

GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE OCTOBER 2012 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The author looks at the key foreign policy trends and changes that became obvious after the parliamentary elections of October 2012.

The article's first part describes Georgia's foreign policy under President Saakashvili when Georgia received its first conceptual documents—the National Security Concept and the Military Doctrine—both geared toward Europe and the closest possible cooperation with NATO, revised regional relations, and a new agenda.

The second part deals with the changes in Georgia's foreign policy that took place after the presidential elections of 1 October,

2012, when the opposition Georgian Dream Coalition won the majority of seats in the Georgian parliament and the post of prime minister for its leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili. The newly emerging relations between Georgia and Russia and the efforts of the Georgian leaders to resume their dialog with Moscow are also analyzed.

The concluding part offers an overview of Georgia's relations with the European structures, its progress toward an association with the European Union, the course of the talks, and the way this association will affect the main spheres of the country's life.

KEYWORDS: Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, foreign policy, the Rose Revolution, the Georgian Dream, Bidzina Ivanishvili, Abkhazia, South Ossetia.

Introduction

As an independent state, Georgia, very much like other Soviet successor-states, has had to look after its national interests; this has meant a long and torturous road of state-building and conceptualizing of its foreign policy. The country has lived through a civil war, settled its ethno-political conflicts, and survived the socioeconomic and political crises that slowed down its movement in the chosen direction.

Throughout Georgia's long history, foreign policy has been and remains one of the focal points. During the two decades of its independence, Georgia has travelled a road from anti-Russian (anti-Soviet) sentiments, which dominated under Zviad Gamsakhurdia (the country's first president, 1991), to the more or less balanced relations with Russia and the West established under President Eduard Shevardnadze (1995-2003).

The Rose Revolution marked another U-turn: the "young reformers" led by Mikhail Saakashvili overturned the results of the 2003 parliamentary elections, rebelled against the president's policies, and forced him to resign.

After coming to power, the "revolutionaries" and "young reformers" steered the country toward the West, which damaged Georgia's relations with Russia and pushed the country into a war with it in August 2008. It ended with Russia recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; diplomatic relations between Moscow and Tbilisi were discontinued and have not yet been restored.

On 1 October, 2012, the opposition Georgian Dream Coalition won the majority of seats in the Georgian parliament and the post of prime minister for its leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili. From their very first days in power, the new people in Tbilisi announced that they were determined to partly revise the country's foreign policy, move away from the anti-Russian course of the previous government, and drop its provocative rhetoric. They remain devoted to strategic relations with the United States and well-balanced good-neighborly relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. After coming to power, they put partner and friendly relations with the EU and NATO and Georgia's further integration with them on the agenda.

Georgia's Foreign Policy under President Saakashvili

The main foreign policy trends pursued by the Georgian Dream Coalition were formulated and consolidated when Mikhail Saakashvili and his United National Movement party were in power.

Mikhail Saakashvili came to power on the wave of protest rallies in November 2003, which, after starting as scattered events of the opposition dissatisfied with the results of the parliamentary elections, developed into mass riots, clashes with the police, and a regime change. The "young revolutionaries" led by Saakashvili found themselves at the helm. These events went down in history as the Rose Revolution.

A couple of months later, early in 2004, the new Georgian leaders launched reforms designed to adjust the country to Western standards. They wasted neither time nor words to inform the country that they saw no alternative to pro-Western foreign policies, NATO membership, and affiliation with the EU. This did nothing for the already far from simple relations between Russia and Georgia.

Very much in line with international practice, the Georgian leaders formulated and put on paper the country's foreign policy priorities and identified the national security threats. After twelve months

in power they completed, with U.S. financial and technical support, and presented to the public the National Security Concept adopted by the parliament on 8 July, 2005.¹ The document outlined Georgia's foreign policy priorities as: "a 'strategic partnership' with the United States, Ukraine, Turkey and Azerbaijan, a 'partnership' with Russia, and 'pragmatic cooperation' with Armenia."

