

The History of Western Integration of Georgia from Antiquity to the Present

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Abstract: *Today, when the EU and NATO continue to face the possibility of Russian military aggression against the Ukraine, which, if implemented, will not only be aggression against the Ukraine, but also a threat to Georgia, which is firmly pro-Western, it is important for Georgians to remember that our northern neighbor threatens not only our current foreign policy direction, but also our national identity, which is highly dependent on pro-Western sentiment. The purpose of this report is to briefly review the centuries-old process of Georgia's European integration.*

Keywords: *Europeanism, EU, NATO*

Introduction

“Europeanness” is not only a term denoting geographical affiliation, but also a certain way of thinking and values system that characterizes the population of Europe and to which countries aspiring to integrate into the political and economic systems of Europe strive for. Europe and Europeanism from the very beginning (since ancient times - from ancient Greece and Rome) meant the recognition of the rule of law, related to human rights, ethnic and religious tolerance, the predominant role of education and a developed economy.

Main body: The history of Georgia's European integration dates back to ancient times. Moreover, according to the latest linguistic research, the Kartvelian tribes - the Laz - may have been co-creators of the Aegean culture along with other ancient tribes that inhabited the Mediterranean during the Middle Bronze Age; Aegean (Cretan-Mycenaean) culture is considered to be the origin of ancient, therefore, European culture.

If we omit the history of the interaction between the Kartvelian tribes of the Middle Bronze Age and the Aegean world, which is still shrouded in mist, the history of the relationship between the Kartvelian and European worlds must begin with the Late Bronze-Early-Iron era, which is confirmed by Greek mythology itself, by a well-known myth about the Argonauts, which must have described Colchis in around the XIII century BC; The escape of a Georgian woman (Medea) with a Hellen (Jason) and her marriage to him should symbolically indicate the rapprochement of the Kartvelian (here Colchian) and Greek worlds.

After the Argonauts, the Georgian-Hellenic rapprochement deepened during the great Greek colonization (VIII-VI centuries BC), when the Greek colonizers spread colonies on the whole Black Sea coast, including the eastern and southeastern coasts, which were the settlement of the Kartvelian Laz tribes.

By the second half of the I century B.C. Rome had already completed the conquest of the Hellenistic kingdoms; In the context of these conquests, Kartli (Iberia) and Colchis were also

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included: In 65 B.C. Pompey invaded the Caucasus and, in opposition to Mithridates VI, conquered his allied kingdoms as well: Armenia (Armenia) and Iberia. From this time Iberia is called a "friend and ally" of Rome, because the king of Iberia was entrusted with the fortification of the Darial Passin order to protect the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire from the nomadic tribes; and in Colchis Pompey himself appointed a ruler, thus making Colchis entirely subject to the empire. Thus, the Georgian space again turned out to be within the framework of the advanced European space.

First Egrisi and Kartli, and since the end of the X century already united Georgia was still considered in the Roman-Byzantine community, being a part of the Eastern Christian, Orthodox world. However, it should be noted that in the XI-XIV centuries Georgian kings competed with the Byzantine emperors for leadership in the Orthodox space, both militarily and culturally; However, the history of Eastern European integration was interrupted for several centuries by the Ottoman strengthening and the capture of Constantinople in 1453. From now on, Georgia turned out to be isolated from Europe, both by land and by sea.

Since the capture of Constantinople Georgian political thought has not ceased to seek ways to return to European orbit. Prominent examples of this are the attempt of the last king of united Georgia, George VIII, to form an anti-Othman coalition (1458-1459) and Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani's visit to France as an Ambassador (1713-1714).

Georgian-European diplomatic relations of the XVII century could not go beyond the missionary-cultural limits. Gradually, the renewal of relations with the young Russian state, which started in the XV century, became essential. On one hand, the Georgian rulers acknowledged Russia as a country having equal military power of Iran and the Ottomans, which was able to protect Georgia from its old enemies, and, on the other hand, as an alternative authority to the "conciliation judge" of the Georgian kings and high rank officials who could manage to bring down peace by means of individual speech among the Georgian rulers.

At the end of XVIII century, the proponents of a political alliance with Russia, viewed it as an European surrogate, allowing Georgia to open an indirect path at least possibly to Western culture and political space. According to the Georgian rulers, the way of Russia was an accessible way to return to Europe, but during the reign of Vakhtang VI, it revealed that Russia was just another aggressive invader, who trusted no one and nothing on the way of its expansion. After the annexation of the Georgian kingdoms, the Russian Empire used to try its best to carry out Russification reforms and erase cultural memory of the Georgian people as well as assimilate it culturally; thus, penetrating Europe through Russia then and now leads to cultural assimilation, consequently, at present the mentioned way does not work.

After 70 years of isolation, Georgia has regained its natural foreign policy orientation. Georgia-EU relations began in 1991-92, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and establishment of Georgia as an independent state. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed between the EU and Georgia on 22 April 1996 in Luxembourg; and on June 27, 2014, the Association Agreement was signed between the EU and Georgia.

Georgia became a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1992; on March 23, 1994, Georgia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP); and at the Bucharest Summit, conducted on April 3, 2008, the Alliance decided that Georgia would become a member of NATO, which means an open commitment made by the allies.

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Conclusion: Despite numerous historically challenging circumstances, today, as never before, Georgia is close to joining the European Union and NATO, which will be, on the one hand, a guarantee of our military security and, on the other hand, a guarantee of economic progress. Even if these material motives did not exist, as already mentioned above, Europe is regarded as the cultural homeland and area of natural existence of Georgia. We must not accept pro-Europeanism as one of the options of foreign policy, but pro-Westernism and Europeanism are to be considered as the leitmotif of our history (the Georgian nation was formed in the context of the Bible and Christianity) and is the only way of development for Georgia, which is already enshrined in the Georgian Constitution.¹

"We will finalize our historical review with the words of professor Tedo Dundua from his book "Georgia within the European integration": "... Seeing itself as a superpower of the Eastern Christian community, Russia believed that Georgia must have entered the space, which it joined in the early 19th century; the Soviet Union was the political successor to the Russian Empire, but today Georgia is seeking to obtain its place in a common European space".

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