

“EUROPE” AND “THE WEST” IN GEORGIA’S POLITICAL IMAGINATION AND NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

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Georgia’s Nationalist Discourse after the Rose Revolution

The political upheavals of the 2000s caused by the post-authoritarian landslide pushed to fore the problem of nations and nationalism and the question of further development routes.¹

In 2003, President Shevardnadze lost his post: this marked a turning point in Georgia’s history, which has since been grossly hyperbolized within Georgia’s nationalist discourse.

T. Avaliani, for example, has the following to say on this score: “In November 2003, after two civil wars and 12 years of post-Soviet turmoil and suspense, Georgia was the first among the Soviet-successor states to tear down the Iron Curtain of the Russian Empire. The Rose Revolution, which liberated the Georgian people from imperial dictatorship and communist legacy, began building a new, civilized, and democratic state.”²

Today, the revolution is seen as a key event in Georgia’s current political history.

G. Areshidze, a prominent political scientist, commented on the post-revolutionary situation as follows: the new elites inherited a country with a “quasi-balanced constitutional foundation, legislative power ... a business community that the state could not control ... and several semi-democratic political parties.”³

¹ In the 2000s, East European intellectuals revived their interest in the problems of nations and nationalism, ethnicity and identity, and development of political nations after the relatively subdued interest in these subjects in the latter half of the 1990s (see: R. Kalanj, “Liberalno i komunitarističko poimanje identiteta. Prilog analizi identiteta hrvatskog društva,” *SE*, Vol. 14, No. 1-2, 2005, pp. 53-73; Idem, “Zov identiteta kao prijeporno znanstveno pitanje,” *SE*, Vol. 12, No. 1-2, 2003, pp. 47-68; M. Lutz-Bachmann, “Svjetska državnost” i ljudska prava nakon kraja naslijeđene ‘nacionalne države’,” *PM*, Vol. XXXVI, Br. 3, 1999, S. 23-33.

² T. Avaliani, “Utrachennye nadezhdy gruzinskogo naroda,” available at [<http://lazare.ru/post/28816/>].

³ G. Areshidze, “Gosudarstvennoe stroitelstvo i pravlenie v novoy Gruzii,” in: *Kavkaz. Ezhegodnik KISMI*, ed. by A. Iskanderian, Erevan, 2006, p. 47.

In the latter half of the 2000s, therefore, Georgian nationalism remained exposed to pressure from various actors.

The Rose Revolution of November 2003 brought to power new political leaders headed by Mikhail Saakashvili who were even more open about their political nationalism⁴ than their predecessors and more confirmed Westerners. They believed that the country's future was associated with the European Union⁵ and NATO. Scared of Russian nationalism (the revival of which became obvious in the 2000s)⁶ the Georgian political elite was determined to move out of the post-Soviet political expanse. It seems that President Saakashvili is a political leader who, having come to power amid political turmoil with democratic slogans, is very much susceptible to radicalization. Such leaders tend to rely not only on slogans, but also on principles stemming from ethnic, rather than civilian, nationalism.⁷

Georgian journalist G. Vekua argues that Mikhail Saakashvili, armed with the "policy of Westernization,"⁸ tried to de-Sovietize Georgian statehood in the most radical way: he was determined to "speed up, harshly and even by force, the emergence of a purely bourgeois state known as a 'nation-state' in political science and sociology."⁹

On the other hand, Saakashvili insisted on radical reforms, while the gap between the real situation and the Georgian elite's political plans and ambitions created a crisis and fanned ethnic nationalism.¹⁰

In the 2000s, Georgia was faced with a conflict between two, still half-baked, political institutions—the national (nationalizing) state and civil society;¹¹ Georgia's fairly shallow democratic potential was exhausted, which pushed the regime closer to authoritarianism amid crisis trends.

Belarusian political scientist V. Chernov has offered the following comment on the 2003 political changes: "In Georgia one authoritarian leader replaced another through yet another, this time bloodless, coup they called the Rose Revolution. It turned out to be a coup 'from below' realized by the counter-elite under democratic slogans."¹²

⁴ For more on the specific features and trends of the development and functioning of the nationalist discourse during Saakashvili's presidency, see: J.S. George, "Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia," *EAS*, Vol. 60, No. 7, 2008, pp. 1151-1175.

