

Understanding Europeanization in Georgia and Armenia - Discourses, Perceptions and the Impact on Bilateral Relations

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Keywords: Europeanization, Armenia, Georgia, EU, Association agreement, Russia, Customs Union, EurAsEC, discourses, bilateral relations.

Introduction

Post-Soviet Georgia and Armenia have a long history of cooperation with the European Union (EU). With the aim of deepening bilateral ties with the EU, both countries were included in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program. Since 2009, the European Union began negotiating the Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with Georgia and Armenia. Several reforms have been conducted to converge their policy to that of the European Union. But the geopolitical climate has changed significantly.

On 3 September 2013, when the Agreement was finalized in Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia, made an unexpected announcement about the decision to join the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union instead of signing an Association Agreement with the EU. Armenian membership in the EurAsEC Customs Union would be incompatible with the agreements negotiated with the EU¹. Thus, the Armenia–EU

¹ Rettman, A., *Armenia to join Russia trade bloc, surprises EU*, EUObserver, September 3, 2013, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/121304> (accessed on 04.08.2015)

Association Agreement was called off by Armenia in early September 2013, though a revised agreement is still under consideration. Unlike Armenia, EU membership still stays the top priority in the Georgian political agenda and Georgia signed the EU association agreement in 2014.

Despite these geopolitical changes, both Armenia and Georgia are continuing their Europeanization and European integration.

This paper investigates how Europeanization is perceived in Armenia and Georgia, and the different impetuses of Europeanization in the two countries. The research aims to analyze the extent to which the understanding of Europeanization affects Georgia-Armenia bilateral relations. The study shows that Europeanization seems to be an effective tool for the convergence of Georgian and Armenian policies despite the fact that the essence of Europeanization is substantially different in both countries. The research also aims to show how some fields in Armenia “have suffered” as a result of the decision not to sign the Association Agreement. However, the analysis does not reflect the complete picture as it is too early to give a precise assessment, since Armenia and the EU are in an ongoing negotiation over a modified association agreement.

What is Europeanization?

Europeanization consists of the polities and/or public policy contents of EU member states or candidate countries, which converge towards a “European norm” usually manifested by existing European Union (EU) rules, legislation, and institutional frameworks. Helen Wallace, Thomas Risse, and others utilize the term “Europeanization” to signal the development of a European political culture or identity—a “We in Europe” feeling as well as the emergence of a new political entity. Furthermore, Europeanization does not end at the external borders of the European Union. It consists of the export beyond European territory of forms of political organization and governance that are typical and distinct for Europe. Europeanization in this sense concerns relations with non-European actors and

institutions. Europeanization signifies a more positive export/import balance as non-European countries import more from Europe than vice versa².

According to Ladrech 'Europeanization is an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making.'³

Since the 1990s, however, EU scholars have begun to look beyond the formal borders of the EU and study the impact of European governance on external actors. This broadening of the horizon was a result of major developments in European integration. As a consequence of its Single Market Program and a series of enlargement rounds, the EU deepened and expanded its internal market. The size and attractiveness of this market accorded the EU considerable power to shape the economic and public policy rules of global governance and its trading partners. Also, Eastern enlargement was bigger and considerably more intrusive and transformative than previous enlargement rounds.⁴ So, Europeanization has had a considerable impact on the EU's neighborhood. The EaP has facilitated cooperation and integration in a number of policy areas such as trade, energy, transport and the environment. The prospect of visa-free travel, though conditioned upon partner countries' application of Freedom, Justice and Security (FJS) reform and cooperation, is a particularly strong incentive.⁵

² Ugur M., *Europeanization, EU conditionality and governance quality: Empirical evidence on Central and Eastern European countries* // International Studies Quarterly.2012, p. 41 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256023612_Europeanization_EU_Conditionality_and_Governance_Quality_Empirical_Evidence_on_Central_and_Eastern_European_Countries (accessed 04.08.2015)

³ Ladrech R., *Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France* // JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 32:, 1994, p70

⁴ Schimmelfennig F., "Europeanization beyond Europe" // Living Reviews in European Governance 2:1, 2007, p 3. <http://www.livingreviews.org/lreg-2007-1> (accessed 04.08.2015)

⁵ Solonenko I., Shapovalova N., *Is the EU's Eastern Partnership promoting Europeanisation?*. policy brief. FRIDE, September no 97, 2011, p. 2. http://fride.org/download/PB_97_EaP.pdf (accessed 04.08.2015)

This research aims to contribute to the analysis of Europeanization in 2 ways: firstly, it demonstrates the understanding of Europeanization through the lens of non-EU states; and secondly, the paper investigates the effect of Europeanization on the bilateral relations of non-EU states (Georgian and Armenian).

The issue raised in this paper is not what Europeanization "really" is, but whether and how the term can be useful for understanding the dynamics of the political processes in Georgia and Armenia. According to many authors, the EU generates external effects through conditionality, socialization, externalization, and imitation⁶. So, Europeanization is linked with institutional changes. But, the impetus of change is substantially different in Georgia and Armenia.

Theoretical Framework

The paper represents the constructivist approach of Europeanization. Europeanization is what states make of it. In constructivist accounts, social norms have 'communicative, rather than merely referential functions,' ones that 'guide, inspire, rationalize, justify, express mutual expectations'.⁷ Through discursive interactions, agents are constructing social reality (the Europeanization concept). In turn, the structural context contributes to re-shaping agents' preferences and identities.⁸ Interpretative constructivism emphasizes the intersubjective process which underpins common norms and defines social structure. So, Europeanization in Georgia, as well as in Armenia, should be considered in the context of "subjective opinions" about the concept. Europeanization includes "processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU

⁶ Schimmelfennig F., "Europeanization beyond Europe" // Living Reviews in European Governance 2:1, 2007, p 3. <http://www.livingreviews.org/lreg-2007-1> (accessed 04.08.2015)

⁷ Kratochwil F., Ruggie J. G., *International Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State* // International Organization, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Autumn, 1986), p 767-769.

