attract financial great investment from Asian countries, mainly from China. The “oriental” supplement to the foreign policy-making has been demonstrated soon afterward appointment of new Foreign Affairs Minister when Prime-minister Irakli Garibashvili paid his official visit to China and attended to the international conference devoted to promotion of new version of “Silk Road” strategy. In addition to that fact, China was invited to take part in realization of the geoeconomic project – construction of the sea-port in Anaklia in 2024. Georgia was seeking to take part into*

the greatest geoeconomic project named “New Silk Road” where China wants to invest more \$22 billion with aiming of fostering “East-West” transit corridor potency. Georgia wishes to attract investment packages from Asian developing nations – India and China and this is indispensable part of the third part priority if new foreign policy of Georgia [3].

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