⁵ For more on the European trend in Georgia's foreign policy, see: D. Fean, "Making Good Use of the EU in Georgia: The 'Eastern Partnership' and Conflict Policy," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, September 2009, 19 pp.

⁶ The political elites of Georgia are concerned about the mounting Russian nationalism and radical sentiments, which they describe as imperial. It seems that their political fears were fed by the Russian nationalists' obviously intensified activities during President Putin's two terms; this is best illustrated by a much greater number of nationalist and so-called patriotic publications (see, for example: L. Byzov, "Russkoe samosoznanie i rossiiskaia natsia," *AGZh*, No. 10, 2007, pp. 14-33; A. Bystritskiy, Dm. Shusharin, "Imia natsii," *AGZh*, No. 10, 2007, pp. 2-11; V. Lukin, "Globalnaia rol Rossii i evropeyskaia identichnost," *RGP*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2008, pp. 8-17; A. Makarkin, "Rossia ili Rus?" *AGZh*, No. 10, 2007, pp. 34-47).

⁷ For more on similar political leaders and factors of nationalism, see: N. Vladislavljjevic, "Institutional Power and the Rise of Milošević," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2004, pp. 183-205.

⁸ For more on the political dynamics in Georgia before August 2008, see: T. German, "Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Collision of Georgian and Russian Interests," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, June 2006, 19 pp.

⁹ G. Vekua, "Gosudarstvo-natsia protiv ethnosa, naroda i federalnoy imperii," available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1242237840>].

¹⁰ For more on the interconnection between flare-ups of ethnic nationalism and the political crises, see: S.J. Tambiah, "The Nation-State in Crisis and the Rise of Ethnonationalism," in: *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, ed. by E.N. Wilmsen, P. McAllister, Chicago, London, 1996, pp. 124-143.

¹¹ For more on similar processes in Europe, see: D. Grubiša, "Križa demokracije u Europi: između nacionalne države i evropske vladavine," *AHPD*, Br. 7, 2006, pp. 125-148; Ch. Krupnick, "Expecting More from Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe," *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2005, pp. 149-165.

¹² For more detail, see: V. Chernov, "Revolutsia i poriadok," *Palatychnaia sfera*, No. 8, 2007, p. 43.

Intellectual Coordinates of Nationalism: “Europe” and “Kartveloba”

The symbolic and ritual content of nationalism and Georgia's political independence¹³ was shaped in the 2000s.

At the same time, the terms which symbolized Georgian ethnicity (*kartuli droša*, *sakartvelos droša*,¹⁴ *kartuli saxelmcipo*, *saxelmcipo sakartvelo*, *sakartvelos saxelmcipo*¹⁵) were pushed to the forefront to establish and strengthen Georgia's identity.

By that time, Georgia's nationalist discourse had already acquired ethnic hues; the trend traveled to the humanities as one of the spheres of nationalist imagination; Georgian intellectuals, however, preferred to cultivate nationalism in an academic discourse rather than profiting from an opportunity for open political involvement.¹⁶

While the European intellectuals had to admit that the national state and ethnic nationalism were in a crisis,¹⁷ Georgian nationalism not merely remained very much alive, its strong ethnic trends demonstrated powerful dynamics.

The European idea and the conviction that the Georgians were part of the Western cultural and political context (popular among the Georgian intellectuals under Soviet power as a form of political and intellectual dissent) were revived in Georgia's political discourse.¹⁸

A similar Western discourse has been inherited from the nationalism of anti-Soviet opposition, in which the concepts “the West” and “Europe” figured prominently, while the idea of “European” was applied to both Georgian and European society.

In the last three centuries, Georgian society has learned to present itself as European: Georgian intellectuals were working hard to look like Europeans in the eyes of the Western educated classes and to be Europeans. Neither the West nor Europe, however, was prepared to accept this.

By the 20th century, their perseverance finally bore the first fruits: chairs of Kartvelian studies were set up in some of the Western universities to teach the Georgian and kindred languages, Georgian history, culture, and literature.

By that time, Europe had acquired a much clearer idea of the Caucasus (previously seen as indistinguishable archaic Orient), largely thanks to enforced modernization in the form of authoritarian Sovietization and industrialization. It became a region with fairly clearly defined borders between the national groups and communities.