⁸ Ibid p.755

decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies”.⁹ Thus, in this article, the importance and meaning of Europeanization in Georgia and Armenia are considered in accordance with internal political discourses, identity, as well as subjective perceptions of norms and rules.

Methodology

This paper analyzes EU-Armenia and EU-Georgia relations as well as the European integration and Europeanization of these countries. The research investigates “Europeanization” in Georgia and Armenia using discourse analysis. In relation to European integration, discourse analytical approaches have been used to map out the features and form of the European project.¹⁰ In this paper, studying Europeanization implies a discourse analysis of the statements of Georgian and Armenian officials, as well as politician interviews. Here, the focus is on how the integration project is conceptualized as such and what kind of identity it promotes, as well as how it defines the principal goals of Georgian and Armenian European integration by analyzing the spheres (for example: security, economy, conflict resolution) to which it is related, mostly in the public discourse. In this case, public polls can be used as a source of information. Also, with the aim of gaining a thorough picture of the perception of “Europeanization,” the paper uses personal interviews with experts on European Studies and Integration, political analysts and representatives of civil society. The authors have recorded 8 formal interviews in Armenia and Georgia. In addition, the study investigates official documents and statistics through content analysis.

The study tries to explain the meaning of Europeanization in Georgia and Armenia using case study methods. The authors have conducted single case studies in both countries. Furthermore, to investigate the impact of Europeanization on Georgia-Armenia bilateral relations, the research uses

⁹ Bulmer S., Radaelli C., *The Europeanization of National Policy?* // Queen’s Papers on Europeanisation, No 1, 2004, p.4.

¹⁰ Kratochwil F., Ruggie J. G., *International Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State* // International Organization, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Autumn, 1986), p. 760-761.

comparison of the results of two single case studies. Therefore, the last part of the paper represents a comparative case study.

Armenia's Path to Europeanization. The Perception of Europeanization in Armenia.

Armenia and the EU: Historical Background, Ongoing Cooperation.

The Armenia-EU relationship has a long history dating back to 1996, when the EU-Armenia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed. When this Agreement came into force in 1999, the two sides began collaboration in the areas of political dialogue, trade, investment, economy, law-making and culture.

In 2004, together with the other South Caucasus countries, Armenia was included in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Later on, in 2005, an ENP Action Plan for Armenia was published. "*Armenia is invited to enter into intensified political, security, economic and cultural relations with the EU, enhanced regional and cross border co-operation and shared responsibility in conflict prevention and conflict resolution*" reads the Action Plan.¹¹

Armenia's inclusion in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative in 2009 was another move towards deepening EU-Armenia cooperation. Thus, Armenia and the EU began negotiating an Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The negotiations were finalized in July 2013 and expected to be signed at the summit in Vilnius, Lithuania in November 2013. The newly-opened (31 January 2013) EU Center in Yerevan, Armenia, was "set to become the European Union communication hub"¹².

However, after a meeting with the Russian President Vladimir Putin in his Novo-Ogaryovo presidential residence outside Moscow, on September 3, 2013, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan announced that Armenia would join the Russian-led Customs Union instead of signing the

¹¹ EU-Armenia Action plan 2015, 1: http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/action_plans/armenia_enp_ap_final_en.pdf, (accessed 10.08.2015)

¹² EU in Armenia: "*EU Centre Opens Door*" <http://eucentre.am/eu-centre-opens-door/>, (accessed 10.08.2015)

Association Agreement with the EU¹³. Joining the Customs Union would mean engaging in the Eurasian integration process as well.

Reasons behind the Withdrawal of the Association Agreement. The Armenian Public's Reaction to the Sudden U-Turn.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, some post-Soviet countries chose to join any Western initiative which would contribute not only to the prosperity of the 'newborn' countries but also to the disintegration of the Russian Empire. Unlike those countries, Armenia maintained its good relations with the Russian Federation. This is connected with several factors: obviously Russia has great levers over Armenia which have been used in influencing Armenia's Foreign Policy. These levers are namely the territorial dispute, the Armenian large diaspora in Russia, and Russian capital in Armenia.

Thus, the main reason of why Armenia preferred the Moscow-led Customs Union to the Association Agreement with the EU was the country's foremost concern - security. Armenia is blockaded by two of its neighboring countries—Turkey and Azerbaijan, due to existing conflicts with these two neighbors, especially the confrontation involving large-scale military operations alongside the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Armenia and Russia are both members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) military alliance along with four other ex-Soviet countries. Thus, Armenia perceives Russia as its main guarantor of security. In this respect, Armenia is 'dependent' on Russia. Unlike the Russian Federation, the European Union Association Agreement provided no security guarantees. Consequently, having Ukraine as an example, Armenia feared making a new enemy in the Russian Federation. Perhaps Russia gave a slight hint of the possible consequences by selling military equipment worth up to \$1bn to Azerbaijan.

Russia also 'reminded Armenia of its importance' by deporting a number of Armenian citizens working in Russia. Further deportations could have had serious consequences as remittances from Armenian migrant

¹³ *Armenia Chooses Russian Trade Deal over the EU*, September 2013, <http://www.rt.com/business/russia-armenia-customs-eu-391/> (accessed 01.08.2015).

workers in Russia make up 9.1% of Armenia's GDP.¹⁴ In this respect, Armenia is economically dependent on Russia in a way.

