

## Go West: Georgia's European identity and its role in domestic politics and foreign policy objectives

Donnacha Ó Beacháin<sup>a\*</sup> and Frederik Coene<sup>b</sup>

*<sup>a</sup>School of Law and Government, Dublin City University, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, Ireland; <sup>b</sup>Ghent Institute for International Studies, Ghent University, Universiteitstraat 8, 9000 Ghent, Belgium*

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This article sheds light on the Euro-Atlantic discourse in Georgia by situating it in a wider frame. It provides an analysis of its Euro-Atlantic orientation by presenting it as a continuation of past efforts to involve European powers in Georgian affairs and highlights changing trends in this aspect of contemporary foreign policy. Far from determining whether or not the Georgians are European, the different arguments that have been used to support Georgian “Europeanness” are evaluated to assess its role in the national identity construction process. Focusing primarily on the United National Movement government led by Mikheil Saakashvili, we demonstrate how the Euro-Atlantic discourse has been employed domestically by the political elite as a legitimacy management strategy and explore its function in seeking Western patronage, a key foreign policy goal.

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“Georgia, Europe Started Here.” This is the slogan the Georgian Government’s Department of Tourism had emblazoned on its official website (Government of Georgia 2011). Throughout the country, one will find many more references to the Europeanness of Georgia, and the rhetoric of most of the elite is drenched with a European focussed discourse. Fundamental to Georgia’s foreign policy is the tenet that Georgia is an old, if not the oldest, European country, one which has been taken down civilizational cul-de-sacs, be they in the guise of Persian, Ottoman, Russian, or Soviet empires, but which in recent years had sought to retake its rightful place in Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union liberated Georgia from the imposed Communist experiment that had tucked it away far behind the Iron Curtain and destroyed the promise of the first independent Georgian republic of 1918–1921, suppressed by the Red Army shortly after enacting a democratic constitution (Kandelaki 2014; Matsaberidze 2014).

But the Soviet collapse and Georgian independence movement simply created the opportunity, as in other former Soviet republics, for Georgia’s “return to Europe,” they did not guarantee it. In the view of the Saakashvili government, and, indeed, of much of the electorate, the foreign policy balancing act of President Shevardnadze had only created seemingly friendly relations with the main international actors, but had not led to

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\*Corresponding author. Email: [donnacha.obeachain@dcu.ie](mailto:donnacha.obeachain@dcu.ie)

any major positive development in the country. Instead, this first decade of independence was squandered by corruption, ineptitude, and a privatization of state power for private gain. In the process, Georgia had lost three of its regions. Abkhazia and South Ossetia won de facto independence by force of arms (see Companjen and Polese 2012; Ó Beacháin 2012; Hewitt 2013), with Russian support, while Adjara became the private fiefdom of local strongman Aslan Abashidze who paid neither taxes nor homage to the state authorities in Tbilisi. To its supporters, the Rose Revolution of 2003 represented a desperate attempt to reverse this decade of decline and to re-chart Georgia's destiny so that a strong state, protecting democratic and liberal values, might win back the lost territories and restore Georgian national pride and confidence (Ó Beacháin 2009). The European identity of the country would play a major role in this reimagining of the country and its destiny.

Much of these views were encapsulated in a speech delivered by President Saakashvili in 2009 in the presence of Spanish premier José María Aznar. Saakashvili asserted that Georgia is one of the oldest European countries: "We must never forget it; we are not anyone's distant relatives and connected with them by force. We are an indivisible part of this civilization." Saakashvili claimed that through their actions during the Rose Revolution, Georgians had made a choice to leave behind the undemocratic Soviet past for a bright democratic future.

Our choice has one name – Europe. This name means freedom, democracy, independence and peace. In cooperation with our European friends we will provide the victory of this name over occupation, aggression, kidnapers of 13-year old teenagers, over their ideology and all kinds of attempts to restore the Soviet Union. Georgia's democratic way will win.

The Rose Revolution, he argued, meant that Georgians had decided to join the process that had begun in 1989 when the people of Central and Eastern Europe had discarded the Soviet system to reclaim their place in the mainstream of European history. According to its supporters, the Rose Revolution had occurred

in order to make our country part of modern European processes ... this was a real triumph of the European values in Georgia. This was not one single event, but it was the start of very important processes, which are being carried out in our country. (President of Georgia 2009)

This article charts Georgia's European orientation and discourse, primarily during the period of dominance by the United National Movement (UNM) led by Mikheil Saakashvili (2004–2012). The first part examines the elite's claim that Georgia is, and always has been, an ancient European country. This will assist in establishing to what extent Georgia's European credentials are sustainable and to what extent they have been constructed to sustain a so-called European orientation. We explore "Europeanness" as part of Georgian national identity before identifying the parameters of this phenomenon. We then look at how Georgia's attitude toward Europe, and more specifically the European Union (EU), has evolved since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Finally, we provide an analysis of the European orientation and discourse and try to evaluate the extent to which this has had an influence on both domestic politics and foreign policy. The aim of the article is not to criticize Georgia's "Europeanness," but rather to present a constructivist approach toward the formation and evolution of concepts such as "Europe" and "Europeanness" in the official discourses of the Georgian government.

### **Europeanness as part of the Georgian identity**

To judge from the rhetoric of the Georgian leadership and most of the political and intellectual elite, there seems to be no doubt that Georgians have always been European and

that European values are at the core of Georgian society. This European self-perception is not new and has been the object of intense debate among Georgian intellectuals for at least a century and a half. It is not only important to understand when this European feeling emerged, but also to realize that the evidence of Europeanness currently employed seems to be basically a copy of the discourse used during the time of the first republic.

There is little historiographical evidence or support for the identity sentiments or emotional affiliations of the Georgian nation. The Georgians had close contacts with, and were in some ways part of, the Greco-Roman and Byzantine worlds, but there are no indications to what extent they identified themselves with these civilizations and cultures. Still, what seems to be indisputable, however, is the fact that the Christian faith played a central role in the way the Georgian elite viewed itself and that Christian Europe was important for Georgia's foreign policy orientation.