¹³ For more on the nationalist content of civil rituals, see: M. Azaryahu, *State Cults: Independence Celebrations and Soldier Memorials, 1948-1956*, Sde-Boker, 1995; R. Kook, “Changing Representations of National Identity and Political Legitimacy: Independence Day Celebrations in Israel, 1952-1998,” *NI*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2005, pp. 151-171.

¹⁴ Georgian for the Georgian flag.

¹⁵ Georgian for the Georgian blood.

¹⁶ See: K. Baratašvili, *Mahmadiani mesxebis kartuli gvarebi*, Tbilisi, 1997; J. Gvasalia, *Agmosavlet Sakartvelos istoriuli geografi*, Tbilisi, 1991; V. Lortkipanidze, *Samc'kxe-Džavaxeti XIX-XX saukuneebshi*, Tbilisi, 1994; N. Cereteli, *Kartveli da osi kxalkxebis urtiertobis istoridan*, Tbilisi, 1991; E. Babunašvili, Th. Uturgaidze, *Anton pirvelis gramatika da misi erovnul-istoriuli mnišvneloba*, Tbilisi, 1991; P. Kotinovi, L. Mepharishvili, *Ilia Čavčavadze da sagramatiko paekroba (1886-1894)*, Tbilisi, 1992 (all in Georgian).

¹⁷ For more detail, see: M. Dogan, “Comparing the Decline of Nationalisms in Western Europe: The Generational Dynamic,” *ISSJ*, No. 136, 1993, pp. 177-198; idem, “Nationalism in Europe: Decline in the West, Revival in the East,” *NEP*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1997, pp. 66-85; R. Jenkins, “The Ambiguity of Europe,” *ES*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2008, pp. 153-176; E. Moxon-Browne, “Eastern and Western Europe: Towards a New European Identity?” *CPol*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1997, pp. 27-34.

¹⁸ For more on the European idea in Georgia, see: G. Nodia, “Obraz Zpada v gruzinskom soznanii,” in: *Etnicheskie i regionalnye konflikty v Yevrazii*, Vol. 3: *Mezhdunarodnyi opyt razresheniya etnicheskikh konfliktov*, ed. by B. Coppieters, E. Remacle, A. Zverev, Ves Mir, Moscow, 1997.

Nationalism and Imagined Geography

The criteria the Western intellectuals applied to the Armenian S.S.R. and Georgian S.S.R. are hardly identifiable, yet they were aware that they differed greatly from the Azerbaijan S.S.R., a Muslim republic, and from the national autonomies of the R.S.F.S.R. The positive images of both republics might be a product, among other things, of the indefatigable efforts of their diasporas. Their developed Christian traditions and millennia-long national histories convinced some of the Western academics that they had been a European periphery torn away from Western Europe, if not part of the West itself.

“Imagined geography”¹⁹ proceeded from the fact that both the Georgians and the Armenians were Christians: for a large part of the European and Western intellectual community Christianity was evidence of affiliation with Western civilization, while Georgia looked like “its own” country as opposed to Azerbaijan and the R.S.F.S.R. with its persistent and enforced atheism.

It seems that this geography dates from the 18th century when Georgians reached the West and contacts with educated Georgians at European universities stirred up an interest in Georgia, its history, language, literature, and culture.

British expert on the Caucasus David Marshall Lang²⁰ (he died in 1991, the year independent Georgia appeared on the political map of the world) did a lot to familiarize Europe with Georgia.

He taught the West to look at Georgia as part of Europe: in the distant past, ancient Georgians, who dominated the continent, spread from Spain to the Transcaucasus. His surmise was based on the affinity between the Basque language and Georgian. Dr. Lang defined Georgians as Caucasian Europeans with close anthropological parallels between the Greeks and the Italians; the nature of feudalism in medieval Georgia served as another argument: it was much closer to West European feudalism than to Georgia’s Muslim neighbors. On the other hand, he agreed that Iran had exerted certain, yet indeterminate, influence on Georgia.