Also, Armenia depends on Russia for its energy supply: in May 2013, during debates in the parliament, Armenia's Public Regulatory Commission Chairman Robert Nazaryan said the electricity price would rise from 30 to 38 drams per kilowatt-hour in Armenia. (Electrical Networks of Armenia Closed Joint Stock Company was then a 100% subsidiary of the Russian INTER RAO EES. The company had exclusive rights for the transmission and distribution of electricity to around 950,000 consumers, including the population across Armenia)¹⁵. However, On June 19, 2015 the company announced a 16 percent increase in the electricity tariff starting in August. This decision caused a mass turnout, which earned the name "Electric Yerevan," protesting the hike in electricity rates.

Serzh Sargsyan, the President of Armenia, had said that the country would affiliate itself with the Eurasian Economic Union for trade purposes. "Armenian cognac can't really be sold in Paris," Sargsyan, speaking through a translator, said. "But it does well in the Russian Federation." One-third of Armenia's exports go to Russia and its partners, including agricultural products on which thousands of jobs depend. In addition, Russia sells natural gas to landlocked, energy-poor Armenia "at quite a good price"¹⁶. According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, the first export destination of Armenia is Russia (19% of exported goods) and it is the top import origin of the country (15%) (atlas.media.mit.edu). When one compares this to EU trade with Armenia, where there was a 24.2% export growth rate in 2004, the growth in 2013 and 2014 was consequently 5.0% and -0.4%. The growth of imports in 2005 was 107.7% and dropped

¹⁴ World Bank, Migration & Remittances Data, <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:22759429~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html#Remittances> (accessed 10.08.2015).

¹⁵ ARKA News Agency, "Electricity price to rise from 30 to 38 drams per kilowatt-hour in Armenia", 24.05.2013, http://arka.am/en/news/economy/electricity_price_to_rise_from_30_to_38_dramsperkilowatt_hour_in_armenia/ (accessed 10.08.2015).

¹⁶ The Washington Post, "Why Armenia turned to Russia instead of the West", 07.05.2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2015/05/07/why-armenia-turned-to-russia-instead-of-the-west/>, (accessed 10.08.2015)

to -5.2% and 5.7% respectively in 2013 and 2014 (European Union, Trade in Goods with Armenia, 2014). Nevertheless, the fear of a possible war in Nagorno-Karabagh and of further deportations of the Armenians working in Russia were the most influential reasons behind RA President Serzh Sargisyan's decision to join the Moscow-led Customs Union.

The Armenian public was divided into several groups after the sudden announcement of the President. Most of the young people expressed their disappointment concerning this decision as the majority of the Armenian youth strived for the establishment of core European values - equal rights and opportunities, democratic governance, rule of law, and transparency. And many young people demonstrated their objections to this decision by protesting in front of the presidential residence in Yerevan. However, there were no mass protests in Armenia like the ones in Ukraine. This perhaps confirmed the survey results by Gallup International's local representative Armenian Marketing Association from April 2013. 67 percent of the surveyed had said yes to the question "Should Armenia join the Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus?"¹⁷. However, another survey held in October 2013 by the same Association, showed a result of 64 percent. Aram Navasardyan, Chairman of the Association, told the press on November 27, 2013 that the survey was carried out among 1,067 people in Yerevan and the provinces. According to him, they used a direct method of inquiry, i.e. face-to-face interviews. Yet, according to the EU Neighborhood Barometer survey, conducted in Eastern Partnership Countries in November-December 2012, "85% of respondents wanted a greater EU role in economic development, 87% in trade, 84% in human rights, 74% in democracy, and 78% in regional cooperation"¹⁸.

¹⁷ *Gauging opinion: New survey in Armenia shows 64-percent approval for Customs Union accession*, ArmeniaNow.com, 27.11.2013, http://www.armenianow.com/news/50405/armenia_russia_customs_union_gallup_public_opinion_survey (accessed 30.08.2015)

¹⁸ *ENPI Barometer: Taking the EU Pulse in the Eastern Neighborhood*, EastBook.eu. 03.05.2013, <http://www.eastbook.eu/en/2013/05/country-en/poland-en/enpi-barometer-taking-the-eu-pulse-in-the-eastern-neighbourhood/>. (accessed 30.08.2015)

Meanwhile, there were people, mainly from the older generation, who considered the decision of joining the Customs Union to be the right one. They explained this decision using the existing conflict with Azerbaijan. “I have always said that we should maintain a balanced and good relationship with both Russia and the West. However, we are currently in a hot conflict and the time and circumstances have proven that the decision to join the Customs Union was the right one.”¹⁹

*“If Azerbaijan decides to restore jurisdiction over Nagorno-Karabakh by force, the [Russian] military base may join in the armed conflict in accordance with the Russian Federation’s obligations within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)”*²⁰. This was the announcement of Russia’s 102nd military base commander, Colonel Andrey Ruzinsky, who, according to eurasianet.org, “made the comments in an interview with the Russian military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda*” in November 2013. This announcement was said to be the first publicly made statement by a Russian commander. Thus, if the decision to join the Customs Union was said to be a security strategy, then this choice may be considered satisfactory.

In any case, as barometer.am reports, according to the Eurasian Development Bank Integration Barometer, Armenia had the lowest integration rates in 2015 among other Eurasian Economic Union Countries. As EDB’s survey states, 56% of surveyed Armenians are positive about Armenia joining EurAsEC.

EU-Armenia Current Relations. Opportunities for Future Cooperation

The EU was quite cold towards Armenia after Serzh Sargsyan had announced his unexpected decision, which seemed to put an end to EU-Armenia cooperation. Nevertheless, both sides later expressed a

¹⁹ Personal Interview with Arman Navasardyan, RA former Foreign Deputy Minister, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, interviewed by the author. June 2015, Yerevan.

