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GEORGIA'S FOREIGN-POLITICAL VECTORS AND THE POLITICAL EFFECT OF ECONOMIC RAPPROCHEMENT WITH CHINA

Annotation

One of the important prerequisites for the existence of any sovereign state is the development and implementation of the relevant foreign policy direction. For Georgia, as a small and also a country with a burdensome geopolitical location, it is vital to define effective and targeted foreign policy vectors. The country, which is facing domestic as well as regional challenges, has a indispensable need to administer a well organized foreign policy. It has become a constitutional obligation of Georgia, by the constitutional bodies, to take all measures to ensure full integration of the country into the European Union and the Euro-Atlantic Treaty Organization. At the same time, Georgia-China relations have significantly changed and are characterized by a trend of close economic rapprochement, which was crowned by the signing of a bilateral strategic partnership agreement last year. On the one hand, the drive towards Euro-Atlantic structures and on the other hand, the strategic partnership with China, one of the main actors of global priorities and threats, named in the US national security strategy, create a multifaceted picture of the foreign-political vectors of the Georgian state.

Keyword: Georgia, China, USA, European Union, Economic Partnership, Political Effect

The foreign policy of the country represents the general goals of the state, which guide the activities and relations of one state in relation to other states. The development of foreign policy is influenced by domestic political relations of the same country, key issues of national interests and national security. Also, the political behaviour of other states or specific geopolitical plans.

As a small country, the foreign policy of Georgia, historically, has always been directed through political manoeuvring to save itself. *“For small, weak countries, in contrast to strong countries, the international reality has always created more dangers; The weak almost always had fewer choices than the strong. From a military-political point of view, weak countries are usually «slaves» to their geopolitical location – some may be lucky, while others are neighbors of a strong country, and its location is of geopolitical or strategic importance”.*¹

Today, Georgia stands at the crossroads of historical opportunities. The large-scale geopolitical crises that surround the Georgian state. The major challenges for the country are: the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the conflict between Russia and the West, which has transformed into a Russian-Ukrainian war, Russia's foreign policy, through which it tries to gain exclusive influence in the region, Turkey's active work to increase its regional role, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and Iran's domestic problems, in general, create a new geopolitical reality for Georgia, and if we also take into account the growing interest of the West in the Black Sea region and China's intensified attention in relation to the same region, there is a feeling that new geostrategic contours are emerging for the Georgian state.

In the changing security environment, among the challenges facing Georgia, the most acute is the occupation of Georgian territories by the Russian Federation and the risk of new military aggression from

¹ Rondeli, International Relations., 2006, p. 128

the Russian Federation¹, which, in turn, contains the biggest obstacle to successful multilateral diplomacy with various actors of the world political system, because the mentioned threat hangs over Georgia like a sword of Damocles.

Georgia's undoubted success is the agreement on association with the European Union, which aims at political association with the European Union and gradual economic integration. However, the political narrative that Russia, as can be seen from the positions officially announced by its government, will not allow (at least it will try as much as possible) in the region of its interest, if not the tendency to expand the North Atlantic Organization, is significant, but, as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict shows, it is not friendly towards the European Union either.

Against the background of this task, Georgia's foreign policy, through «balancing», tries to avoid new threats, which implies Russia's «non-irritating» policy, and at the same time, conduct effective diplomacy both with the West and, already, with the East. Moreover, in the strategic plan of foreign policy, the country has declared European and Euro-Atlantic integration, joining the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as official goals.²

Recently, with positive dynamics, the relationship between Georgia and China has significantly changed, and last year, the sides of Georgia and China published a joint statement on bilateral strategic partnership, that was followed this year by the agreements on free trade and visa-free travel, which in turn opens a new economic and possibly political window for the Georgian state.

Diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and Georgia were established as early as June 9, 1992, and since then, the bilateral relationship has been gradually advancing, mainly focused on economic cooperation. By 2017, China became the fourth largest trade partner of Georgia, and according to the data of January-May 2024, it retains the named place.³ Last year, China considered Georgia as a crucial country for the Middle Corridor. At the beginning of 2023, the Chinese ambassador in Tbilisi publicly supported the construction of the transit road and said that Chinese companies are ready to participate in the implementation of the project. At the end of the same year, China and Georgia issued a joint statement mentioning the «development and strengthening of the Middle Corridor» as a major common goal. This was followed by China's willingness to participate in Georgia's long-standing efforts to establish a commercial port at Anaklia on the Black Sea coast.⁴

The intensified relations between China and Georgia have created an ambiguous attitude among the local opposition forces and civil society representatives. They actively discuss the negative sides of China-Georgia close relations,⁵ which in most cases is related to the problem of recognizing the territorial integrity of Georgia and the country's Euro-Atlantic perspective. However, it is also a fact that, at this stage, Georgia's interest in establishing ties with China is not in the epicenter of attention from the EU leaders. As mentioned above, Georgia won the EU candidate status at the end of 2023, and the EU report, which to some extent reviewed Georgia-Russia relations, did not criticize Georgia's relations with China.

The importance of the issue of China-Georgia relations is also interesting from a global point of view, because in today's international situation, the relations between the USA and China, as the hegemon and the main state on the way to the rise, are of great importance. Relations developed against the background of ideological or geopolitical disagreements can have a significant impact on current processes in the world. In the complex relations of states throughout history, a number of confrontations and aspects of cooperation were manifested. However, the environment of their relations was always competitive.

¹ See: National Security Concept, <https://mfa.gov.ge/national-security-concept>

² See: Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia for 2019-2022, <https://mfa.gov.ge/Foreign-Policy-Strategy>

³ See: Geostat, Foreign Trade of Georgia, <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/single-news/3188/sakartvelos-sagareo-vachroba>

⁴ See: Castello, 2024: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/south-caucasus/georgia-is-improving-relations-with-china-can-it-still-balance-with-europe>

⁵ See: Khidasheli, 2023: <https://www.freiheit.org/south-caucasus/devil-details>

Avdaliani, 2023: <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2023/08/whats-behind-chinas-strategic-partnership-with-georgia?lang=en>

China's claim to become the most powerful state is perceived as a threat to America. China's growing military potential, strengthening its position in the East and the world's first growing economy are at stake. There are expectations that there will be a large-scale balancing or competition of power between China and the United States in the economic arena, and a major military confrontation is unlikely. A new possibility for the world to return to bipolarity, according to the theorists of political realism, which is also based on the historical experience brought by the «Cold War», will be more peaceful than in the case of a multipolar international order.¹

In conclusion, we can say that Georgia – a country with a strong Western orientation for a long time – is rapidly developing a multi-vector foreign policy, marked not only by cooperation with China, or «balancing» policy with Russia, but also by smaller developments, such as increased security cooperation with Turkey.

It is a fact that all the above-mentioned events, political conditions and expectations pose a great challenge for Georgia. On the one hand, the inability of the northern neighbor and on the other hand, new opportunities create an interesting and at the same time difficult political configuration for Georgia. However, one thing is clear, that the era of long-term political peripherality of the Georgian state may be replaced by the centrality of the regional scale, as evidenced by the attempt of Europe and Asia to build new trade routes bypassing the territory of Russia.

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¹Tcheishvili T., *Prospects for the return of the bipolar system, on the example of US-China relations, Current challenges of modern science*, №7 (73), 2022, p. 39-41