He wrote that “practically all social institutions of European feudalism” were present in Georgia; he went even further to surmise the presence of free (“kmoba”) and bonded (“kma”)²¹ estates similar to those of the medieval West and to liken the Georgia of King Vakhtang Gorgasala to the period of legendary King Arthur.²²

Georgian Europeanism and the Nationalist Doctrine

For I. Bakhtadze, the common roots of Georgian and West European medieval culture are obvious: “The medieval written culture of the Christian World was united and universal to the extent that it served as a strong intellectual basis for its individual cultures. These common internal ties went much deeper and were much stronger than we can imagine today.”²³

L. Berdzenishvili goes even further: to him Georgians are latent Europeans: “From the way we live, it is difficult to guess we are Europeans, because we are deteriorated Europeans, but as soon as

¹⁹ For more on the theoretical aspects of the problem, see: V. Goldsurdi, *Izmislyaneto na Ruritania. Imperializmt na vobrazhenieto*, Sofia, 2004 (see also: A. Strandzheva, *Evropa i podvizhnosta na kulturnite i granitsi*, available at [http://www.bulgic18.com/modernoto/astrandzheva.htm], both in Bulgarian).

²⁰ See: D. Lang, *Gruziny. Khraniteli sviatyn* (Russian translation by S. Fedorov of *The Georgians*), Moscow, 2004.

²¹ See: “Kmoba” and “kma” are social groups in medieval Georgia who, historians believe, were identical to the West European feudal estates.

²² See: D. Lang, op. cit., pp. 12-14; 108-111, 134.

²³ I. Bakhtadze, “‘Russkiy factor’ v kulturoistoricheskoy oreintatsii Gruzii,” p. 57, available at [http://anthropology.ru/ru/texts/bakhtadze/_04.html].

genuine European things, musical and esthetic among others, reach us, we respond with an outburst of Europeanism. Every time a novel appears in European form, we respond with good novels; as soon as a European form of verse, sonnet, for example, appears, we respond to this as well.”²⁴

In certain political contexts, history may become an important political factor²⁵; in any case, it is not limited to studies of the past. This probably explains why Georgian intellectuals who treat Byzantium as Oriental Europe insist that the contact between Georgia and Byzantium in the Middle Ages made both a part of Europe. “The downfall of the Byzantine world not only blocked the road to Europe, it also detached Georgia from the civilizational processes and undermined Georgia’s experience of specific historical interaction with them.”²⁶

This is obviously in line with the late Soviet Georgian intellectual tradition, which placed Georgia within the Western cultural area on the strength of its Christianity.

Jonathan Friedman believes that “objective history, just as any other history, is produced in a definite context and is a particular kind of project.”²⁷ The contemporary intellectual space of Georgia is no exception. I. Bakhtadze, in particular, describes Georgian history as part of European history: “At all times, the Georgian monarch-politician was a monarch-enlightener. The very fact that the idea of an ‘enlightened monarch’ was realized in Georgia speaks volumes, while Western thought was excited by this ideal. Georgian kings (Archil, Vakhtang VI, Teimuraz II) who suffered political defeats were the very embodiments of this ideal... In fact, the age of Irakly II reflected its Western biases. It is no accident that Anton Catholicos, who headed the Eupropia supporters, served as the country’s intellectual image. By the latter half of the 18th century, Western orientation had taken its final shape: unification with Russia completed Georgia’s predominant cultural and historical orientation.”²⁸

The intellectuals played an important role in the functioning and reproduction of the nationalist discourse in transit societies.²⁹

Merab Mamardashvili,³⁰ an outstanding Georgian philosopher who in 1980 returned to Georgia from Moscow, stirred up an interest in Europe³¹ and strengthened the position of Europeism in Georgia’s intellectual expanse. Toward the end of his life, Mamardashvili gave an extensive course of lectures at Tbilisi University which promoted the idea of European identity still further; there were attempts to integrate Kartveloba³² (the concept of Georgian identity) into the European cultural and political context.

Today it is commonly believed that Mamardashvili’s influence on the Georgian intellectual discourse helped to spread the idea of the contrast between the Georgian (as part of the West and the European cultural tradition) and the Byzantine-Russian world associated with the East.³³

²⁴ L. Berdzenishvili, “Gruzia—Evropa ili Azia,” available at [http://dialogs.org.ua/crossroad_full.php?m_id=216].

²⁵ For more detail, see: *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerungen and Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich*, Hrsg. P. Bock, E. Wolfrum, Göttingen, 1999.

²⁶ I. Bakhtadze, op. cit., p. 58.

²⁷ J. Friedman, “History, Political Identity and Myth,” *Lietuvos etnologija. Lithuanian Ethnology. Studies in Social Anthropology and Ethnology*, No. 1, 2001, No. 1, p. 41.