The concept of Georgian cultural nationalism started to develop from the 1860s onwards with the *tergdaleulni*, a generation of young Georgian students who had studied in Russia and brought back some European ideas to Georgia. Brisku (2009, 73–75) claims that while in the late nineteenth century, Georgianness was viewed as something authentic but sharing more characteristics with the Eastern cultural space, this view was strongly challenged in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century. Ilia Chavchavadze, the father of the Georgian national movement, still represented the old view of Georgian authenticity and claimed Georgia was part of “Western Asia” (Brisku 2009, 52). He even feared European culture would be detrimental to the authentic Georgian nature (see for example Nino Khoperia cited in Brisku 2009, 74). Still, Chavchavadze and most of his colleagues agreed that the European ideas of nation and Enlightenment could play an important role. The *tsispermkantselni* (the Blue Horn: 1915–1931), a group of Georgian literary figures mainly educated in Western Europe, led to a major change in this self-perception. They saw Georgian culture as both Eastern and Western. Since Asia and its traditions were respectively a “nightmare,” and “old, fat, and cretin” (Titsian Tabidze cited in Brisku 2009, 81), the *tsispermkantselni* promoted the “return” to the European space (Brisku 2009, 76).

The Soviet invasion in 1921 put an end to the brief independence of Georgia that had resulted from the collapse of the Tsarist Empire in World War I. The decades following the loss of Georgian statehood witnessed numerous discussions among the intelligentsia on the European or Asian roots of the Georgians and the direction they should follow for the future. During the Soviet era, Georgians never lost their strong sense of national identity and managed to preserve education in their own language (see, for example, Blauvelt 2009). When national movements arose all over the USSR in the 1980s, Georgians saw a chance to undo the injustice of 1921 and called for the restoration of independence. Once full sovereignty was restored with the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the country needed a strategy for its own development and to find its place in the international arena. As Nodia (2010, 94) comments, “Europe” or “the West” in general provided a larger framework identity, as the role model and as the presumed ally.

### Parameters of Georgia's Europeanness

Since the Europeanness of Georgia and the Georgians is portrayed and perceived as an absolute truth, there is not much discussion in society challenging this axiom as the elite has come up with multiple supporting arguments, many of them finding their origins with the *tsispermkantselni*. Georgian society does not welcome divergent views and

perceives questioning these arguments as a heresy committed by pro-Russian traitors who do not wish to see a prosperous future for Georgia.

The Netherlands-born First Lady Sandra Roelofs, herself a symbol of Georgia's Europeanness, summarized these arguments in an interview with Network Europe in 2007:

First of all, we are an old European country, let's start in this way. We are already involved in Europe, I mean, we are participating in the Eurovision Song Festival, European football championships and so on. And we are of course a member of the Council of Europe but we will have a facilitated visa access to the European Union. [ ... ] Before being part of the Soviet Union, they [the Georgians] were part of a bigger European family and throughout our history, I mean; we were part of the Hellenic world and even of the Roman Empire. I mean, we are feeling our mentality is very close to the European one. We had property rights in the Middle Ages like Europe had itself. (Walker 2007)

In the following pages, we closely look at the various arguments in the fields of geography, history, religion, culture, anthropology, and geopolitics.

Ever since the emergence of the concepts of "Europe" and "Asia," scholars have tried to set the boundary line between them, initially focusing on the geographical interpretation. Although there is not much debate about the dividing line that traverses the Aegean Sea, the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus and the Black Sea, many different versions have emerged throughout the past 2500 years about its continuation to the northeast. From antiquity until the late Middle Ages, most authors agreed that the border between Europe and Asia ran along the Don River.<sup>1</sup> Later versions moved the boundary more eastward toward the Volga and Ural rivers with either the Kuma-Manych Depression or the Greater Caucasus Range as the south-eastern border.<sup>2</sup> Thus, with only few exceptions, literature traditionally places Georgia outside of the geographical borders of Europe. Nevertheless, Georgian discourse sometimes focuses on these exceptions. For instance, Tamaz Gamkrelidze only mentions the Phasis River as the historical Europe-Asia border (Gamkrelidze 2010). Due to the absence of any distinctive geophysical features, most contemporary geographers, however, are no longer convinced that a real geographical border should be drawn between Europe and Asia. Instead, they consider this whole landmass as a single Eurasian continent. Therefore, the geophysical and geographical arguments for Georgia's age-old place within Europe – and for a border between Europe and Asia in general – is difficult to sustain and is even not really meaningful.

The historical argument of Georgian Europeanness mainly emerged from the *tsispermkhantse*, whose call for a "return to Europe" has more recently been repeated all too often by the Georgian elite.<sup>3</sup> The belief that Georgia was part of the Greco-Roman cultural space in antiquity and has always belonged to the European space is especially popular. The reality, however, is not so straightforward and only a few historians – including Georgian ones – would agree with this line of thinking. There were indeed permanent settlements of Greek colonists on the eastern Black Sea shores as early as the sixth century BC (Coene 2009, 98) and the Georgian kingdoms were at times allies in the periphery but not provinces of the Roman Empire (Coene 2009, 101–104). However, such alliances were most often conceived out of strategic and economic interests, focusing on the self-preservation of the Georgian rulers and not necessarily on integration. So, the fact of settlements and occasional alliances of convenience does not necessarily argue for Georgia being part of Europe in any significant way. For several centuries, Georgia was part of the Byzantine world and many Georgians even held leading positions in the Byzantine state (Coene 2009, 104–110). However, the Byzantine world was on increasingly bad terms with the Latin Christian states in Western Europe. True, Georgia has throughout history most

often looked westwards in order to find patronage and protection against hostile neighbors. Still, after the fall of Byzantium, Georgia was not only looking to the Latin European states for support, but also to Muslim Middle Eastern states hostile to the Ottoman sultan, such as the Aq Qoyunlu (Vateishvili 2003, 47–49) or the Mamluks (Vateishvili 2003, 54). European support and patronage for Georgia never materialized apart from the participation of a small group of Crusaders in the Battle of Didgori against the Seljuq Turks in 1140, the “blessing of the pope” and the “moral support of the European kings” (Vateishvili 2003, 33–77). After the fall of Byzantium, Georgia was almost completely cut-off from Europe – apart from some diplomatic missions – and it would not be until the eighteenth century that real contact would be re-established, via Russia as a proxy. The Georgian leadership seems to be very much aware of the lack of real historical ties between Georgia and Europe. For example, President Saakashvili has said that “the whole history of Georgia is of Georgian kings writing to western kings for help, or for understanding. And sometimes not even getting a response” (Rachman 2008). Nevertheless, there is an obvious discrepancy between knowledge and discourse, as the medieval and early modern Georgian desire for European support is now all too often falsely equated to being part of Europe. President Saakashvili, following US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s distinction between “Old” and “New” Europe, coined the term “Ancient Europe” to which Georgia apparently belonged. Considering that Europe had only a geographical meaning until the Middle Ages, a political connotation to the term “Ancient Europe” makes little sense.