²⁰ Eurasianet.org: “*Russian Officer: We Would Intervene In Karabakh Against Azerbaijan*”, 1.11.2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67712>, (accessed 10.08.2015)

commitment to continue collaboration. Subsequently, a modified association agreement was signed on January 20, 2015 by the EU Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Johannes Hahn and Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian. Johannes Hahn's visit to Armenia this March restated the willingness for cooperation and a perspective for closer relations. The EU commissioner once again highlighted that the focus appeared to be on issues of democracy, human rights and judicial cooperation.

At the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in 2013, the EU and Armenia (with its 30-member delegation) agreed on the need to update the EU-Armenia Action Plan and build upon the existing framework for cooperation. The EU and Armenia reconfirmed their commitment to further developing and strengthening their comprehensive cooperation aiming at the continuous improvement of democratic institutions and the judiciary, the promotion of human rights and rule of law, good governance, the fight against corruption, strengthening civil society, further improving the framework for enhanced trade and investments, continued implementation of the mobility partnership and increasing sectoral cooperation. The joint statement of High Representative Catherine Ashton and Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian reaffirmed the commitment for cooperation:

*"The EU and Armenia enjoy close links and reconfirm their commitment to further develop and strengthen comprehensive cooperation in all areas of mutual interest within the Eastern Partnership framework. Based on common values, both sides are committed to further cooperation aimed at the continuous improvement of democratic institutions and the judiciary, the promotion of human rights and rule of law, good governance, the fight against corruption, the strengthening of civil society, the further improvement of the framework for enhanced trade and investments, the continued implementation of the mobility partnership and increased sectoral cooperation"*²¹.

²¹ Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, Vilnius, 28-29 November 2013.
http://www.euronest.europarl.europa.eu/euronest/webdav/site/mySite/shared/general_documents/eap_summit/2013-11-28-joint-declaration.pdf (accessed 01. 08.2015)

The ‘negotiations’ between Armenia and the European Union were just talks until October 13. On this day, the EU Foreign Affairs Council granted the European Commission with a mandate for an ‘Enhanced Partnership Agreement.’ Over 2 month later, on December 7, 2015 the EU and Armenia “*opened negotiations on a new overarching framework for the deepening of their bilateral relations. Negotiations were launched by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, Federica Mogherini, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Edward Nalbandian*”²². As the official website of the EU Delegation in Armenia informs:

The future Agreement will replace the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1999) and reset EU-Armenia relations within the wider framework of the recently-reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy and of the Eastern Partnership. It also serves as an opportunity to definitively turn the page following uncertainties created in 2013 when the negotiated EU-Armenia AA/DCFTA could not be completed following Armenia's decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union”.²³

However, even prior to getting the mandate, Armenia and the EU continued the implementation of joint projects, namely in the areas of agriculture, education (more specifically, the Bologna System), energy sector, nature protection and climate change mitigation, entrepreneurship, civil society organizations, and anti-corruption strategy, including e-governance, which is currently working in most structures of the Armenian Government together with an electronic tax return system. More importantly, the talks on the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia are still in progress.

Regardless of the maintenance of cooperation in the above mentioned fields, the youth sector drastically suffered due to recent events, even

²² European Union External Action: Press Release: “*EU and Armenia launch negotiations for a new agreement*”, 07.12.2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151207_04_en.htm, (accessed 07.12.2015)

²³ Ibid.

though the European Union claims to value the importance of civil society organizations, NGOs and other youth initiatives. Artur Najaryan, the president of “Youth Initiative Center” NGO, states that funding from the European Union to Armenian civil society organizations has significantly decreased. “The national agencies for the Youth in Action Project say the funds have decreased for all Eastern Partnership countries. We’re in the second half of the year now but the national agencies have no money left for new projects. If 2 years ago, our NGO could implement 5-6 projects yearly, the funding currently is enough for only 5-6 in the whole region,” says Artur Najaryan. He adds that since the EU claims to value the importance of civil society, he expects better opportunities to appear in 2016²⁴.

Despite the fact that political decisions are hard or impossible to forecast as they are often unprecedented, both sides, Armenia and the European Union, anticipate a tighter relationship and closer cooperation. As the mission of Traian Hristea, Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation in Armenia, is coming to an end soon, he published a speech highlighting 4 years of joint work by the EU and Armenia. “*The EU believes its partnership with Armenia is extremely important, and we are keen to continue deepening relations to promote our common values of democracy, rule of law, human rights and market economy by means of implementing our bilateral agreements. [...] Armenia can rest reassured that the EU will continue to be there to deliver results,*”²⁵ he declared.

Perception of Europeanization in Armenia

Armenian people interpret Europeanization in different ways. Mikayel Hovhannisyanyan, expert in European Studies, European Integration and the EU Eastern Partnership project, says Europeanization simply “includes the

²⁴ Personal Interview with Artur Najaryan, President of Youth Initiative Center NGO, interviewed by the author, June 2015, Yerevan.

²⁵ Mediamax: “*Traian Hristea: Relations with the EU: what do they mean for Armenians?*”, 04.08.2015, <http://www.mediamax.am/en/news/foreignpolicy/15014/>, (accessed 10.08.2015)

set of all the principles which served as the basis for the establishment of the European Union”²⁶.

However, the way Europeanization is defined by the experts varies from the way it is perceived by ordinary people. Interestingly, most often ordinary citizens do not think about the term “Europeanization” when they strive towards European values. They simply vote for sustainable livelihood, social security, and better working conditions. In this regard, Armenia began its Europeanization process long ago and still continues on that path. Heghine Manasyan, Executive Director of CRRC-Armenia, shares this idea and adds that “Europeanization is also a culture, a set of values”²⁷.