The catastrophic August 2008 war with Russia stirred up talks about the need to revise, at least partly, the 2005 Concept; on 23 December, 2011, the parliament, with a majority of 150 votes "for," passed and approved the document's new version.²

As could be expected, the new document described Russia as one of the main threats to Georgia's national security; it referred to the "occupation of Georgian territories by the Russian Federation" and "the risk of renewed military aggression from Russia," as well as "terrorist acts organized by the Russian Federation from the occupied territories." The changes to the New Concept were related only to relations with Russia and the way it was perceived by the Georgian leaders and Georgian public.³

Part 5 entitled "Integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union" can be described as one of the central points of the new document, which says, in part that "accession to NATO is an important foreign policy objective of Georgia." At the same time, the Concept pointed out that "the military aggression by the Russian Federation could not alter Georgia's course toward democratic development and NATO integration" and that "since 2004, Georgia has achieved significant progress in cooperation with NATO."⁴

The Concept paid a lot of attention to relations with the United States as Georgia's strategic partner: "Georgia continues to deepen its strategic partnership with the U.S., a fact reflected in the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership signed in January 2009."⁵ The document presupposes cooperation in the security sphere.

Under the signed agreements, Washington pledged to shoulder some of the expenses needed to modernize the armed forces and upgrade Georgia's defense capability. After the defeat of August 2008, the Georgian leaders, encouraged and supported by their Western partners, the U.S. in particular, began reforming the country's Armed Forces. Between 2009 and 2010 Georgia received about \$32.2 million of non-repayable credit from the United States to cover its military needs.⁶ According to available information, in 2014 the U.S. will cut down its aid to \$12 million⁷; in 2012-2014 Washington will allocate \$44.4 million of aid.⁸ The Western donor-countries allocated \$4.5 billion to restore the military and civilian war-damaged infrastructure.

The new National Security Concept continued to describe the relations with neighbors (Turkey and Azerbaijan) as strategic and with Armenia as "close cooperation" and said: "Georgia believes that the establishment of a common approach to the region's future development is extremely important.

¹ See: "National Security Concept Finalized," *Civil.ge*, 15 May, 2005, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=9887&search=>], 5 December, 2013.

² See: "Georgia's New National Security Concept," *Civil.ge*, 23 December, 2011, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24299&search=>], 5 December, 2013.

³ See: "National Security Concept of Georgia," available at [<http://www.nsc.gov.ge/files/files/National%20Security%20Concept.pdf>], 5 December, 2013.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ "SShA i Gruzia podpisali khartiyu o Evroatlanticheskom sotrudnichestve," *Rosbalt*, 9 January, 2009, available at [<http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2009/01/09/608456.html>], 5 December 2013.

⁶ See: J. Melikian, "Military Reforms and Stability in the Southern Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 11, Issue 2, 2010.

⁷ See: "SShA urezhut ob'em bezvozmezdnoy pomoshchi stranam Tsentralnoy Azii i Kavkaza," *EurasiaNet*, 11 April, 2013 [<http://russian.eurasianet.org/node/60006>], 2 March 2014.

⁸ See: "Tsentralnaya Azia i Kavkaz: Washington nameren sokratit assignovaniya na okazanie zarubezhnoy pomoshchi," *EurasiaNet*, 17 February, 2011 [<http://russian.eurasianet.org/node/58554>], 2 March 2014.

Deepening regional cooperation and developing a common economic space and market would promote the stability and well-being of the region.”⁹

Under President Saakashvili, the liberal economic reforms transformed Georgia, a predominantly agrarian country, into an importer of agricultural products¹⁰; Turkey seized the opportunity to become Georgia’s largest trade partner by supplying Georgia with its products to fill the deficit the latter was experiencing. In 2007, the two countries signed a free trade agreement.

Azerbaijan is not far behind: both countries belong to the leading group of three biggest trade partners and investors. This is confirmed by the following figures: in January-October 2013, Turkey’s export to Georgia amounted to \$1.1 billion, while Georgia’s foreign trade turnover reached about \$1.2 billion.¹¹ During the same period, Azerbaijan moved into second place among Georgia’s trade partners with a total trade turnover of over \$1.06 billion.¹²

Georgia is a link between Turkey and Azerbaijan; cooperation with both countries is good for tourism and trade, which brings economic gains and geopolitical advantages. It is planned to commission the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway in 2014.