Christianity is considered one of the most important components of Georgian national identity as it was key to the struggle for survival for centuries (Jones 2003, 88–90). For many Georgians, Christianity is the main indication of their feeling of Europeanness, and also many Europeans may consider the Christian bond and the related values and norms to be the common factor of “Europe.” However, does being Christian automatically make any nation a European one? What can we say then of the old Nubians or the Copts in Egypt, the Christians in Lebanon or Iraq or even the majority of the population of the Philippines or Chile? Indeed, during the Middle Ages Europe did gradually become a synonym with the “Christianitas” or (Latin) Christian community. Even then, there was also no unity among the different Christian churches and historically the Catholic Pope was almost as dismissive of the Orthodox Church doctrines as those of the Muslims. Therefore, claiming that Georgia is European because it is Christian is rather simplistic and inconsiderate of the history and peculiarities of Christianity.

Cultural arguments for Georgia’s Europeanness are closely related to the historical and religious ones. The Hellenic and Roman influence on Georgia was very limited (Vateishvili 2003, 22), and for instance literature was subjected to only minor European influences until the 18th–19th centuries. The most important Georgian epic *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* is set in the East, not in Europe. The *tsisperkhantselni* actually complained that Georgian literature was mainly “Asian” and had to become “Europeanized.” Similar attitudes were expressed toward other cultural forms so that, for example, European music and opera arrived in Tbilisi only in the second half of the nineteenth century. The most interesting conclusion we can make here is that although Russia is often depicted as the antonym of Europe and detrimental to Georgia, it is largely thanks to Russia that Georgia came into contact with European culture. It was the Russian Governor General Vorontsov who laid the foundations of many cultural enterprises (Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre 2011), it was from Russian literature that Georgian intellectuals learned about Europe (Brisku 2009, 40–92), and the Chavchavadzes brought the first piano – probably the most widely used instrument in Europe – to Georgia via Russia.

In the early twentieth century, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia,<sup>4</sup> Mikhael Javakhishvili,<sup>5</sup> and Grigol Robakidze<sup>6</sup> advanced “racial” claims as proof of Georgian Europeanness. Even after fascism was defeated in Europe, such discourses still appeared in the speeches of people like Mikhako Tsereteli<sup>7</sup> or Malhaz Abdushelishvili.<sup>8</sup> There is no scientific evidence for these claims<sup>9</sup> and the very use of such arguments now would rather indicate that one does not share European values.

Many Georgians argue that contemporary geopolitics clearly place Georgia in Europe. They give examples such as their membership in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, and even their membership of the Union of European Football Associations or their participation in the Eurovision Song Contest.

Thus far we have examined how the national elite have presented Georgia’s place in Europe. It may also be relevant to look at the other side of the equation, of how Georgia has been perceived in Europe. For much of recorded history, Georgia was far-off, independent for only short periods, and outside of the “mental map” of Europe; the West had only limited information about the Georgians. As a result, the Georgian lands were generally lumped together with descriptions of the Ottoman, Persian, or Russian Empires, none of which were perceived as European by those who collectively called themselves Europeans. Furthermore, the limited cases where information or knowledge specifically related to the Georgians was published came either from travelers, priests, people who had spoken to travelers, or people with connections to Georgians. As a result, these accounts were often biased, relied on little factual substance and analysis, and were at times contradictory. For example, the *Thesaurus Geographicus* of 1709 states that Georgian “Men are so rude and vicious a nature” and “The Chief Traffick of the Country is in Boys and Girls, a barbarous Trade!” (Moll 1709, 55), that is to say, not in line with how the Europeans saw themselves. A more positive image had been given in 1705 by Nicolaes Witsen (1705, 503–551), a friend of King Archil of Imereti, who depicted the Georgians as “friendly Asians.” Uncontestably, these earlier publications placed Georgia in Asia. Also at the 1922 Genoa Conference, the delegates expressed the view that Georgia was part of Asia (Katcharava et al. 1976, 191). Contemporary sources have varying opinions: the United Nations classification of world regions places Georgia in Western Asia; the CIA World Factbook, National Geographic, and the Encyclopædia Britannica place it in Asia; but the BBC, Oxford Reference Online, and the Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary place it in Europe. During the last two decades, an increasing number of Western (mainly American and “new” European) political leaders have very clearly stated their view that Georgia is a European country. It is not clear, however, if they say this out of their conviction that Georgia is indeed on the path of democratic reforms and that they really feel Georgia is European or if opposition to Russia is the real marker of this common “Europeanness.”

Obviously, there is no clear-cut definition of what the word European means and what criteria need to be fulfilled to be European. Furthermore, it is nowadays very much interpreted from an EU-centric approach. The arguments used by the Georgian elite cannot deliver an incontrovertible and waterproof evidence of their Europeanness, but on the other hand it is also not possible to demonstrate they are not European either. Instead of looking at specific criteria and parameters, perhaps the mere feeling of being European should already be considered enough. As this Europeanness is a clear aspect of the Georgian national identity, one can cogently argue that it does not matter whether it is true or only a perception and construction. In order to conclude this section on a more philosophical note, it is useful to reflect upon the importance of feeling European and the equally important factor of being perceived as European. The question of whether or not Georgia and its nation is European is only secondary to the issue of why this matters so

much. Being Caucasian appears insufficiently grandiose and being Asian would be considered by many Georgians as an insult, both leading to a certain inferiority complex. One might ask why the Georgians cannot be content with being proud Caucasians, constituting the crucial bridge between East and West.

### **Georgia's European aspirations and orientation as a foreign policy goal**

Whereas Georgia's current European orientation is considered to be largely a product of the strident policies of Mikheil Saakashvili, the "Georgia in Europe" narrative was increasingly employed and refined, even before Saakashvili seized power in 2003.

In the first few years after independence, there was hardly any public discussion about a European orientation. Zviad Gamsakhurdia did indeed seek support from the West in order to avoid reimposition of Soviet/Russian rule. The leadership at that time did not, however, seem to consider Georgia to be part of Europe but rather focused on the Caucasian aspect of the national identity instead. Also in the first few years after Shevardnadze returned to Georgia following Gamsakhurdia's ouster, there was little mention of a European orientation. One reason for this relative silence may have been Shevardnadze's efforts to eject the Russian peacekeepers who, in the Georgian view, assisted Abkhaz and South Ossetian *de facto* independence. Nor should it be forgotten that during the early 1990s, the institutional setup and image of "Europe" were completely different from what it is now. The EU, comprising 12 countries, was only formally established in November 1993 and its predecessors (i.e. ECSC, EEC, and EC) did not have the same comprehensive role.