Artur Najaryan, the president of Youth Initiative Center (YIC) NGO who has been involved in youth work for around 10 years, and has met a variety of young people from the different regions of Armenia, also realized that the majority of young people identify Europeanization with European integration, freedom of expression, liberty and a secure environment in a secure country. “But the elderly identify it [Europeanisation] with perversion,” he says ²⁸. To be more specific, the older generation is reluctant to accept non-standard sexual orientations and absolute gender equality. This is the main reason behind the negative attitude toward the European Union.

Despite this controversial attitude, Armenia continues its Europeanization mainly through European integration. From this perspective, Armenia began its Europeanization in 1996 when it signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (in force since 1999)²⁹ with the EU. But it is a matter of time and circumstance how long and deep this

²⁶ Personal Interview with Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Expert in European studies, European Integration and EU Eastern Partnership project, interviewed by the author. May 2015, Yerevan.

²⁷ Personal Interview with Heghine Manasyan, Executive Director of “CRRC-Armenia”, interviewed by the author, June 2015, Yerevan.

²⁸ Personal Interview with Artur Najaryan, President of Youth Initiative Center NGO, interviewed by the author, June 2015, Yerevan.

²⁹ Delegation of the European Union to Armenia: Political and Economic Relations, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia/eu_armenia/political_relations/index_en.htm, (accessed 10.08.2015)

process can go. At some point, Russia may not tolerate ties between the EU and Armenia that are too close in nature. For the time being, Armenia seems to have real opportunities for continuing and deepening its Europeanization process as Russia has not yet responded to Armenia's "both/and" political choice. The European Union, in turn, emphasizes the importance of bilateral relations and at every official visit and highlights the areas of cooperation.

Understanding Europeanization in Georgia: Discourse and Perceptions

EU integration is very closely related to the main goals of Georgian statehood. The discourse of EU aspiration is very complex and diverse. It includes different spheres and objectives for Georgia. This section investigates the main narratives related to the EU integration process in Georgia, which help us to analyze the Georgian perspective of European integration.

The EU integration process is an inevitable part of Georgian political discourse and it has been highly represented in Georgian political debates since the 2000s. The aspiration to EU membership is considered as unquestionable foreign policy direction in Georgia. Georgia's leaders - from Shevardnadze to Saakashvili to Ivanishvili have been consistent in saying that Georgia's choice was Europe, and that this was not open for speculation³⁰. Also, Georgia's political opposition, at least those like the Free Democrats and United National Movement that seek to move Georgia towards the West, have said they would do better than the Georgian Dream at moving Georgia in this direction. That is a position that might help them with an already wary electorate³¹.

The EU has both substantive and intangible attractions for Georgia. The substantive attractions include national security, increased economic opportunities and links to one of the world's biggest and most vibrant economies. The intangible appeal is harder to define but also very

³⁰ *Opinion: Georgia's European quest: a question of stamina*, Commonspace.eu, May 2015, <http://commonsplace.eu/eng/news/6/id3271> last seen 04.08.2015 (accessed 04.08.2015)

³¹ *Georgia beyond EU and Russia*, lincolnmitchell.com, July 2015. <http://lincolnmitchell.com/georgia-analysis/2015/7/8/georgia-beyond-europe-and-russia> (accessed 04.08.2015)

significant. This might be described as a sense of belonging to an elite international group and full membership in a family of prosperous and democratic nations. The intangible draw of these Western institutions is very powerful in Georgia, particularly among Georgia's Western-learning political elite³².

The EU and Georgian Identity: Georgian “Europeanness”

First of all, the impetus of Georgia's aspiration towards the EU is its national identity, more specifically its self-perception as a European nation striving to return to the European family. Georgian “Europeanness” is not a recent phenomenon for the country. Identification with the West (Europe) has roots even before the nineteenth century, and intensified after gaining independence in 1991. From then onwards, Georgia declared its commitment to Western values as a priority and aspired to membership of Western institutions³³.

According to Ghia Nodia, historically the bottom line of Georgia's quest for a patron in the West had been its perception of itself as a Western nation. Georgia considered itself to be unlucky, being surrounded by Muslim neighbors and identified itself with the “center of goodness” (Europe)³⁴. Immediately after gaining independence, Georgia declared Western principles as the basis for the country's development³⁵. In this process of self-establishment as a sovereign state, this westward conviction was based on the assumptions that the West should care about Georgia because “the latter intrinsically belongs to the former” and as “the West was

³² *Opinion: Georgia's European quest: a question of stamina*, Commonsense.eu, May 2015, <http://commonsense.eu/eng/news/6/id3271> last seen 04.08.2015 (accessed 04.08.2015)

³³ Minesashvili S., *How European Are We? Explaining Georgia's Westward Aspiration* // Center for Social Science working paper, 2012, p. 6. [http://css.ge/files/documents/Papers/Research_paper_Salome_Minesashvili_\(1\).pdf](http://css.ge/files/documents/Papers/Research_paper_Salome_Minesashvili_(1).pdf) (accessed 04.08.2015).

³⁴ Nodia G., *The Georgian Perception of the West* // Coppieters B., Zverev A. and Trenin D. (eds.), *Commonwealth and Independence in post-Soviet Eurasia*. London-Portland, 1998, p.13.

³⁵ Jones S., *The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy* // *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 19(3) 2003, pp.91-93.

seen as an embodiment of fairness, by definition it was obliged to support just cases and Georgia's claim to independence was clearly just"³⁶.

The idea of Georgia's European identity was always floating around in Georgian political discourse, and from 2000 onwards it was directly reflected in the country's foreign policy. This policy was starkly defined as pro-Western.