Two pipelines—the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline—bring Caspian hydrocarbons to the Turkish and European markets across the Georgian territory.¹³

Political relations between Georgia and its two main trade partners have been developing in full accordance with its economic dependence on Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Georgia’s foreign policy prior to the parliamentary elections of 2012 can be summarized as follows:

1. The pro-Western vector and integration with NATO and the EU are still the main priorities.¹⁴
2. Military-strategic relations with the United States, which lost its former interest in the Southern Caucasus after the Democrats came to power, continue to be pertinent.
3. In the last ten years, at the regional level, Georgia has been demonstrating its consistency as a transit country, a so-called geopolitical crossroads, a Caucasian hub at the junction of the North-South and West-East axes. However, the financial crisis, as well as monopolization of power and economic assets, caused discontent in Georgia, which led to a democratic change in power, an unprecedented event in the country’s recent history.

Foreign Policy after the October 2012 Parliamentary Elections

The parliamentary elections of 1 October, 2012 brought about a change in the government, the country’s domestic situation, and its foreign policy. On 25 October, 2012, the parliament en-

⁹ “National Security Concept of Georgia.”

¹⁰ See: “Vladimir Papava: Zigzagi reformirovaniya ekonomiki postsovetskoy Gruzii,” available at [<http://bizzone.info/articles/1382134945.php>], 7 December 2013.

¹¹ See: “Melsida Lomidze: V yanvare-oktyabre ob'em eksporta iz Gruzii v Turtsiyu povysilsya na 25%,” available at [<http://newsgeorgia.ru/economy/20131129/216167269.html>], 7 December, 2013.

¹² See: “Melsida Lomidze: V yanvare-oktyabre eksport iz Gruzii v Azerbaidzhan povysilsya na 11,2%,” available at [<http://newsgeorgia.ru/economy/20131128/216162812.html>], 7 December 2013.

¹³ See: “Michael Cecire: Zero Problems 2.0: Turkey as a Caucasus Power,” 20 September, 2012, available at [<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12354/zero-problems-2-0-turkey-as-a-caucasus-power>], 5 December, 2013.

¹⁴ Until the Agreement on Association with the EU and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement are signed.

dorsed the government program For a Strong, Democratic, and United Georgia, and the Georgian Dream Coalition led by Ivanishvili¹⁵ pledged to realize it. It outlined the foreign policy priorities of the governments of Ivanishvili and Irakli Garibashvili, who became prime minister after Ivanishvili. The program offered a glimpse of the new government's social, economic, and foreign policies.

An analysis shows that the main foreign policy vectors have not gone far from those outlined in the National Security Concept 2011: "The determination to join the EU, Euro-Atlantic orientation, and integration with NATO are the stated priorities of the government."

"Georgia will maintain relations with the United States as its main ally, according to the terms defined by the Charter of Strategic Partnership."¹⁶ Relations with neighboring countries remained the same, with minor adjustments. The prime minister and other top officials started talking about a more balanced foreign policy in the Southern Caucasus.¹⁷ The new government dropped the anti-Russian rhetoric of the previous regime and said that "Georgia will try to initiate a dialogue with Russia using international mechanisms, with the objective to work out a strategy of gradual reduction of the crisis in bilateral relations."

On 12-14 November, 2012, the Georgian prime minister paid his first official visit to Brussels to confirm that the EU remained Georgia's foreign policy priority and its importance for implementing Georgia's foreign policy tasks.

To preserve well-balanced relations with his Georgian neighbors and in line with the policies of the previous government, Ivanishvili visited Baku on 26 December, 2012, Yerevan, on 17-18 January, 2013, and Ankara on 9 February, 2013. Some of his statements, however, caused negative responses in Azerbaijan and Armenia.

While in Baku, he openly doubted the usefulness of the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway project, which was interpreted in Baku as an unfriendly statement.