²⁸ I. Bakhtadze, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁹ For more on the role of the intellectuals in transit societies, see: A. Pažanin, “Uloga intelektualaca u Novoj Evropi,” *AHPD*, Br. 6, 2007, pp. 331-339; “Intelektualy: pa-za mezhami kompetentsyi. Razmova z Igaram Babkovym,” *Palitichnaia sfera*, No. 4, 2005, pp. 5-9.

³⁰ For more on the way M. Mamardashvili is perceived within the Georgian intellectual tradition, see: Z. Andronikashvili, G. Maysuradze, “Gruzia-1990: filogema nezavisimosti, ili Neizvlechenny opyt,” *NLO*, No. 83, 2007, available at [http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2007/83/an10-pr.html].

³¹ Works on the history of Europe and Georgian-European contacts show that Georgia has a lot of interest in Europe (see: A. Grishikashvili, *Polonet-sakartvelos urtiertoba*, Tbilisi, 2006, 274 pp., in Georgian).

³² The term defies any adequate translation into English, the closest term being “Englishness.”

³³ See: Z. Shatirishvili, “‘Staraia’ intelligentsia n ‘novye’ intellektually. Gruzinskiy opyt,” *NZ*, No. 1, 2003, p. 47.

Europeization of the Historical Past: Intellectual Practices of Georgian Nationalism

Merab Mamardashvili enriched the Georgian intellectual discourse with a consistent European narrative that was manifested in the desire to “imagine” history and the country’s past within European categories. In the same way as “contemporary ethnicity is artificially imposed on hoary antiquity,”³⁴ contemporary Georgian intellectuals and politicians are doing their best to make Georgian history more European.

A. Jokhadze, for example, writes: “Before the 13th century Georgian society was identical to the feudal society of the West European type; typologically, Georgia belonged to the West European civilization. This means that its social infrastructure realized the idea of personal freedom, although, admittedly, as a system of rights and duties of the complicated vassal hierarchy.”³⁵

L. Berdzenishvili, who concentrates on the European content of Georgian history, describes *The Knight in the Tiger’s Skin* as a manifestation of Europeism, as an “entirely European poem” even if based on “an absolutely Oriental subject. Its ideology, however, is Platonic; its main idea is: he who does not seek friends is his own worst enemy. This is not merely Oriental wisdom, it is ancient, therefore, entirely European, wisdom. It says everything about Asia; it contains absolutely everything about Arabia, India, and China, but in the form of European ideas.”³⁶

This makes history a construct deliberately mythologized by the intellectuals; today, ideas about the past are inseparable from a revised and re-examined identity.

Those who describe Georgian experience or offer new versions of it rely on terms common to the Georgian and European political and historical past: “raindoba,” “midžnuroba,”³⁷ “the civilization of Rustaveli”—the age of Dante, etc.

Mariam Lordkipanidze, a prominent Georgian historian, likewise tends to rely on European historical categories when writing about the Middle Ages in Georgia. Her works³⁸ abound in such terms as “agara,” “aznauri,” “mokme,” “glekxi,” etc.³⁹

History draws upon terms which are used to point to common features and parallels; in this case, historians are shaping an image of Georgia as a country with a European history.

Georgia’s European Choice: Nationalism and Political Vocabulary

The Georgian elites indulge in European parlance. President Saakashvili, for example, has stressed: “The Georgian nation has opted for the European road and this choice is immutable. This is

³⁴ V.A. Shnirelman, *Voyny pamiati. Mify, identichnost i politika v Zakavkazie*, Moscow, 2003, p. 18.

³⁵ A. Jokhadze, “Rossia glazami gruzina,” available at [<http://www.apsny.ge/society/1177005060.php>].

³⁶ L. Berdzenishvili, op. cit.

³⁷ “Raindoba” and “midžnuroba” (*Geor.*) are terms that described the concepts of “knighthood” and “courteous” typical of Western medieval culture.

³⁸ M. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries* [<http://www.georgianweb.com/history/mariam/>].