In October 2000, a document was prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia entitled 'Georgia and the World: a Vision and Strategy for the Future'. It declared that 'the highest priority of Georgian foreign policy is to achieve full integration in European political, economic and security structures, thus fulfilling the historical aspiration of the Georgian nation to participate fully in the European Community' and that 'deepening cooperation with the [European Union] represents a paramount aim of Georgian foreign policy'. The following statement in the document stresses Georgia's pro-Western orientation: 'Georgia considers cooperation with the United States of America and European countries as the main segment of the strategy of integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures'³⁷.

More drastic change occurred after the Rose Revolution. Throughout the two terms of President Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration was set as a top priority. Drawing from the narrative of Georgia's belonging to the West, these aspirations were based on the country's traditional quest for its place in the European family. In the document of "Foreign Policy Strategy" (2006-2009), the priority of Euro-Atlantic integration was justified by Georgia's belonging to Europe in terms of "geography, and a political, cultural and value system." In official documents, Georgia's belonging to the European family is constantly underlined: "historically, culturally, politically and geographically Georgia is a part of Europe, we fully share European values"³⁸. During his inaugural

³⁶ Nodia G., *The Georgian Perception of the West* // Coppieters B., Zverev A. and Trenin D. (eds.), *Commonwealth and Independence in post-Soviet Eurasia*. London-Portland, 1998, p. 20.

³⁷ Rondeli A., *The Choice of Independent Georgia* // Chuffrin Genady (eds) *The Security of The Caspian Sea Region*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2002, p 196-197.

³⁸ Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia, 2003, p 21

address in 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili, with the banner of the European Union along with the Georgian flag in the background, declared: “[The European] flag is Georgia’s flag as well, since 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 towards European integration. It is time Europe finally saw and valued Georgia and took steps toward us³⁹.

The importance of belonging to Europe is still relevant to the Georgian foreign policy and identity. In 2015, in his annual report, President Margvelashvili emphasized EU integration as a top objective of Georgia: “From a Post-Soviet country to a European State- that is how I defined the goal of my annual report a year ago, and now we have to take a firm step for strengthening the European State.

We are Europe historically as well as culturally, not only a part but also as an active participants in its development and creation through centuries; nevertheless, we could have contributed much more. Due to the geographical distance and separation to a certain extent, we had to defend the values frequently that are significantly important for European civilization, but we had to do so by ourselves, without allies.

This is our current challenge - to firmly establish these values in everyday life, to build a modern, European Georgia based on a rich inheritance; Georgia, centered on an individual - the modern Georgian as the heir of a great culture, and therefore a European citizen^{39,40}.

The EU in the Concept of Georgian Security and the Anti-Russian Foreign Political Choice

The EU is also related to the security of Georgia. Usually, it is considered as part of a wider geopolitical narrative. For example, in 2012, Saakashvili said the following when he addressed the public: “We almost

³⁹ Minesashvili S., *How European Are We? Explaining Georgia’s Westward Aspiration* // Center for Social Science working paper, 2012, p. 8-9. [http://css.ge/files/documents/Papers/Research_paper_Salome_Minesashvili_\(1\).pdf](http://css.ge/files/documents/Papers/Research_paper_Salome_Minesashvili_(1).pdf) (accessed 04.08.2015).

⁴⁰ Annual Report of the President of Georgia, 2015

have what has always lacking throughout history... a powerful family of free nations ready to welcome Georgia, to support and protect its statehood, its freedom, its existence. This family is called NATO and this family is called the EU. This family is called Europe and the Trans-Atlantic Alliance of Democratic Nations. To put it in another way: the West, the horizon we were always looking at without ever fully reaching it⁴¹.

The EU and the European market form the core element of the Georgian energy security strategy. Georgia perceives itself as a transit country, thus defining its importance as a linking point from East to West. The transit of energy resources from the Caspian Sea to the European market is the strategic goal for Georgia. Future development and economical projects have existential meaning for Georgia and they are usually related to Georgian security, sovereignty and even survival. So the EU is a crucial element for the Georgian energy security discourse and is highly represented in Georgian political debates related to energy issues.

Furthermore, the EU should be considered as an anti-Russian choice. For ordinary Georgians, this may present the issue of whether continued hostility towards Russia is a wise economic and security position given that the economic and security benefits of joining the EU and NATO appear to still be a long way in the future. This frames Georgia's choice as a binary one - either the primal satisfaction of full integration into the West or succumbing to the shadowy influence of Moscow.

If the question is framed in this way, the easiest answers are that either Georgia should continue doing what it is doing to get into NATO and the EU, as strengthening institutions and building a more democratic and functional state are worthwhile goals on their own, or that, without imminent membership in these organizations, Russian influence will inevitably grow⁴².

⁴¹ Bolkvadze K., Naylor R., *Popular and Elite Perceptions of the EU in Georgia* // Bachmann V., Muller M.,(eds.) *Perceptions of the EU in Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa: looking in from the outside*. New York: Pagvilan Macmillan Press, 2015, p. 112.

⁴² *Georgia beyond EU and Russia*, lincolnmitchell.com, July 2015. <http://lincolnmitchell.com/georgia-analysis/2015/7/8/georgia-beyond-europe-and-russia> (accessed 04.08.2015)

But, as Tamar Pataraiia has mentioned, the perception of the EU as an anti-Russian alternative is a very simple view. In reality, the EU is more than only a balance to Russian power. Furthermore, only EU mediation can facilitate a Georgian-Russian dialogue. It can also play a positive role in conflict resolution in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region (South Ossetia)⁴³.