In Yerevan, he praised the complementary model of the Armenian foreign policy course, which caused negative feelings in the parliamentary minority.

These statements could be interpreted as a hint at possible changes in Georgia's foreign policy vector. On the other hand, this was probably an attempt to negotiate lower prices on Azeri gas sold to Georgia and till the soil for possible talks with Russia.

No matter what prompted these statements, the opposition United National Movement headed by then President Saakashvili vehemently criticized the premier and doubted that the course toward European integration would survive. On 21 January, at the winter session of PACE in Strasbourg, Saakashvili outlined the domestic situation in Georgia after the elections and pointed to the wide gap between the foreign policy goals of the previous and present governments.¹⁸

The efforts of the former president and his team to discredit the new government in the eyes of Western partners and the failure to see eye to eye on many issues forced the new government to start working, in January 2013, on a document to demonstrate that the pro-Western trend of Georgia's foreign policy remained intact. Early in February, after heated debates, the parliamentary majority invited the United National Movement faction to discuss and sign an inter-factional agreement on the

¹⁵ See: "Parlament Gruzii utverdil pravitelstvo Ivanishvili, Natsdvizhenie progolosovalo protiv," *Novosti-Gruzia*, 25 October, 2012, available at [<http://newsgeorgia.ru/politics/20121025/215293033.html>], 5 December, 2013.

¹⁶ "Government Program for A Strong, Democratic, and United Georgia," available at [http://government.gov.ge/files/41_35183_108931_4.pdf].

¹⁷ See: "Gruzia On-line: Ivanishvili schitaet uspešnoy vnesnyuyu politiku novykh vlastey," available at [<http://www.apsny.ge/2013/pol/1360110723.php>], 5 December 2013.

¹⁸ See: "In PACE Speech Saakashvili Slams Govt," *Civil.ge*, 22 January, 2013, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25666>].

country's foreign policy. The document was discussed and passed by a unanimous vote on 7 March, 2013.¹⁹

It consists of 19 points, each of them related to the national interests of Georgia and the main foreign policy trends. Point 3, for example, pointed out that "integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures represents the main priority of the country's foreign policy course. For the purpose of achieving membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Georgia will take further steps to build and strengthen democratic institutions, as well as establish a governance system based on the principle of the rule of law and supremacy of human rights."

The document (Point 9) followed the government program and the National Security Concept 2011: "Georgia carries out its relations with the United States under the terms defined by the Strategic Partnership Charter." Point 14 of the agreement pointed out that "deepening bilateral political and economic relations with neighboring Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey are important. Georgia should continue implementing mutually beneficial political and economic relations;" this means that the new government was following the course charted by its predecessor.²⁰

In order to achieve irreversible and sustainable economic development, Georgia refused to join those international organizations, the charters of which contradicted Georgia's priorities. This excluded its membership in the CIS, EurAsEC, the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and the planned Eurasian economic union.

Point 4, in turn, says: "Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic foreign policy course, first and foremost, serves sustainable democratic development and the country's security and is not directed against any other state." This meant that Georgia would persist in its efforts to revive contacts with Russia.

At the same time, according to Point 18 of the document, Georgia would follow its consistent foreign policy to earn respect of its territorial integrity and sovereignty: "Georgia should not either have diplomatic relations or be in a military, political, or customs alliance with a state that recognizes the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

Point 11 deals with Georgia's relations with the Russian Federation: "Georgia carries out a dialog with Russia using the international mechanisms available at the Geneva International Discussions, as well as in the bilateral framework. The goal of this dialog is to resolve the conflict, as well as establish and develop good-neighborly relations."²¹

An unbiased analysis of the behavior of the Georgian leaders and their fairly balanced approach to this problem suggests that they are working hard to minimize the risks that might interfere with their attempts to establish relations with Russia. This can be done in the bilateral Karasin-Abashidze format and at the Geneva Discussions on security and stability in the Caucasus, the final aim of which is a treaty on the non-use of force by the conflicting sides (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Russia, and Georgia); representatives of the United States, the EU, U.N., and OSCE are also involved in the process.