³⁹ “Agara” (*Geor.*) is identical to the West European “feud”; “aznauri” (*Geor.*), feudal lords; “mokme” (*Geor.*), knights; “glekxi” (*Geor.*), peasants.

not an aim in itself, but a choice of the state and state policy. Europe should not be afraid to open its doors to us because Georgia is following a truly democratic road ... everything we do will bring us closer to Europe, which should know that Georgia is its close friend, a strong and reliable partner that can be trusted.”⁴⁰

Moldavian historians A. Kusko and V. Taki have pointed out: “At all times, history is used to adding legitimacy to political processes and situations.”⁴¹ This explains why Mikhail Saakashvili pours a lot of effort into the European image of his compatriots: “Georgians are not merely Europeans; they are enthusiastic Europeans. We invariably turned to Europe in times of trouble.”⁴²

These sentiments are shared by a large part of the Georgian intellectual community: “Our future is in Europe; we cannot save Georgia without Europe. We are a European civilization and if we fail to return to Europe we, as a nation and a state, have no future.”⁴³

Political Europeanism in Georgia is not only rooted in the close contacts between the Georgian and Western political elites; it is rooted in the intellectual and political traditions of the past based, in turn, on political nationalism and Europeanism as its part.

It should be said in all justice that not all members of the Georgian intellectual community share this Occidental optimism. Ghia Nodia, for example, believes that “the choice in favor of a Western liberal democratic model in Georgia, it seems, is largely identity-driven; Georgians feel they have to be democratic because they have to be Western. However, the country’s social and historical experience with Westernization is minimal.”⁴⁴

Historian V. Shnirelman has commented on (re)interpretation of history by saying, “when constructing the past, people try to ensure a future based on a past that has been adequately interpreted or reinterpreted.”⁴⁵

Europeanism is one of the universal historical landmarks in Georgia’s intellectual expanse used to confirm its identity and meet the challenges of its marginal and peripheral nature.⁴⁶ It is blended with political and, to a lesser extent, ethnic nationalism of Georgian society. This rather specific synthesis between the European optimism of the ruling elite and Georgian nationalism as a whole and the still incomplete nature of Georgian statehood in the context of the fairly fragmented political expanse⁴⁷ makes it much harder to arrive at a balanced strategy of European integration.

Some Georgian authors are very skeptical about the future of the European idea in Georgia. One of them, D. Barbakadze, has pointed out that in the 2000s, Europeanism was pushed aside by Atlanticism: “There is something that neither the intelligentsia nor the broad masses find strange. I am talking about the fact that Europe as a political and cultural expanse has completely disappeared from Georgia’s press and television. This is not fortuitous; it did not happen because information about Europe

⁴⁰ “Gruzia, nakazannaia za evropeizm, prosit podderzhki u Evropy,” available at [<http://www.apsny.ge/analytics/1163794329.php>].

⁴¹ A. Kusko, V. Taki, “‘Kto my?’ Istoricheskii vybor: rumynskaia natsia ili moldavskaia gosudartvennot,” *Ab Imperio*, No. 1, 2003, p. 485.

⁴² [<http://www.apsny.ge/analytics/1163794329.php>].

⁴³ V. Rukhadze, “Gruzinskaia voennaia strategija dolzhna pereiti na partizanskuiu taktiku;” available at [<http://www.apsny.ge/interview/1247181355.php>].

⁴⁴ G. Nodia, “Georgia: Dimensions of Insecurity,” in: *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution*, ed. by B. Coppieters, R. Legvold, Cambridge (Mass.), 2005, p. 69.

⁴⁵ For more detail, see V.A. Shnirelman, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴⁶ For more on the European idea as a factor designed to overcome marginality, see: A. Horolets, “Sram od zaostalosti: simbolička konstrukcija Evrope u poljskom tisku,” *ET*, Vol. 38, 2008, pp. 61-80.

⁴⁷ Early in the 1990s Jürgen Habermas warned about similar problems (see J. Habermas, “Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe,” *Praxis International*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1992, pp. 1-19) with which the transit and nationalizing states of Eastern and Central Europe have to cope with (see: Z. Csergo, J.M. Goldgeier, “Nationalist Strategies and European Integration,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 2, No.1, 2004, pp. 21-37; M. Kasapović, “Regionalna komparativistika i Istočna Evropa: kako se raspala Istočna Evropa,” *AHPD*, Br. 5, 2007, pp. 74-97; V. Vujčić, “Nacionalizam, građanstvo i strategije integracije u Evropsku Uniju,” *AHPD*, Br. 6, 2007, pp. 99-117.

was scarce. This 'failure' has very clear political and psychological reasons. Orientation toward the United States is only possible in one-track minds; with Europe as part of the system of coordinates, this would have been impossible."⁴⁸

Some people in the West are puzzled by Mikhail Saakashvili's Occidentalism and Europeanism. One of them, William Pfaff, refers to medieval history to comment: "The new president (Saakashvili) says he is committed to leading Georgia back into the Euro-Atlantic fold. Back? Georgia was under divided Persian and Turkish rule from the 16th to 18th centuries, then it was a Russian colony for two centuries, and from 1921 to 1991 it was a constituent republic of the Soviet Union."⁴⁹ The Occidental message of the Georgian elite is misinterpreted by some of the members of the Western political community: the Georgians are not referring to the Middle Ages, but mainly to the common European heritage of Antiquity.

Humanitarian studies followed the general trend toward more intensive national awareness;⁵⁰ practically none of the periodicals, the *Archival Bulletin* dealing with the Georgian archives being one of them, proved immune.

The Georgian national-oriented authors plunged into a radical revision of the history of Georgia's relations with Russia, their works being peppered with such words as "victim," "conquerors," "colony," and "colonizers;"⁵¹ cooperation with Russia did nothing good to Georgia—this narrative is carefully cultivated.

A. Jokhadze, for example, believes that "Georgia won only when it refused to draw closer to its northern neighbor, with which it shared the same faith, and followed the political will of the most aggressive Muslim empires. Strategically, this compromise was fraught with obvious distortions of its national and cultural identity; tactically, however, maneuvers and temporary retreats sometimes produced positive results. The 112 years of Muslim rule in Kartli (1632-1744) are the best proof: the country enjoyed relative peace and order, while Georgian culture lived through a renaissance of sorts."⁵²

Preliminary Results: Political Potential of Georgian Europeanism

On the whole, the historical studies in Georgia today based on the European paradigm play an important role in the functioning and reproduction of the nationalist discourse.

⁴⁸ D. Barbakadze, "Mezhdu 'nichto' i 'nechto': nablyudeniia gruzinskogo pisatel'ia," available at [<http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2003/1/barb.html>].

⁴⁹ Quoted from: G. Nodia, op. cit., p. 80 (see also: W. Pfaff, "Europe Has Historical Limits: The Baltics vs. the Caucasus," *The International Herald Tribune*, 28 February, 2004). On the way Georgia is perceived in the European context, see: B. Coppieters, "Georgia in Europe: The Idea of Periphery in International Relations," in: *Commonwealth and Independence in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, ed. by B. Coppieters, A. Zverev, D. Trenin, Frank Cass, 1998.

⁵⁰ For more on the nationalist trends in historical studies and the factor of developing historical imagination in the context of unfolding nationalism, see: G. Kasianov, "'Nationalized' History: Past Continuous, Present Perfect, Future....," in: *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, ed. by G. Kasianov, Ph. Ther, Budapest, New York, 2009, pp. 7-24; M. von Hagen, "Revisiting the Histories of Ukraine," in: *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, pp. 25-50; A. Kappeler, "From an Ethnonational to a Multiethnic to a Transnational Ukrainian History," in: *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, pp. 51-80; Ph. Ther, "The Transnational Paradigm of Historiography and its Potential for Ukrainian History," in: *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, pp. 81-115.

⁵¹ N. Kipshidze, "War between Georgia and Russia, and the Trail of Russian Boots," *Archival Bulletin*, No. 3, 2008, pp. 17-23; K. Rostiasvili, "To the Respected Sons of Abkhazia," *Archival Bulletin*, No. 3, 2008, pp. 11-16; K. Sarsevanidze, "May Almighty Help Us Take Back Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region!" *Archival Bulletin*, No. 3, 2008, pp. 26-37.

⁵² A. Jokhadze, op. cit.

Georgian Europeanism has found its most graphic representation in the formula Georgia/Europe (the West) vs. Russia/Asia (the East).

In fact, Georgian nationalism has already revealed the speed with which it responds to external and internal challenges.

Anthony Smith, for example, believes that “nationalism only becomes of paramount importance ephemerally in crises of nation-building, conquest, external threat, disputed territory, or the internally perceived dominance of a hostile ethnic or cultural group.”⁵³ This is probably wrong. Indeed, Georgian experience shows that nationalism has become institutionalized in the country’s political expanse.