In the mid-1990s, when EU assistance to the country gained importance and when a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was negotiated between Georgia and the EU, the Georgian leadership showed an increasing interest in European integration. Still, the narrative of the Shevardnadze administration was that Georgia was a fledgling democracy trying to survive in a very inhospitable environment and that its future as a sovereign, law-based democracy could only be assured with massive external support. This narrative proved successful in attracting foreign aid, but not in carrying out the much needed reforms and democratization. Shevardnadze never pushed the pro-Europe policy beyond the declarative level. By the end of the 1990s, it was clear to many that Shevardnadze's possibilities as an agent of democratic, modernizing change had been exhausted and Shevardnadze himself increasingly fell back on his instincts and skills, honed during the Brezhnev years, of managing the myriad of conflicting personalities that surrounded him rather than solving policy problems and implementing necessary reforms.

At the turn of the new millennium, the younger generation of reformists within the ruling party (Citizen's Union of Georgia – CUG) had grown increasingly disenchanted with the state of affairs. They became the driving force behind the European dream. Indeed, it was not Shevardnadze, but parliamentary chairman Zurab Zhvania who declared before the Council of Europe the oft-quoted dictum that "I am Georgian, therefore I am European" (Ó Beacháin 2009, 214). Georgia's admission to the Council of Europe in 1999 was viewed as an essential symbolic step in Georgia's path "back to Europe." This event marks the moment when these reformers began to acquire influence and take over the policy-making from the president. Had Shevardnadze decided not to contest the 2000 presidential election, by which time he had survived two assassination attempts, he might still have exited the stage with some applause. His decision to continue to lead the nation into the twenty-first century sealed his fate. The economy continued to slide, corruption became ever more institutionalized, and the winter of 2000–2001 saw the country

sporadically without gas, and without electricity for about twenty hours every day. Shevardnadze's delicate balancing acts were coming undone and his CUG imploded during 2001.

Zhvania's maxim cited above became an important underlying justification for the anti-Shevardnadze protests that dislodged the president in what became known as the Rose Revolution. According to one seasoned observer, the quest for Europe constituted "the core of the anti-Shevardnadze opposition ... the major outcome of the revolution is that Georgians have started to feel European again" (Nodia 2005, 104). The Velvet Revolution was, after all, associated with Central and Eastern Europe, and by executing a mass non-violent revolution, Georgians had shed the sense that they were a people incapable of resolving their differences peacefully. When, on 21 November 2003, convoys of protestors from other parts of the country converged on Tbilisi, Saakashvili interpreted this as the masses upholding Georgia's national dignity and democratic values:

Georgia has arisen to defend its dignity and its future. Today, we are witnessing a European-type, velvet, bloodless, democratic and nation-wide revolution which aims at the bloodless removal of President Shevardnadze from his post, the removal of President Shevardnadze's government from power by democratic means, the restoration of our dignity and the return of our country's future. (BBC Monitoring 2003)

This re-entry to Europe was symbolized by a new flag that stressed Georgia's Christian character with not one, but no fewer than five crosses of Saint George. Emphasizing Georgia's claim to Europeanness, the EU flag<sup>10</sup> has been flown throughout Tbilisi, especially outside all major government institutions.

During the first two years of its term, the Saakashvili government sought to apply the color revolution model to regain its lost territories in Adjara, South Ossetia and Abkhazia and to export it to other post-Soviet republics (see Ó Beacháin and Polese 2011; Polese 2011; Polese and Ó Beacháin 2011). Implicit in much of this rhetoric was the notion that Georgia was now an outpost of democratic (European) values and would seek to spread these to other parts of the former Soviet empire. Also implicit was the idea that as Georgia was Europe's frontier state in the non-Baltic former USSR, the West should defend Georgia against its enemies. That Europe should take an enhanced interest in Georgia was made clear from the very beginning of Saakashvili's presidency. During his inaugural address in January 2004, Saakashvili had the banner of the EU raised alongside the Georgian flag and declared:

[the European] flag is Georgia's flag as well, 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 toward European integration. It is time Europe finally saw and valued Georgia and took steps toward us. (Quoted in Müller 2011, 64)

The image of Georgia, the original long-lost and undervalued European nation struck a chord with many of those in Saakashvili's inner circle. However, it also served a strategic interest in that if Georgia was recognized as an integral part of Europe and a member of its key political, economic, and military structures, then it might reasonably be assumed in Tbilisi that Europe would assist Georgia in confronting Russia with a view to restoring its territorial integrity. Furthermore, whereas at the time of the Rose Revolution the ambition was for Georgia to acquire the attributes of a European state, the Georgian leadership under President Saakashvili soon tried to create the image that the country in several ways has outdone its mentor and has even become an example for Europe.

The euphoria for Europe seemed to have no limits in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution and President Saakashvili even claimed that any party not agreeing with the European orientation should be made illegal.<sup>11</sup> Not everybody has shared this enthusiasm.



Labour Party leader Shalva Natelashvili claimed that it would be better not to focus on Europe alone, but to also nurture relations with Russia. That said, the party did not question the country's European orientation. More importantly, however, were the libertarian Euro-sceptics, which appeared among the ranks of the UNM government and gained a strong position in policy-making. Shortly after the Rose Revolution, in June 2004, Kakha Bendukidze, a Georgian oligarch in Russia, was appointed economy minister and he continued to hold different high-level positions until February 2009. Bendukidze did not want Georgia to be part of the "European sclerotic civilization" and thought its overregulation could kill economic growth (Bendukidze 2005). Under Bendukidze's influence, the country's leadership was no longer using Europe as the sole benchmark, but also Hong Kong and Singapore became a model. Although Bendukidze left politics and government, a considerable part of his team and followers remained in place and continued to have a huge influence on policy.<sup>12</sup>

Little in-depth research has been carried out that related to public opinion on questions connected to Europe and the EU's relationship with Georgia. A very detailed study, however, was accomplished by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) in August 2009, based on close to 2000 full interviews. It found that although the population has a meager understanding of what the EU is and does it was nonetheless very enthusiastic about joining the union (with 67% in favor, 5% against, and 28% without opinion). A shocking 10% of respondents actually believed Georgia already was an EU member. Perhaps this result stems from confusion and lack of knowledge about the Council of Europe of which Georgia indeed is a member. Then again, only 33% thought that Georgia was member of the Council of Europe, whereas 39% thought otherwise. Furthermore, only 39% had a good idea of what the EU Monitoring Mission was doing in their country,<sup>13</sup> with 38% not even having any idea at all (Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2009).