A closer look at Russian-Georgian relations reveals that they are developing in bilateral and multilateral formats. In October 2012, the new people in the Georgian corridors of power offered an important initiative: they instituted the post of special representative of the Georgian prime minister for relations with Russia to start a dialog with the Russian Federation. On 1 November, 2012, the then prime minister Ivanishvili appointed former ambassador of Georgia to Russia (2000-2004) Zurab

¹⁹ See: "Parliament Adopts Bipartisan Resolution on Foreign Policy," *Civil.ge*, 17 March, 2013, available at [<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25828>].

²⁰ See: *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

Abashidze to this post.²² Russia appointed Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Grigory Karasin to an identical post of Russia's representative.

Bidzina Ivanishvili believes that Georgia, having started this dialog, took the first step toward normalizing relations with Russia. He had to specify, however, that "as far as diplomatic relations are concerned, it won't happen fast... It will take a long time and it won't be an easy process," because his country could not accept Russia's position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia.²³ He also pointed out that the format of the Geneva Discussions on security and stability would be preserved and continued.

The new people in power in Georgia initiated a Russian-Georgian dialog, which later became known as the Karasin-Abashidze format. The official representatives met for the first time on 14 December, 2012 in Geneva; to distinguish this format from the format of the Geneva Discussions (more on this below), it was decided to make Prague the meeting place.

To sum up the five meetings (the fifth took place on 21 November), we can say that the sides discussed practically the entire spectrum of questions related to trade and economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation.

According to Zurab Abashidze, in 2013, the format of Russian-Georgian talks permitted the sides to discuss about 80% of the agenda, including restored trade relations (Georgian agricultural products, wines, and mineral water were returned to the Russian market), transport (the Verkhnny Lars-Kazbegi checkpoint resumed its round-the-clock functioning in the summertime), and cooperation in the humanitarian and cultural sphere (the number of joint cultural, sports, scientific, religious, and other events is on the rise, including the participation of Georgian athletes in the Sochi Olympics-2014). The special representative also pointed out that cargo haulage by truck would be resumed soon (so far, there is a visa problem for Georgian drivers). This means that the remaining 20% of the unsolved problems are related to the visa problem.²⁴

The Russian Foreign Ministry said in its statement: "The overall constructive and amicable atmosphere of these meetings, held since December 2012, allows successful resolution of practical issues."²⁵

In mid-June 2013, in an interview with the English-language TV channel Russia Today, President Putin touched upon relations with Georgia. He said that Moscow intends to fully restore relations with official Tbilisi; cooperation between the law and order structures of both countries could become the first step to a visa-free regime.²⁶ The talks scheduled for 2014 will show whether the agenda will be completely fulfilled.

The Geneva Discussions, an earlier format, ensure contacts between the conflicting sides. I have already written that a treaty on the non-use of force among Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Russia, and Georgia with the participation of the United States, EU, U.N., and OSCE has been and remains the main issue.

The Geneva Discussions brokered by the EU, U.N., and OSCE have been going on since October 2008; two workgroups are engaged in parallel talks on security and humanitarian issues.

The latest, 25th, round took place on 5-6 November, 2013; the four previous rounds, in 2012 and 2013, were carried out by the new leaders of Georgia.

²² See: "PM Appoints Special Envoy for Relations with Russia," *Civil.ge*, 1 November, 2012, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25407>].

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ See: "Abashidze i Karasin reshili 80% problem v otnosheniyakh RF i Gruzii," *Rosbalt*, 14 November, 2013," available at [<http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2013/11/14/1199612.html>], 5 December, 2013.

²⁵ "Georgian, Russian Diplomats Meet in Prague," *Civil.ge*, 21 November, 2013, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26712&search=>], 7 December, 2013.

²⁶ See: "Putin: RF namerena v polnom ob'eme vosstanovit otnosheniya s Gruzией," *RIA Novosti*, 11 June, 2013," available at [<http://ria.ru/politics/20130611/942850870.html>], 7 December, 2013.

So far, the Geneva talks have not produced significant progress in bilateral relations between the conflicting sides; in addition, no agreement on the non-use of force can be expected any time soon.

“Non-use of force and international security arrangements represent one of the key issues regularly discussed at the Geneva talks. Work on the draft of joint statement on non-use of force continued, but as Georgia’s chief negotiator put it, ‘irreconcilable differences’ made it impossible to make progress.”²⁷

The Russian side points to Georgia’s unconstructive position, which insists that the joint document should contain a Russian statement on the non-use of force.²⁸

During the few latest rounds the Georgian side repeatedly raised, within the workshop on security issues, the question of the barbed-wire barriers Russian military were building along the administrative border of South Ossetia and the ditches dug along the administrative border of Abkhazia.²⁹ This happened in 2009, but the Georgian media started paying them particular attention in the last six months, which does nothing for the far from stable relations with Russia.

“In her address to the OSCE ministerial council in Kiev on 6 December, [2013], Georgia’s Foreign Minister Maia Panjikidze called for ‘intensified diplomatic efforts to persuade’ Russia to reciprocate Georgia’s unilateral non-use of force pledge.

“Georgia made a unilateral non-use of force pledge in November 2010 and since then has been calling on Russia to reciprocate, but the latter refuses, saying that it is not a party in the conflict between Tbilisi and the two breakaway regions.

“Yet, unfortunately, against the background of the restored economic and cultural relations, Russia has further intensified its illegal activities. As we speak, Moscow continues to impose barbed-wire, fences and other artificial obstacles along the occupation line in the Tskhinvali and Abkhazia regions of Georgia, dividing peoples, families and communities,” Panjikidze said.³⁰

“Asked about Georgia, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told journalists on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial council in Kiev on 5 December: ‘If we continue working pragmatically, I do not see any obstacle to developing relations in the economy, trade, energy and humanitarian sectors, and culture. But if we want to fully normalize relations, I cannot offer anything new except for the need to recognize the reality that exists in this region’.”³¹

These statements made on the eve of the 26th round of the Geneva Discussions held on 17-18 December, 2013 show that the political issues on the Georgian-Russian agenda cannot be resolved and that the sides insist on two different approaches to the problem.

After the recent presidential elections in Georgia, which gave Giorgi Margvelashvili, representative of the Georgian Dream Coalition, an impressive victory, the new government, headed by former Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia Garibashvili, announced that it would follow the foreign policy course outlined by the Ivanishvili government in the program For a Strong, Democratic, and United Georgia. Very much like its predecessor, the new government remains devoted to the European development vector and the country’s territorial integrity as its main priorities.

Vano Machavariani, the recently appointed foreign policy advisor to the president of Georgia, was fairly positive: “We do hope that there is enough potential in the Geneva Discussions to invigo-

²⁷ “Twenty-Fourth Round of Geneva Talks,” *Civil.ge*, 29 June, 2013, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26225&search=>], 7 December, 2013.

²⁸ See: “Novosti-Gruzia: RF pridaet osoboe zhanenie novomu raundu Zhenevskikh diskussiy—MID,” available at [<http://newsgeorgia.ru/russia/20131031/216042019.html>], 7 December, 2013.

²⁹ See: “Novosti-Gruzia: Ivanishvili svyazyvaet ustanovku ograzhdeniy u ‘granitsy’ s Abkhaziyey i YuO s Olimpiadoy v Sochi,” available at [<http://newsgeorgia.ru/politics/20130925/215911429.html>], 7 December, 2013.

³⁰ See: “Georgian FM Address OSCE Ministerial Council,” *Civil.ge*, 6 December, 2013, available at [<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26765&search=>], 7 December, 2013.

³¹ See: *Ibidem*.

rate the talks on specific issues. It is very important to widen the Abashidze-Karasin format to work on the diplomatic issues related to the economy, finances, investments, etc.”³²

In Lieu of a Conclusion

By way of concluding my overview of the foreign policy course Georgia has been pursuing since 2003, I will discuss its integration with the EU, which has remained consistent over the last ten years. Much has been said and written on the subject.

On 22 July, 2013, the new government of Georgia and the EU summarized the latest round of talks within the Georgia-EU Association. Brussels was informed that the talks on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA),³³ which was part of the Association Agreement, “had been successfully completed.” The European Commission issued a statement which said: “The comprehensive FTA, negotiated in just 17 months and seven rounds, will see Georgia gaining better access to the EU market for its goods and services... The Agreement is expected to boost the inflow of European direct investment to Georgia thanks to an open, stable and predictable policy-making environment.”³⁴

EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton and Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle welcomed “the substantive completion” of the negotiations on the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia.³⁵

The Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU was officially initialed by Foreign Minister of Georgia Maia Panjikidze and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton on 29 November, 2013, at the Vilnius Summit of Eastern Partnership,³⁶ an outstanding event in Georgia’s foreign policy of recent years. The same day, George Kvirikashvili, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, and Karel De Gucht, European Commissioner for Trade, signed the part of the document related to the comprehensive free trade area.

The sides have reached the stage at which the document, before being signed, must be discussed with and approved by the EU member states, a far from simple process. Georgia hopes that this will happen in 2014. When ratified, this document will replace the 1996 Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation now in force and will create a new legal framework for cooperation between Georgia and the EU.

On 29 November, President of Georgia Margvelashvili said that “many generations of Georgians” were fighting for the initialing and signing of the Association Agreement. “Today, we have moved closer to the future in which we will belong to the family of European countries.”³⁷

The document, which is 1,000 pages long,³⁸ can be conventionally divided into three parts.³⁹

³² “Vano Machavariani: Format peregovorov Abashidze-Karasin po normalizatsii rossiysko-gruzinskikh otnosheniy dolzhen byt rasshiren,” available at [<http://www.pirveli.com.ge/rus/?menuid=8&id=8635>], 7 December, 2013.

³³ The DCFTA talks between Georgia and the EU began in February 2012.

³⁴ “EU, Georgia Conclude Free Trade Talks,” *Civil.ge*, 22 July, 2013, available at [<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26297&search=>], 7 December, 2013.

³⁵ See: “EU Hails ‘Substantive Completion’ of Association Agreement Talks with Georgia,” *Civil.ge*, 25 July, 2013, available at [<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26303&search=>], 7 December, 2013.

³⁶ See: “Golos Ameriki: Gruzia parafirovala soglashenie s Evrosoyuzom,” available at [<http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/georgia-vilnius/1800445.html>], 7 December, 2013.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ See: “EU-Georgia Association Agreement,” available at [http://eeas.europa.eu/georgia/assoagreement/assoagreement-2013_en.htm], 7 December, 2013.

³⁹ See: “Gruzia na poroge assotsiatsii s ES, nezavisimye eksperty predosteregayut,” RIA Novosti, available at [<http://ria.ru/world/20131128/980200098.html#13865075584993&message=resize&relto=register&action=addClass&value=registration>], 7 December, 2013.

- The first part deals with political matters and opens the road to cooperation on the protection and strengthening of common European values, the rule of law, democracy, and human rights; respect for the principles of international law, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of internationally recognized borders; promotion of peaceful conflict resolution; strengthening of political dialog and cooperation in realizing domestic reforms; strengthening of regional stability and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; fighting organized crime, money laundering, drug trafficking, etc.
- The second part, related to industrial branches, covers the problems of modernization of all spheres and introduction of European standards in transport, energy, agriculture, tourism, health protection, and other spheres.
- The third part deals with the DCFTA. The two sides set up a free trade area (DCFTA), which will remove tariff barriers and settle a great number of problems related to food security and policies in the field of competition, protection of intellectual property, and customs issues.

On the whole, the foreign policy course has survived the regime change; after coming to power, the new leaders concentrated on preparations for the signing of an Association Agreement with the EU; this means that the European vector has been and remains the cornerstone of Georgia's foreign policy. Time will show whether the new leaders of Georgia will move consistently toward integration with the EU; today the Georgian government has the parliamentary opposition and the majority of the country's population on its side.