On 24 January, 2005, during the inauguration ceremony in the Gelati monastery complex in Kutaisi,⁵⁴ Mikhail Saakashvili spoke not only of the Christian,⁵⁵ but also of the European Georgian political identity and pointed out that the Georgians were “not merely old, but ancient Europeans.”⁵⁶

The inauguration venue was not a random choice: it symbolized Georgia’s Christianity and its political experience of many centuries. It is the burial place of King David IV the Builder, one of the central figures of Georgia’s national pantheon.

The ceremony was an act of commemoration designed to stress the continuity of Georgia’s medieval and contemporary statehood.

President Saakashvili replaced the Georgian flag designed by the Georgian Social-Democrats in 1918 with a flag featuring five red crosses,⁵⁷ symbolizing, among other things, the country’s religious affiliation⁵⁸ as part of the Georgian national identity.

Under President Saakashvili, the symbolic side of the Georgian nationalist discourse proved to be highly important: Georgian political nationalism greatly relies on historical commemoration to strengthen the nation’s identity.

On 23 November, 2006, a monument to St. George the Victory Bearer was set up on Freedom Square in Tbilisi⁵⁹ to confirm the nationalist or national-oriented discourse in the perception of Geor-

⁵³ A.D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History (Key Concepts)*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003 p. 24.

⁵⁴ For more detail, see: “Catholicos-Patriarch to Bless Saakashvili as President of Georgia,” *InterPress*, 24 January, 2004. On the political component of the civil rituals in the context of developing nationalism, see: A. Krivolap, “Kosntruiruia novoe prostranstvo. Belorusskiy opyt vizualizatsii Dnia Nezavisimosti,” *Palitichnaia sfera*, No. 8, 2007, pp. 81-93.

⁵⁵ It seems that the role of religious trends in the current Georgian nationalist discourse should not be overestimated. Nationalism is largely an anti-traditional ideology. The historical process of modernization of the peripheries was connected with their secularization. On the other hand, religious trends played their role in the slower pace and slower modernization in Central and Eastern Europe, which was trailing behind the West. The correlation between religion and nationalism has been studied in more or less greater detail (see: Ž. Boneta, “Politički identiteti periferija,” *RzS*, Vol. 34, No. 3-4, 2004, pp. 143-158; D. Marinović Jerolimov, “Tradicionalna religioznost u Hrvatskoj 2004: između kolektivnog i individualno,” *SSe*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2005, pp. 303-338; D. Marinović Jerolimov, S. Zrinščak, “Religion Within and Beyond Borders: The Case of Croatia,” *SoC*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2006, pp. 279-290).

⁵⁶ “Georgian President Optimistic about Future in Inauguration Speech,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, 25 January, 2004.

⁵⁷ For more on the state symbols in the context of nationalism, see: B. ZhikiĀ, “Amblemot na trite prsta: kako srbite go konstruiraa vuzuelniot imits na nivniot natsionalen identitet vo devedesettite godini od dvaecettiot vek,” *EAS*, No. 4, 2004, pp. 10-25 (in Serbo-Croatian); I. Lialkou, “Pytanne dziazrzaunay symboliki u Belarusi: gistoria i suchasny stan,” available at [<http://arche.bymedia.net/2002-1/alk102.html>].

⁵⁸ For more on the religious factor in the mainly secularized European societies and nationalisms, see: D. Sekulić, Ž. Šporer, “Religioznost kao prediktor vrijednosnih orijentacija,” *RzS*, Vol. 37, No. 1-2, 2006, S. 1-19; Z. Šram, “Religioznost i društvena svijest: analiza odnosa na uzorku građana Subotice,” *CuS*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2001, pp. 389-419; idem, “Dimenzije etnocentrizma i nacionalna pripadnost,” *DI*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2002, pp. 1-22.

⁵⁹ For more about this event and its intellectual prerequisites, see: Z. Andronikashvili, “Slava bessilia. Martirologicheskaia paradigma gruzinskoy politicheskoy teologii,” *Ab Imperio*, No. 4, 2007, pp. 87-120.

gia's history. On the other hand, the ceremony was symbolic to a certain extent: Georgia presented itself not only as a country which preserved its freedom and identity, but also as a country prepared to defend them.

This moved the country several steps closer to the historical and symbolic background of the political strategy which the political elite has chosen for Georgia and which it is following.