According to Martin Müller, Georgians are in "Euphoria" and see closer association with the EU through "rose-colored glasses" (Müller 2011, 84). A majority believes that joining the EU would have a positive effect on national security, territorial integrity, freedom of speech, employment, etc. Although research has not established a causal link between public opinion and discourse of the leadership, the Georgian elite steadily and continuously created the image of the EU as a savior. For example, in October 2004, President Saakashvili said that

at present Estonia's per capita budget is 12 or 13 times greater than Georgia's. The minimum pension in Estonia is GEL 240, even though 10 years ago we both had similar standards of living. This shows what can be achieved by pursuing freedom, full independence, integration into Europe and Euro-Atlantic partnership.<sup>14</sup>

### **European discourse and domestic politics**

In the previous section, we saw how the European discourse has played a crucial role in delegitimizing the presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze and for legitimizing the Rose Revolution. This is not the only example where the European orientation and discourse have been instrumentalized and even manipulated for domestic political purposes.

First of all, this discourse has helped to give electoral support to the ruling elite. Europe is seen as a symbol of hope, prosperity, and quality. It stands in contrast to the counter-concepts of "Asia" and "Russia," which are both perceived as backward, inferior, and even evil. Therefore, in order to gain and keep public support (i.e. win elections and remain in power), it is important to give people hope and encourage a belief that through

support for the incumbent political elite will bring them closer to Europe. Indeed, during the period of UNM dominance there was a partial shift from Europe as a benchmark of quality to Georgia as an example for Europe. Already at the end of the Soviet era, anything that came from Europe was seen as being of better quality. The concept of *Evroremont*, common throughout the entire post-Soviet space, hinted at a “European”-style and thus better quality renovation of an apartment (even if this entailed Chinese construction materials and work carried out by migrant workers from the poorer Soviet states). During the early years of independence, “European” was indeed a benchmark for quality and with the arrival of Mikheil Saakashvili as president, everything was officially done according to European standards: schools, playgrounds, hospitals, slaughter houses, and even prisons. The big paradox, however, was that the Georgian authorities refused to adopt the European standardization and metrology system. Highlighting the progress made and demonstrating how the country was becoming even more advanced than Europe itself played a role in trying to generate public support. Indeed, it seemed that the Georgians had in many fields even moved beyond the European standards and were setting the example to Europe. There are multiple illustrations for this claim. At the inauguration of the new Tbilisi Airport in 2007, President Saakashvili claimed that

This airport is better than Brussels airport. This airport is better than Munich airport. This airport is better than many other airports that operate in Europe at present.<sup>15</sup>

The very next day the head of the Customs Department at the airport was dismissed and the President demanded a halt to the “baggage-handlers’ and taxi drivers’ mafia,” saying that this “mafia can go to some other country and do it there.”<sup>16</sup> On another occasion, in August 2010, Saakashvili claimed that “Switzerland should aspire to become the Georgia of Europe,”<sup>17</sup> while in terms of economic reforms, the Georgian president asserted a month later that the European states had moved in the direction of his libertarian politics (Georgian International Media Centre 2010). Clearly, many of these statements range from exaggerations to simple mendacities, but as the majority of the Georgian population has never visited, and in most likelihood will never visit, the EU, they had only limited opportunities to get another perspective.

Secondly, associating Europe and the wish to become European with potentially unpopular reforms can make it easier to convince society of the need for such changes. This does not necessarily mean that the authorities use Europe as a scapegoat without explaining the rationale for such reforms. Nevertheless, it is not always clear to what extent these reforms are indeed imposed by the EU. A good example has been that of the introduction of food safety measures. The authorities claimed that opening a modern slaughter-house (which led to increases in meat prices) was needed to comply with EU requirements, whereas the European Commission claims not to have pushed for it.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, there is ample evidence that the reforms and economic thinking do not correspond with the approach of the EU, but rather with that of the USA. Thus, whereas the EU is producing regulations and guidelines on almost every conceivable product and practice, the Georgian government wished to deregulate as much as possible. In terms of tackling criminality, the US approach of zero-tolerance and long prison sentences for minor offenses was enthusiastically adopted. In terms of social policies, healthcare was privatized, education became ever more expensive, and social dialog was virtually non-existent. And at the very same time that the Georgian government claimed to have moved toward closer integration with the EU, it ardently refused to approximate its legislation to the European *acquis*. Thus, instead of “Europeanization,” it sometimes seemed more of an “Americanization” of Georgia. This, however, does not mean that progress was not made in the country.

Indeed, economic growth reached impressive heights and criminality rates fell, to name just two major achievements.

Not only the elite in power, but also the opposition, has turned to Europe in an attempt to get support from the domestic electorate. Indeed, it is common practice that opposition politicians try to maintain close contacts with foreign diplomatic representations in their country with one of the aims to discredit the ruling elite, to search for foreign assistance, and to apply pressure on the government. Clearly, the opposition is also instrumentalizing “Europe” – whatever this “Europe” may mean – to add weight to its argument. Machiavelian exaggerations and fabrications are not uncommon. For example, in September 2010, Tina Khidasheli of the Republican Party claimed that her party had provided materials about the eviction of Internally Displaced People from collective centers and that the EU would “suspend its assistance if [this] unlawfulness is not stopped.”<sup>19</sup> The Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia immediately published a statement denying this and said that he found it “regrettable that the Republican Party is trying to score political points where they have no point to score” (Eklund 2010). Moreover, civil society and even the population at large mimic this practice of the political elite and increasingly use Europe as a means of putting pressure on the leadership for reforms.<sup>20</sup>

### **European discourse in foreign policy and conflict transformation**

Getting security guarantees has been a continuous challenge for the Georgian leadership throughout history. Being a small country surrounded by major empires and having suffered many invasions, Georgia has logically been in search of a patron and protector. Sometimes, the patron has turned into an oppressor and occupier, and all too frequently the Georgian elite has allied itself very closely with the court or administration of the patron. The history of Georgia’s relations with Persia and Russia are very clear examples. Although Georgia did ally itself with these two powerful neighbors, this was only the second-best choice. There is ample evidence of Georgian diplomatic efforts throughout history, to seek patronage from Christian Europe. Although some authors may have accused the Georgians of being traitors for shifting alliances (Epifantsev 2009), it could also be interpreted as a pragmatic and successful approach to guarantee the existence of some form of Georgian statehood.

Today, Georgia is looking for a new patron, which could provide the much needed security guarantees and help in terms of restoration of its territorial integrity. In the past, the argument that the Georgians had stopped the Mongols from invading Europe was used to try to instigate a feeling of responsibility toward Georgia.<sup>21</sup> Now the Georgian government tries to explain how the country plays a crucial role in providing energy security to Europe (although the Nabucco-project will only provide 5% of Europe’s gas needs if and when it becomes operational), how it wishes to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures, and how it is a good example of what can happen if Russia is not curtailed. This public discourse, especially in combination with the Euro-Atlantic aspirations, has clearly antagonized Russia, but not necessarily provided the European assistance it may have hoped for.

As the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia are a matter of territorial restoration, it would appear logical to include this under the section on domestic politics. However, due to the high involvement not only of Russia but also of western partners in these disputes, we prefer to mention it together with the country’s foreign policy. Whereas EU member states prefer to see a peaceful resolution of the conflict, Georgia has sought European support – including military – for the restoration of its territorial integrity.

There is little doubt that the extent to which Georgia has committed itself militarily to NATO – it sent more troops per capita to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan than any other country, including the USA (Kucera 2011) – is connected to Tbilisi's wish to entice western powers into playing a major role in resolving Georgia's territorial disputes. This is not always clear from official pronouncements. When asked to explain this unrivalled level of commitment, Georgian foreign minister Grigol Vashadze said: "I would like to remind you that it was not the West that went to Afghanistan. Afghanistan came to us, on September 11, 2001" (Asatiani 2011). While Vashadze's sixteen years of residence in New York may have encouraged him to personalize the 9/11 attacks, it is unlikely that most Georgians felt in the same way that an attack on the USA was an attack on them, as members of the western world.<sup>22</sup> The second argument offered for Georgia's involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq – that they are geographically close to Georgia – also rings hollow. Vashadze argues that

when you look at this region, you must remember that we are part of it; we are closer. God forbid that the coalition is defeated or that Afghanistan again becomes a haven for terrorists and Al-Qaeda. Georgia would suffer the consequences much sooner than the Czech Republic, Slovakia, or Luxembourg. This is the first reason for Georgia's presence there. (Asatiani 2011)

The idea that Afghanistan and Georgia are part of the same region strikes a discordant note when played at the same time as the "Georgia in Europe" hymn. Georgia's enemy is consistently presented as Russia, not Islamic militants in Iraq or Afghanistan, which seem a world away to most Georgians. It is also difficult to reconcile with Georgia's cultivation of relations with republics of the North Caucasus, many of which are considered to harbor Islamic militants. Vashadze's other reason for Georgia's participation in these wars enjoys greater cogency:

Georgia wants to become a member of the military alliance, and we are already halfway there ... So we have to act like a member of the alliance. The alliance is in Afghanistan; therefore, so are we. (Asatiani 2011)

According to this version, by playing its part in NATO's wars Georgia should enhance its prospects of membership of the alliance, which in turn should help Georgia contain Russia and to recover the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia's obligations as a western country, therefore, will also necessitate some level of reciprocity and Tbilisi might expect European support for resolving its territorial integrity issues. A variation of this theme is played out in the film, *Five Days of War*, conceived and financed by members of, or those very close to, the Georgian government and released during the summer of 2011 (see Shuster 2009; Aptsiauri 2011). The opening scenes show an American vehicle that comes under sustained attack from ill-defined militants in Iraq only to be heroically rescued by a Georgian military unit. Later in the movie, the main Georgian character reminds the Americans plaintively that Georgia was there for the USA in its hour of need, but asks rhetorically where the USA is now when Georgia is being invaded. As has been the case for centuries, Georgia looks westwards for a patron, but finds its efforts spurned or insufficiently reciprocated.

One final aspect of Georgia–EU relations that is worthy of comment is how the government's assertive embrace of the EU has influenced the cultural identity of ordinary Georgians and their views on Europe and the EU. A major 2009 survey of over 2400 Georgians carried out by the CRRC found that a slight majority agreed with the statement "I am Georgian and therefore I am European" and this sentiment, with expected variations, was held by the greater number irrespective of the age, education, or residency of the respondent (Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2009: Question 40, Slides 1–4).

Perhaps it is in part due to the rather aggressive visual and symbolic embrace of EU emblems that causes one in 10 Georgians to believe that they are already in the EU while another sizeable body of citizens are not sure.<sup>23</sup> The Council of Europe suffered from a reverse form of ignorance with only a third of the population stating affirmatively that Georgia was a member despite it having joined in 1999.<sup>24</sup> In terms of important international organizations, the EU is considered second only to NATO, in which hopes for a security umbrella are vested.<sup>25</sup> Urban dwellers, the young, and the highly educated were the most likely to value the EU's role for Georgia.<sup>26</sup> Exactly half the population believed that Georgia would join the EU within 10 years. Ten percent thought it would take longer than 10 years, while 38% did not know. An astonishingly low figure of 1% thought that Georgia would never join the EU, indicating that the government's mantra of the inevitability of EU membership and Georgia's integral place at the heart of European organizations has made a significant impact.<sup>27</sup> Despite this, the vast majority of Georgians have no desire to work or study in the EU<sup>28</sup> and only 8% would like to live there permanently.<sup>29</sup> The picture that emerges from such surveys is of a Georgian population that in a general sense sees itself as part of European civilization and believes strongly in the virtues of an ever-stronger alliance with EU institutional structures. This enthusiasm often co-exists (and may even be partially dependent upon) with a lack of detailed knowledge of the character and policies of the EU and how it views engagement with Georgia.

### After Saakashvili

Since this article was composed, parliamentary elections were conducted in Georgia (1 October 2012) that resulted in a defeat of the ruling UNM and victory for the Georgian Dream coalition led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. During the election, President Saakashvili painted his opponents as "various kinds of thieves, bandits, traitors of the homeland."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, he maintained that they had been opposed to the Rose Revolution nine years earlier and the values it espoused, and thus this election was presented as "our enemy's final flounder, final struggle, last hope, last Rubicon." Georgian Dream was depicted as a willing pawn of the Kremlin's larger geopolitical design to dominate Georgia and re-orientate the country away from the West and toward Russia. At a pre-election rally, President Saakashvili declared that

Our enemy thought that now is the right time to use [a] different approach with [the] Georgians; they thought: "We've failed through economic embargos, provocations, explosions and invasion ... maybe the Georgian people are now tired and as a result of these elections ... let's seize this beautiful country with kind words and bribes." No. We will have freedom, we want Europe, we want NATO, we want development and better life. (Civil.ge 2012b)

Saakashvili further claimed that during the spring of 2012, Russia had spent two billion dollars to finance Ivanishvili's campaign (Civil.ge 2012b). The charge that Ivanishvili was a fifth columnist, however, never achieved the traction necessary to be a game-changer, not least because no hard evidence was produced to sustain the allegation. Moreover, Georgian Dream, as a six party coalition, contained many figures, such as Irakli Alasania and David Usupashvili, who were well-known for their pro-western orientation.

Because of the far-reaching networks that UNM had cultivated during the preceding years, combined with extensive and expensive lobbying financed by the exchequer, many international actors and news outlets interpreted Georgian Dream's victory in a manner that deviated little from President Saakashvili's narrative. The *Wall Street Journal*, for example, ran with a headline entitled "A Russian victory in Georgia's parliamentary elections" (Kirchick 2012).<sup>31</sup> Georgian Dream's pre-eminence has not, despite the

dire predictions, resulted in a fundamental re-appraisal of Georgian foreign policy or in a challenge to the European values espoused by a majority of the electorate.

Throughout the first months of 2013, the UNM attempted to frame the debate in a manner that suggested that Georgia was in danger of re-orientating itself away from the West and toward Russia, a strategy calculated to mobilize UNM's international supporters to cause discomfort for the new regime. UNM pressure resulted, on 7 March 2013, in parliament passing a comprehensive bipartisan resolution, which indicated that Georgia's international policy preferences remained unchanged and proclaimed, *inter alia*, that "integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures represents the main priority of the country's foreign policy course" (Civil.ge 2013d). These attempts peaked with a demonstration in Tbilisi on 19 April convened to reaffirm Georgia's pro-EU and pro-NATO perspective. UNM general secretary and former prime minister, Vano Merabishvili, declared that

April 19 has already made history; by turning out at this rally you put the threat Georgia was facing into the past; from this day on neither Ivanishvili nor his ministers and neither Vladimir Putin nor anyone else will dare to even dream about turning Georgia away from Europe. (Civil.ge 2013c)

The 19 April rally ostensibly represented an attempt to re-affirm the policies of the previous UNM government, instrumentalizing the Euro-Atlantic integration discourse to mold a genuine pro-European identity among the wider public. To some, however, it appeared that UNM had erected an imaginary threat in order to present themselves as the exclusive standard-bearers of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation and the values and identity that underpinned it. To hold a rally under the banner of proclaiming Georgia's pro-western policy constituted, as one Georgian Dream MP put it, "knocking at a wide open door."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, opinion polls indicate that there has been no diminution of support for the EU. One major poll (EuroEast 2013), based on over 1000 interviews and conducted in November-December 2012, found that more Georgians (71%) trusted the EU than any other international institution such as the UN and NATO, and even more than they trusted their new government (65%), Parliament (62%) or political parties (46%). The overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) believed that the EU and Georgia enjoyed good relations, as opposed to a mere 8% who disagreed.

There remains, however, a fundamental difference between declarations of fidelity to European values and the rather obvious deviations from these very tenets. This was quite starkly demonstrated on 17 May 2013, when a mob of several thousands, led by Georgian Orthodox priests, attempted a pogrom against a small group that planned to assemble in the city center to participate in an anti-homophobia rally (Rimple 2013). The impunity with which the mob rampaged through the capital, the impotence of the police, and the indifference of the political elite demonstrated that the new government's commitment to assert its authority when faced with criminality orchestrated by the Georgian Orthodox church, and its will to protect the civil liberties of vulnerable minorities, left much to be desired so far as the EU was concerned (Civil.ge 2013a, 2013b). Many of the demonstrators couched their grievances in anti-European slogans and complained of foreign propagandizing in the promotion of minority rights. As "Europeanization" was widely perceived as a UNM project rejection of the authoritarian excesses of the Saakashvili-led government also risked a rejection of European values, which could be presented as a threat to national interests and traditions. (Asatiani 2014, 81).

The transition from UNM rule was completed in October 2013 with the victory of Georgian Dream presidential candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili. Saakashvili, who was constitutionally prohibited from running for a third term, stepped down after over nine years at

the helm and fled the country. Bidzina Ivanishvili left the administration in the hands of Irakli Garibashvili as Prime Minister. Both Garibashvili and Margvelashvili as President were virtually unknown, even in Georgia, before the victory of the Georgian Dream coalition, and the exit of Saakashvili and Ivanishvili coincided with a shift to a parliamentary system of government, as is the norm within the EU.

Georgia's association agreement with the EU that had long eluded UNM was finally signed on 27 June 2014. In his speech at the signing ceremony, Prime Minister Garibashvili attempted to convey the historic character of the accord:

Today Georgia is taking a big step towards free Europe. June 27 will be remembered as a historic and special day. There are dates in the history of each nation, which they are proud of. Today a new big date is being written in the history of my homeland, which gives hope and which our future generations will be proud of. Many generations have spent their lives thinking about this day. And I am happy that it was honour of my generation to turn this dream of our ancestors into reality. It is very difficult to express in words feelings I am experiencing now. I am sure that everyone has this emotion in my country. Today Georgia is given a historic chance to return to its natural environment, Europe, its political, economic, social and cultural space. (Civil.ge 2014)

The acceleration of the process was significantly influenced by geopolitical factors, a reality emphasized by the fact that association agreements were signed on the same day with Moldova and Ukraine, which have also had their internationally recognized territorial boundaries undermined by the Russian Federation. In a joint resolution drafted in large part as a response to the Kremlin's intervention in Ukraine, the European parliament declared that

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – like any other European state – have a European perspective and may apply to become members of the Union provided that they adhere to the principles of democracy, respect fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights and ensure the rule of law. (European Parliament 2014)

Whether the association agreements mark a beginning or an end point in Georgia–EU relations depends largely on the policy-choices of future Georgian administrations. With the acceptance of Georgia's European credentials and the path to EU membership officially open, Georgian's "return to Europe" depends less on protestations of being "Ancient Europeans" but on implementing and respecting the laws and practices of contemporary EU member states.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have scrutinized the claim, vigorously promoted by the Saakashvili-led UNM government, that Georgia is an integral part of Europe. We have explored the arguments employed to support this claim – historical, cultural, racial, political, and geographical – and found that in many cases the facts have been embroidered, embellished, or even manufactured to sustain a contemporary political narrative that seeks Georgian membership of western political, economic, and military alliances. At the same time, one equally cannot claim the Georgians are not European, not least because there is no clear definition of what constitutes "Europe" or "Europeanness."