On the other hand, Georgia finds it easier to influence Russia using international levers under the Geneva format, but from the Kremlin's point of view, any external involvement (specifically by EU member states and the U.S.) in Russia's sphere of influence is not welcome and may hamper bilateral relations between Russia and Georgia⁴⁴.

The EU as a Normative Power: Reforms, Economy and Building of Political Institutions

Establishing a sustainable, law-based system of governance has become central to Georgia's aspirations of becoming a fully-fledged member of the democratic family of nations, and this goal is repeatedly upheld by politicians of all stripes as essential to the country's development.

The Georgian political elite understands that this path implies consolidating its democratic institutions, the irreproachable state of fundamental rights, and maintaining the successes obtained in the fight against corruption and in the quality of public service, which have been recognized and praised by the international community⁴⁵.

The outspokenly pro-European rhetoric of the Saakashvili government led Elgstrom and Bendgsston to conclude that the Georgian ruling elite largely recognized and shared a positive perception of the EU: the EU is readily acknowledged as a normative leader and performs the role of a

⁴³ Personal interview with Pataraiia Tamar, Head of the European and Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Program at the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, interviewed by the author, July 24, 2015, Tbilisi.

⁴⁴ Gogolashvili K., *The South Caucasus: The European Future* // The South Caucasus 2018 Facts, Trends, Future Scenarios, Konrrd Adenauer Stiftung e.V, 2013, p. 362.

⁴⁵ Kakachia K., *Georgian Politics in Transition: Trends and Obstacles For Potential Transformation* // The South Caucasus 2018 Facts, Trends, Future Scenarios, Konrrd Adenauer Stiftung e.V, 2013, p 44-45.

normative great power as Georgia arranges its transition towards democracy and a market economy along the lines stipulated by the EU⁴⁶.

Economic and trade incentives represent significant drivers of EU-Georgia relations. The ENP Action Plan agreed between Brussels and Tbilisi in 2006 offered Georgia, among other “carrots,” a stake in the EU’s internal market and the opening of their economies to each other. The post-revolutionary government, from its early days, made a very vocal commitment to the idea of a “European” Georgia, and already in 2004, established the ministry of Euro-Atlantic integration in charge of coordinating the country’s rapprochement with the EU and NATO. The ruling elite pushed through a series of radical reforms to curb corruption, strengthen state capacity, promote economic growth and modernize the infrastructure, which were often presented as Georgia’s attempts to align with EU standards and principles. It even inspired some scholars to assume that these reforms exemplified the soft normative power of the EU, which had been able to induce it norms beyond its border⁴⁷.

Public Perception of the EU and New Challenges

Georgian society shares this official aspiration towards the West. 81% agree that Georgia should be in the EU and only 3% disagree. Likewise 79% would vote in favor of membership if a referendum were held tomorrow. In the EU Survey 2011, 55% of Georgians name the EU as important for the country, 64% believe that Georgia should have the closest political cooperation with the EU⁴⁸. One out of every two Georgians agrees with former Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania’s statement “I am Georgian and therefore I am European,” with 59% agreement with the statement and one

⁴⁶ Bengtsson R., Elgström O., *Conflicting Role Conceptions? The European Union in Global Politics* // Foreign Policy Analysis, Vol 8 (1), January 2012, p 105

⁴⁷ Bolkvadze K., Naylor R., *Popular and Elite Perceptions of the EU in Georgia* // Bachmann V., Muller M.,(eds.) *Perceptions of the EU in Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa: looking in from the outside*. New York: Pagvilan Macmillan Press, 2015, pp. 113-114.

⁴⁸ *Knowledge and Attitudes toward the EU in Georgia*, Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC). 2011, p 26-27 http://www.crrc.ge/uploads/files/research_projects/EU_Report_FINAL_Jan25.2012_ENG.pdf . (accessed 04.08.2015)

third disagreement⁴⁹. The majority of Georgians tend to feel as if they belong to Europe. A survey conducted by NDI in 2014 revealed that 79 percent of Georgians support the government's stated goal to join EU⁵⁰.

The Georgian government attempts to improve public awareness about the EU. Since March of 2013, the Information Center on NATO transformed into the Information Center on NATO and the EU. It is functioning under the control of the office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. In particular, a center of this kind is a unique phenomenon in the Eastern Partnership countries. Elene Gotsadze, Director of the Information Center on NATO and the EU, mentioned that the main goal of the center is to improve public awareness about the EU. In particular, after the signing of the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia, the center has attempted to provide useful information to ordinary Georgian citizens. Elene Gotsadze emphasized that EU integration is first of all about democracy and development, but the current Georgian government is trying to reflect the benefits on the lives of ordinary Georgian citizens of the achievements in EU-Georgian relations. She emphasized that economic issues have become more relevant after the Association Agreement. For example, the center is currently attempting to make information accessible to Georgian farmers about the European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD)⁵¹.

The EU integration process enjoys real support in Georgian society. However, one-third of the population (29%) believes that the EU threatens Georgian traditions⁵². Elene Gotsadze underlined that the shifts and instabilities in the geopolitical climate in the Eastern Partnership and the Crimea crisis have led to new challenges for the EU integration process of

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ National Democratic Institute (NDI) Poll, Georgia. August 2014. https://www.ndi.org/Georgia_poll_2014. (accessed 04.08.2015)

⁵¹ Personal interview with Gotsadze Elene, Director of Information Center on NATO and EU, interviewed by the author, July 29, 2015, Tbilisi.

