

# The Eurasian Vector of Georgia's Political Development: Specifics and Opportunities for Implementation

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**Abstract:** The objective of this study is to identify the Eurasian vector of Georgia's political development implementation features and contradictions. The possibilities and extent of Georgia's participation in the Eurasian integration processes, as well as within various organizations (the Eurasian Economic Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, etc.) are considered. The study analyzes the possibilities of Georgia's implementation of the Eurasian development vector in political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, educational and other spheres. The potential of the Eurasian Union development as an economic organization and its attractiveness for the Georgian state is studied. It is emphasized that relations and cooperation building between Georgia and Russia and other member States of the Eurasian Economic Union is possible only subject to strengthening of the existing financial and administrative organization structures and its economic capacity building. Special attention is paid to Russia's policy towards Georgia to attract it to integration processes taking place in the Eurasian space. The authors note the peculiarities and shortcomings of Russia's foreign policy aimed at bringing the two states closer together, and gives recommendations for their correction. Unresolved ethnic and political conflicts and the uncertain state and administrative status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are considered as factors that may encourage Georgia to participate and possibly join these organizations in order to resolve the existing problems. The authors of the article come to a conclusion that the Eurasian vector of political development is becoming more and more popular in Georgian society against the background of a rather distant prospect of the country's joining the Euro-Atlantic structures, and the competition of these projects will in many ways determine Georgia's future internal and foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Eurasian vector, Georgia, Russia, the Eurasian Economic Union, political contradictions, interethnic conflict, security, cooperation.

## INTRODUCTION

The presidential elections 2018 in Georgia proved that despite the rivalry of various political forces, including the opposition, Georgia's adherence to the European direction of development remained unchanged. The few supporters of the country's Eurasian integration vector cannot change the situation and make its development unlikely (Delcour, 2017: p. 62-72). However, in the author's opinion, Georgia's long term entry into the Eurasian integration groupings may become quite a realistic scenario, which will be rather cost-effective and will be determined by a combination of internal and external factors. The Eurasian project is primarily related to the activities of such organizations as the EEU, the CSTO, the CIS, promoted by Russia and a number of other post-Soviet states, as well as the SCO and the China-developed megaproject "the Silk Road Economic Belt" (Vasilyeva, & Lagutina, 2016: p. 77-92).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research methodology is based on the systematic and institutional approaches. The systematic approach allowed the author to trace the

specifics and possibilities of Georgia's participation in the Eurasian integration processes, including within various organizations, among which special attention is paid to the Eurasian Economic Union. The analysis of certain spheres of Georgian society has contributed to the fact that they are treated as elements of a systematic description in this study, which demonstrate the current possibilities and degree of implementation of the Eurasian development vector in each of the areas and show the problems that hinder the process implementation. The application of an institutional approach has contributed to the study of domestic and international institutions, competition between European and Eurasian projects and their impact on Georgia's domestic and foreign policy, which may change in the future. This methodology made it possible to carry out a detailed study of the potential for implementing the Eurasian project in Georgia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As Russia gives new impetus to the EEU development and Georgia implements the EU Association Agreement, it will be increasingly influenced by competing projects that will determine its further economic and political development and, possibly, the process of inter-ethnic conflicts resolving. We can agree with the Georgian scientist Z. Anjaparidze, who noted the following: "In the future,

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there will certainly be a problem of two integration economic projects co-existence, which certainly will be realized by the main players. Georgia is interested in discussing the compatibility of various regional projects, since the emergence of economic wars that may result in political conflicts is of no interest for Georgia" (Anjaparidze, 2018: p. 76).

The relevance of studying of the Eurasian vector of Georgia's development is also related to the fact that it is highly unlikely that Georgia would join Euro-Atlantic organizations in terms of frozen conflicts. This, in turn, gives rise to significant illusions and disillusionments in the Georgian society regarding the implementation of the task. Therefore, now and in the future, the ideas of deepening relations with the Russian Federation and participating in the Eurasian integration processes will become popular. Periodically, they are reflected in the statements of representatives of Georgian political elite. So, the chairman of the party "Free Georgia" K. Kukava believes that participation in Eurasian projects meets the country's national interests: "The evidence from practice shows that there is no other alternative, since the main branches of our economy directly depend on the Russian market" (Pylin, 2020). Quite interesting is the statement of the former head of the International Relations Department of the Georgian Parliament N. Dzhaparidze, who noted that "For more than 20 years, we have been told that Western orientation is a universal remedy, but today the population of Georgia is really striving for the Eurasian space. The people are suffering because of thoughtless policy of the former leadership, who created that lie, believed in it and tried to convince us that Russia is our enemy" (Gordon, 2020). In the authors view, we can agree with these opinions. Russia and Georgia need to review their relations, which now bring more problems than benefits, but with the primary and mutual consideration of the two countries' national interests.

The possibility of implementing by Georgia of the Eurasian project in one form or another can be facilitated by the country's established economic ties with its northern neighbour and other post-Soviet states, especially those that are members of the EEU and the CIS. In the opinion of the above-mentioned researcher Z. Anjaparidze, "The country has so far preserved the traditional structure and rules of trade (the range of goods and services) with Russia, Armenia and other EEU countries. However, in the course of implementation of the Association Agreement / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement, this

situation will gradually change" (Anjaparidze, 2018: p. 75-76). Despite the way this ratio will change, it is clear that Russia remains a key trading partner of Georgia, especially in the sphere of energy transportation, telecommunications development and communications (Zavyalova, 2020). The Russian market is more open to Georgian goods and services than the European market, despite the existing free trade rules.

In our opinion, the Eurasian vector of Georgia's political development can be realized only subject to effective function of the integration entities of the post-Soviet space and, first of all, the Eurasian economic Union. Russia, being a state with powerful economic potential compared to other members of the organization, has a major role to play here. Currently Russia is under Western sanctions, which requires both import substitution policy and development of home production in various economic sectors. This is due to the need to constantly stimulate, as well as develop and strengthen the institutional foundations of the organization, its financial and administrative structures, so that it becomes attractive to potential member countries, including Georgia (Alexanian, 2014: p.38). The expansion of the organization by other states, such as Central Asian ones, which have a good potential for economic development, is a fundamental factor. However, currently Russia pays more attention to other issues, considering them priority, among which we can highlight the political conflict between Russia and Ukraine, relations building with the EEU member states, the Venezuelan crisis, the Syrian conflict, etc. In our opinion, it is more rational to solve these tasks in parallel, paying appropriate attention to them and attracting the necessary resources.

The situation around two ethnic and political conflicts, which have not yet had a political settlement, makes Georgia's adherence to the Eurasian development vector promising. Georgia's participation in a certain format in the Eurasian integration projects could contribute to the emergence of some common unifying ideas for regional development that would help to break the deadlock between Georgia and the "partially recognized states" on its territory and review its relations with Russia. In this context, we can agree with the opinion of a director of the branch of Mir Interstate TV and radio company in Georgia, B. Nachkebia, that "... to change the situation in Georgian-Russian relations, a mental revolution is required to enable Georgia to move towards the Eurasian space" (Gordon, 2020). At the same time, similar changes should occur in the minds of people and

representatives of the ruling elites of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The development of economic, social, cultural, scientific, educational and other ties and their expansion may subsequently lead to the resolution of actual political issues, including the problems of ensuring security and resolving the long-standing Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts.

The implementation of changes implies a policy of compromises and concessions on the part of both the direct participants in the conflict and Russia. So, the latter could sacrifice the part of its national interests by suspending further development of associated relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time, Georgia refuses to approach the EU and NATO or acquires a non-bloc status, which, in fact, makes its membership in Euro-Atlantic organizations impossible, and begins to develop contacts with Eurasian organizations (the EEU, CSTO, SCO, etc.). Subsequently, it gets an opportunity to establish relations with "partially recognized states" up to the formation of a common political and economic space and reintegration of republics. What it will be (a Confederation, a Federation with broad autonomy rights for regions, etc.) is a matter of further relations promotion and finding common ground. The Eurasian vector of Georgia's development may also involve formation of other regional structures that contribute to the creation of a "common house" in which the economic and political dividends of states cooperation will surpass the existing ones.

The considered scenario of Georgia's reorientation to the Eurasian vector is one of the possible prospects for its development, and it is quite remote. Due to the difficulties of implementing this vector today, Georgia's rapprochement with the countries that are part of the Eurasian integration structures is facilitated by intensification of relations at the level of civil societies, non-profit organizations, and mass media. There are a large number of public organizations in Georgia ("Union of young Eurasians of Georgia", "Eurasian choice – Georgia", "Eurasian Institute", "Eurasian choice", "Foundation for the unity of the Russian and Georgian peoples", "Foundation for the revival and development of Russian-Georgian relations", etc.) and youth movements ("People's movement for Georgian-Russian dialogue and cooperation") that defend the Eurasian values of the country's development. In this respect the activities of mass media in Georgia (Patriot, InfoRos news agencies, Iverioni, Gia Boklomi, Georgia and the world, Gruzinform media portals, etc.) are also

of importance. Various events are held annually both in Georgia and in Russia (conferences, forums, symposiums, seminars, etc.) with participation of both states representatives of the authorities, raising the issues of deepening bilateral relations, the problems and opportunities of the Eurasian vector of development of the Georgian state.

Thus, despite the fact that the political elite of Georgia adheres to the Euro-Atlantic orientation in foreign policy, there is a significant part of the population that wants to follow the Eurasian direction. Thereat, high regard is paid both to issues of economy, politics, and to the sphere of education, science and culture. So, according to G. Iremadze, the founder of the Union of young Eurasians of Georgia, "Not all Georgian students can and want to study in Europe. Many of them wish to study, for example, at MSU, MGIMO, etc. That is why the Eurasian direction is so important for young people. It is necessary to understand that not all young Georgian people want to integrate with Europe, not all want to accept the so-called "European values", the European educational system" (Georgia with Russia: a new youth force is preparing to change the Tbilisi vector. free. Checked on April 6, 2020).

The development of relations in social and cultural sphere is also urgent. For example, the Russian and Georgian peoples share a common history and culture, religious values, a significant Georgian Diaspora in Russia and family ties. The existing contradictions and periodic complications in bilateral relations on both sides of the border, even in minds of pro-Western Georgians, are often perceived as abnormal and subject to correction. At the level of mass consciousness of post-Soviet countries people, not only of Russia and Georgia, there is a desire to live together in a common cultural space filled with Eurasian civilizational codes (Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Eurasian Union., free. Checked on April 6, 2020).

## SUMMARY

Thus, the Eurasian vector is a very attractive direction for further political development of Georgia. At the level of civil communities, in economic, social, cultural, scientific, educational and other spheres, we can see an increase in the number of supporters of Eurasian integration and the development of full-fledged relations with Russia. Efficient economic development of organizations (such as the EEC, the CIS, the CSTO) will make Georgia's membership in

them more realistic. Lack of prospects on Georgia's accession to the EU and NATO membership in the foreseeable future contributes to an even greater dependence of its main economy sectors on the Russian market. Economic diplomacy may be an important channel for semi-official political dialogue between the two countries. However, enormous efforts must be made to reorient Georgia to the Eurasian vector. They are related to the deepening of humanitarian and economic components in Georgia's relations with Russia and other CIS countries. The states should avoid crossing red lines related to political interaction and conflict resolution, but get round, seeking for spheres of interaction, which previously seemed impossible.

## CONCLUSION

Today, the mutual desire of both the Russian and Georgian parties to show political will and desire to change something in the current situation is important in Georgia's progress towards the Eurasian vector. Intensification of "soft power" policy in relation to Georgia carried out by the member countries of Eurasian integration associations and their development as inter-state institutions can bring significant results (Czerewacz-Filipowicz, & Konopelko, 2017:p. 43-44). Russia is an economically attractive country for Georgia, it should regularly position the Eurasian structures as organizations that implement the principle of voluntary and mutually beneficial cooperation in their development, instead of merely defending its interests, often resorting to instruments of pressure and power politics. In this context, the problem of reducing the emotional background in

bilateral relations and the need for goodwill gestures is an urgent issue to study.

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