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a vacuum, which was filled by a myriad of hitherto suppressed movements and identities – religious, national, supranational, local, political, ethnic, and so on. There are many traditions and historical experiences from which the Georgian political elite could have molded a national identity and, based on this self-identification, prioritize its alliances and establish its place in the world. The

promotion of a European identity, to the exclusion of almost everything else, has meant deliberately obscuring important parts of Georgia's past including its interaction with the Persian and Ottoman imperial regimes and, most controversially perhaps, the Russian and Soviet empires. This is not to say that Georgia's European identity is any more manufactured than that of many if not all members of the EU. Identity is very much a matter of self-definition and self-belief combined with the perceptions of others. The main limitations to Georgia's "European project," if such it may be called, has been the attitudes of its potential partners in the EU, some of whom viewed Georgia's European "credentials" with ambivalence and even skepticism.

Georgia's starting point, at the collapse of the Soviet Union, was extremely low. Within just two years, it had to contend with two secessionist wars over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two internal struggles with Adjara and Samegrelo, and a civil war, which followed the coup d'état that deposed Georgia's first elected president. Since 2004, Georgia has made huge strides toward strengthening state structures, reforming the bureaucracy, and removing corruption from the lives of ordinary citizens. Its developmental model has been confused, however, with the government at varying times extolling the virtues of very different developmental models of Estonia, Singapore, the EU, and the USA.

In this article, we have argued that there is a happy convergence of government identity politics and strategic self-interests. If Georgia is accepted as an integral part of Europe and the West, the Georgian leadership feels that Europe should help their country, in terms of development, security, and supporting its membership of alliances – particularly the EU and NATO – that can help resolve the issues of territorial integrity in Georgia's favor.

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### **Notes**

1. Examples include Strabo, Claudius Ptolemaeus, Gaius Plinius Secundus maior, Cosmas Indicopleustes, Fra Mauro, Abraham Ortelius, etc.
2. Examples include von Strahlenberg, Tatischev, Pallas, Kant, Brun, etc.
3. See for example the address by President Saakashvili at the Independence Day Parade in which he said: "Today we salute all of Georgia's friends. Georgia is returning to the European family where it belongs." 26 May 2006. Quoted in Kleinhanß (2008, 7).
4. See for example Konstantine Gamsakhurdia cited in Brisku (2009, 180).
5. See for example Mikhael Javakhishvili cited in Brisku (2009, 127).
6. See for example Grigol Robakidze cited in Brisku (2009, 80).
7. See for example Mikhako Tsereteli cited in Brisku (2009, 176).
8. See for example Malhaz Abdushelishvili cited in Brisku (2009, 255).
9. As genetic research has been instrumental in classifying people according to anthropological groups, a quick look in this field may be interesting. Georgians mainly belong to haplogroup G2, which is indeed still partially found in populations in southern Europe, the Balkans, and



- Southern Asia. The core European population, however, is haplogroup R1a, R1b and I. See for example Nasidze et al. (2003).
10. The EU flag is also that of the Council of Europe and it is open to all members of this body to fly the flag. However, as few people are aware of this fact, the flag is generally considered to represent the EU.
  11. President Saakashvili during his 10 February 2005 annual address to parliament, as reported by Rustavi-2 TV station.
  12. A prominent and influential sceptic of Georgian relations with the EU during this time was Levan Ramishvili, the Director of the Liberty Institute. Levan Ramishvili, interview with Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Tbilisi, 24 January, 2008.
  13. For an analysis of the EUMM's role in Georgia, see Freire and Simão (2013).
  14. Statement by President Saakashvili after his meeting with Estonian President Ruutel, 12 October 2004, as reported by Imedi TV.
  15. Georgian President Saakashvili during the inauguration of the new airport of Tbilisi on 7 February, 2007, as reported by Public TV.
  16. Georgian President Saakashvili during a visit to the new airport terminal in Tbilisi on 8 February 2007, as reported by Imedi TV.
  17. President Saakashvili speaking at a ski resort in Mestia, 3 August 2010, as reported by Rustavi-2.
  18. Statement by part of the Members of the Coalition for the European Georgia, 2 July 2011.
  19. Pirveli News Agency, 3 September 2010.
  20. Anti-government protests are often littered with EU flags and carry banners in the English language, which specifically appeal to the EU or "democratic" values. Authors' observations at protests from November 2007 to May 2011.
  21. This does not fully correspond to the course of events known as the Mongols simply continued their way through the North Caucasian steppes into the Kievan Rus.
  22. The authors were living in Georgia at the time of the 11 September 2001 attacks and do not recall such a level of identification with the USA nor a widespread impulse to attack Afghanistan.
  23. Only 71% could volunteer the opinion that Georgia was not a member of the EU. Nineteen percent did not know or would not say (Question 29, Slide 1). Counter-intuitively, Tbilisi residents were almost three times as likely as rural dwellers (14% vs. 5%) to believe that Georgia was an EU member. However, rural dwellers were far more likely to be unsure or to be unable to offer an opinion (30% vs. 13%) (Question 29, Slide 2).
  24. Question 30, Slide 1.
  25. Question 32, Slide 1. In a November 2011, national survey conducted by the IRI, in which over 4000 Georgian adults participated, relations with the EU are considered in a favorable light. Only 1% evaluated Georgia-EU relations as "bad" while more than 9 out of 10 described them as "good." International Republican Institute (IRI), Georgian National Study, October 27–November 11, 2011. Slide 24.
  26. Question 32, Slides 2–4.
  27. In a vote on EU membership a mere 2% would vote against joining. Question 57.
  28. Question 42. Only 29% responded positively to the question "would you like to go to the EU to work" while only 19% expressed a wish to study there. Not surprisingly, the willingness to work and study in the EU was much stronger among the young.
  29. Question 46.
  30. Address in Zugdidi as reported in Civil.ge (2012a).
  31. The equally provocative subtitle proclaimed that "Billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili owes his wealth to the Putin regime in Moscow."
  32. Tina Khidasheli, quoted in Civil.ge (2013e).

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