⁵² *Knowledge and Attitudes toward the EU in Georgia*, Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC). 2011, p 33. http://www.crrc.ge/uploads/files/research_projects/EU_Report_FINAL_Jan25.2012_ENG.pdf. (accessed 04.08.2015)

Georgia. She mentioned that Russian soft power is becoming more active in Georgia. Anti-Western propaganda and negative myths are damaging the image of EU. Identity issues are the most sensitive ones. Some groups consider EU integration as the end of a distinct Georgian identity and a danger for Georgian culture and traditional values. Misunderstandings about the Association Agreement and a lack of information about the reality in the EU have provoked a fear in highly religious groups about the legalization of LGBT weddings. She underscored that Russian soft power tries to rouse nihilism and hopelessness about the future membership of Georgia in the EU. But a positive public perception of the EU should be maintained by the tangible results of the EU integration process, for example visa liberalization could really play such a positive role⁵³.

To conclude, the Georgian perspectives of EU integration are related to many issues. First of all, the impetus of the EU integration process is the Georgian national identity. Secondly, the EU is considered in Georgian political discourse as a means towards and a role model for the development and prosperity of country and is represented as a normative power. Also, the EU is usually perceived as a guarantee of Georgian security and a mediator in Georgian-Russian relations. But, the dynamics of Georgian-EU relations and the Association Agreement have led to new challenges. Currently, public awareness of the EU is more detailed and pragmatic. The economic benefits and tangible results of EU-Georgian relations has reshaped the perception of EU integration in the Georgian political discourse. It is becoming more realistic and result-oriented.

Conclusion

As a result of the two case studies conducted in Georgia and Armenia, the paper reveals the main perceptions and political discourses of Europeanization in both countries. From the Georgian perspective, Europeanization is a foreign political choice. It is closely related to very existential aspects of Georgian statehood – security, identity, foreign policy... Europeanization is considered as an alternative to a pro-Russian

⁵³ Personal interview with Gotsadze Elene, Director of Information Center on NATO and EU, interviewed by the author, July 29, 2015, Tbilisi.

policy. Usually, it is seen as the best way to be free of the Russian sphere of influence. Armenia has also pursued its way into deep European Integration/Europeanization, however currently Armenia does not perceive Europeanization as the only political choice. Though the Armenian government has preferred the Russian-led Customs Union over the Association Agreement, Armenia maintains a good relationship with the EU, stressing the importance of Armenia-EU relations. In case of Armenia, the focus appears to be on issues of democracy, human rights and judicial cooperation. To sum up, the impetus of Georgian Europeanization is conditionality. Conditionality is a direct mechanism of Europeanization, which is based on the EU's manipulation of other actors' cost-benefit calculations. The EU seeks to disseminate its governance rules by setting them as conditions for external actors. The Armenian perspective of Europeanization is different. Unlike Georgia, in Armenia Europeanization is not regarded as incompatible with pro-Russian policy. Though Armenia has preferred the Eurasian Economic Union over the Association Agreement, Europeanization remains of great importance for the country. It is viewed as a way towards progress, modernization, and democratization. And due to the bilateral commitment and the will constantly voiced and highlighted by the European Union officials and Armenia, both sides are actively continuing negotiations and efforts for a new agreement.

To conclude, the Europeanization of Armenia is essentially different from the Georgian case. Therefore, in Georgia, the "Europeanization" of Armenia is not perceived as being very genuine and decisive. Due to the character of Georgian "Europeanization", Georgians have found this concept incompatible with friendship with Russia, as it exists in the Armenian case.

In spite of the different approaches to "Europeanization" in Georgia and Armenia, the Euro-integration process has had positive effects on the bilateral relations of these countries. Until 2013 (when Armenia declared its decision to join the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union instead of signing an Association Agreement with the EU), in the context of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) project Georgia and Armenia had the same political agenda and challenges. The geopolitical changes in the region provoked some misunderstandings Armenia and Georgia about each other in, but the

Euro-integration process remained as a means to focus on the same interests, rather than differences. Thus, the Euro-integration might have great potential for improving the bilateral relations of these neighboring Caucasian countries.

Though the diverging foreign policy paths of Armenia and Georgia (one joining the Eurasian Economic Union, the other signing an association agreement with the EU respectively) could seriously risk the bilateral relationship between the neighbors, both countries have voiced their will to continue their good relations. During his visit to Tbilisi in June 2014, the Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan “reaffirmed a sincere desire and commitment to working [...] in the spirit of friendship and mutual understanding” (President.am, 2014). President Sargsyan stressed the importance of bilateral official visits in the process of cooperation development. A number of official visits from both sides have followed this statement.

**Հասկանալով եվրոպականացումը
Հայաստանում և Վրաստանում. դիսկուրսներ,
ընկալումներ և ազդեցությունը երկկողմանի
հարաբերությունների վրա**

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Հոդվածը վերլուծում է Հայաստանի և Վրաստանի հարաբերությունները Եվրամիության հետ՝ համեմատելով երկու երկրներում եվրաինտեգրման գործընթացը: Հետազոտությունը նպատակ ուներ ուսումնասիրելու երկու երկրներում եվրոպականացման հասարակական ընկալումը: Այս ընկալման մասին պատկերացում կազմելու համար օգտագործվել է դիսկուրս-վերլուծության մեթոդը, մասնավորապես՝ հոդվածում տեղ են գտել երկու երկրների պաշտոնատար անձանց կողմից արված հայտարարությունների, հաղորդագրությունների և զեկույցների, քաղաքական գործիչների, վերլուծաբանների և մասնագետների հետ հարցազրույցների վերլուծությունները: Քննարկվում են նաև եվրաինտեգրման գործընթացում Հայաստանի և Վրաստանի հիմնական դրդապատճառները, համագործակցության հիմնական ոլորտները: Ի լրումն, հոդվածը վերլուծում է Հայաստանի և Վրաստանի վարած տարբեր արտաքին քաղաքականության ազդեցությունը երկու հարևան երկրների հարաբերությունների վրա: