



B | S | T The Black Sea Trust
for Regional Cooperation
A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND



Daria Gaidai

FOREIGN POLICY AUDIT: UKRAINE- GEORGIA

DISCUSSION PAPER





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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Ukraine's interests toward Georgia and Georgia's interests toward Ukraine	7
2.1. Pragmatism of Georgia's new foreign policy	7
2.2. Together in the waiting room for the EU and NATO	12
2.3. Ukraine and Georgia: friends but no longer allies?	17
2.4. Common economic interests: transit, energy, and trade	22
3. Existing and potential risks and conflicts	30
4. Stakeholders, interest groups, and groups of influence	36
Recommendations	41
Acknowledgments	44

1. INTRODUCTION

Arriving in Tbilisi, everyone sees the “Georgia is the associate member of the EU” banner at the airport. Some perceive this slogan skeptically, others – as an expression of “positive thinking” (or national branding), and those who are not interested in politics could even think they are in the European Union. Orientation toward Europe is not a new trend in Georgian politics. The idea that Georgia is part of Europe, i.e. part of the Christian world, has always been an important element of Georgian identity. Over the last two decades, Georgia has been desperate to get rid of its post-Soviet identity and association with unstable and dangerous Caucasus region.¹ Tbilisi’s efforts aimed at escaping from the troubled region and becoming part of the European and Euro-Atlantic space, which have been critically perceived by many observers, meet less and less resistance from the Western partners today.

Aside from security motives, an important role in shaping Georgia’s pro-Western course belongs to economic considerations. Its nearest neighbors, stuck in a period of transition, had little to offer Georgia in terms of modernization and economic development. For Georgia, the path to Europe lies through the restoration and consolidation of its Black Sea identity, i.e., through strengthening cooperation with the Black Sea countries, including Ukraine. Therefore, partnership with Ukraine is a component of Georgia’s broader strategy of repositioning itself in the world to consolidate its integration with the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. But there is more to it.

Given the difference in potentials, the absence of a common border, and other factors, the partnership between Ukraine and Georgia has always been motivated politically rather than economically. The two countries were attracted by their geopolitical considerations and mutual desire to counter Russian influence and achieve closer cooperation with European countries. Georgia remembers the aid provided by Ukraine during the war in Abkhazia, as well as the

¹ *Kornely Kakachia, European, Asian, or Eurasian?: Georgian Identity and the Struggle for Euro-Atlantic Integration // Georgian Foreign Policy The Quest for Sustainable Security, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2013, p. 49.*

support during the five-day war with Russia in 2008. However, values should not be underestimated as a factor, because the period of greatest rapprochement between Georgia and Ukraine came after democratic revolutions (2003 in Georgia and 2004 in Ukraine), which created some sense of ideological affinity between the two post-Soviet countries. Also, religion is important for Georgia. Located next to the powerful Muslim states, Georgia has always sought a Christian ally (the so-called Suliko²), a friendly state, which would help it maintain independence, identity, and relations with Europe.³ For a long time, this role was filled by Russia, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union, amid worsening relations between Tbilisi and Moscow, Ukraine took the place of Suliko in Georgian politics⁴. Although Kyiv and Tbilisi do have not many interests in common today, as noted by Georgian analysts, Georgia is more closely connected with Ukraine than with other countries of the region in terms of practical dimension and values.⁵

Ukraine's interests toward Georgia and Georgia's interests toward Ukraine are the same on the top level: support for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of each other and unconditional support for the implementation of the European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of each other.

² *Suliko means soul in Georgian language.*

³ *Kornely Kakachia, Finding Suliko. What influences Georgia's foreign policy and its domestic perception, Tyzhden, 07/30/2016, <http://tyzhden.ua/World/170646>*

⁴ *«Friendly country» – this was the first association with Ukraine amongst the Georgian experts and journalists surveyed by the Institute of World Policy in 2011. As they noted, the word «Ukraine» in Georgia is always associated with something pleasant». For more see IWP policy paper "Ukraine's Soft Power in the Region: The tool for effective foreign policy", Kyiv, 2011, http://iwp.org.ua/img/myaka_syla_eng.pdf*

⁵ *Jonathan Kulick and Temuri Yakobashvili. "Georgia and the Wider Black Sea" in: Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott. (eds). The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: strategic, economic and energy Perspectives. Washington, D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University and Vienna: Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, 2008. – p. 51*

Other interests emphasized by Kyiv and Tbilisi include the following:

Ukraine's interests toward Georgia:

- security and military cooperation to counter the aggressive policies of Russia;
- strengthening economic cooperation, including increasing Ukrainian investments in Georgia;
- expanding the soft power of Ukraine in Georgia;
- use of Georgia's transit potential;
- learning from the Georgian experience of reforms, of policy on occupied territories and finding solutions to the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Georgia's interests toward Ukraine:

- **mutual support and coordination of activities at the international forums;**
- Ukraine's active participation in ensuring stability and security in the Black Sea region;
- increasing trade turnover and tourist flow between the two countries;
- Ukraine's assistance in the development of Georgia's transit potential.

The areas of cooperation of mutual interest are maritime security, transport, energy, agriculture, vocational technical education, and certain specialties in higher education.

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

2.1. PRAGMATISM OF GEORGIA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY

The need to resist pressure from Moscow was one of the factors of rapprochement between Ukraine and Georgia in the 1990s. It is indicative that Ukraine's only mutual assistance agreement with a foreign country is the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance signed with Georgia in 1993. Georgians do not forget the aid provided by Ukraine in 1993 and 2008. In 1993, for instance, Ukrainian helicopters evacuated Georgians from Abkhazia, saving over 7,600 people.

Warm relations between Kyiv and Tbilisi remain a kind of constant in the foreign policies of Ukraine and Georgia, regardless of changes in governments and political courses in both countries. Furthermore, despite the difference in potentials, this alliance remains the union of two equal allies, which is highly appreciated in Tbilisi. As stressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Ukrainian diplomacy immediately reacts to all violations of Georgia's territorial integrity as if it were the territory of Ukraine. Friendly relations at the state level have been nourished by friendly sentiments between the two nations despite the fact that contacts between them have actually been quite limited.

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Georgia condemns Russian aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, consistently supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country, and is a co-author of resolutions and declarations on Ukrainian issues within the UN, OSCE, and other international organizations. Georgian parliament has adopted three resolutions in support of the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

In 2014, Tbilisi was among the first foreign states to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine by sending 12 tons of cargo (with the total value of 600 000 dollars). In 2014 and 2015, Georgia provided rehabilitation and recovery to over 250 children from the zone of the counter-terrorist operation and more than 50 wounded soldiers. In

July 2015, Georgia allocated USD30,000 to finance the UN action plan to address the humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine. However, for now Georgia's support for Ukraine has its limits, especially in political and military terms.

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After the victory of the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition in the 2012 parliamentary elections, Tbilisi's policy in the region has become more restrained and reconciliatory.

The new Georgian leadership has abandoned the confrontational rhetoric toward Russia,⁶ focusing primarily on economic issues. As repeatedly stated by the GD leader Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgia should not be a source of conflict between the West and Russia.⁷ The new approach had to affect Ukraine. Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 changed the regional context significantly, putting an extremely difficult task before the Georgian government: on the one hand, Tbilisi thought it necessary to show its support for Ukraine, while on the other, it did not want to jeopardize the recently recovered economic ties with Russia. As a result, the Georgian government has adopted a rather cautious stance on Kyiv in order not to irritate Moscow, although the representatives of the Georgian Dream coalition may personally have friendly sentiments toward Ukraine.⁸

The current "pragmatic" approach of Georgian authorities is aimed at establishing a *modus vivendi* with Russia, which would prevent or significantly reduce the likelihood of military confrontation. It is based on the belief that Georgia's security is impossible without a certain level of normalization of relations with Russia. It should be noted in this context that since Eduard Shevardnadze, every Georgian leader came to power with the promise to improve (or at least normalize)

⁶ Kornely Kakachia, *The Ukraine Crisis: Repercussions on Georgia*, http://www.academia.edu/11900526/The_Ukraine_Crisis_Repercussions_on_Georgia

⁷ Former Prime Minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili: *Patience is the key in relations with Russia*, RIA Novosti, 06/03/2016, <http://ria.ru/world/20160603/1442261445.html#ixzz4H1t7A4jN>

⁸ *The open sympathy of the Ukrainian government toward the Georgian Dream's opponents, reinforced by the suspicious attitude of Kyiv toward the GD-formed government, remains an important factor.*

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

relations with Russia. Mikheil Saakashvili was no exception: during his first term in the presidential office, he made several attempts to bring the Kremlin to terms with Tbilisi's pro-Western course. Moreover, Tbilisi believes that the easing of its tense relations with Russia will help increase the chances of Georgia's further integration with the European and Euro-Atlantic political, economic, and security space.

However, the Russian-Georgian normalization that occurred after 2012 has significant limitations. Georgia does not waive demands for the restoration of its territorial integrity and maintains its course on integration with the EU and the NATO. The restoration of diplomatic relations is also off the agenda as long as part of Georgia is occupied. Russian aggression against Ukraine and the West's indecisiveness somehow convinced Tbilisi of the effectiveness of the chosen strategy. This "pragmatic and realistic" approach to foreign policy, as it is described by GD representatives, is supported by Georgian society. According to an opinion poll, the pro-Western course combined with preserving good relations with Russia is supported by 51% of Georgians. The second most favorable option (16%) is a pro-Russian course combined with preserving good relations with the EU and the NATO. A mere 14% support orientation only toward the West. It should be noted that half of the respondents (47%) identified Russia as the greatest threat to Georgia, and almost a third (27%) could not answer.⁹

It should be noted that the US and leading EU states were also interested in improving Georgian-Russian relations. In 2009, the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged Georgia to show "strategic patience" regarding reintegration of the occupied territories. The restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity is a perfect scenario, but not a priority for Western countries which primarily seek to prevent the resumption of hostilities. Therefore, the policy of "strategic patience", as noted by commentators, is aimed at maintaining the status quo, i.e., recognition of the impossibility to change the

⁹ *Results of an opinion poll conducted in Georgia from February 23 to March 14, 2016 by NDI via CRRC Georgia, involving 3,900 respondents, with sample error less than 1.6%. https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf*

situation in the current conditions and a hope that these conditions will improve in the future.¹⁰ This position currently finds support and understanding among Georgian officials. For instance, Georgia's Minister of Defense has stated directly that "strategic patience is the very instrument which Georgia needs the most today and which will help it be a better European country".¹¹

Certainly, this does not mean that Tbilisi has forgotten about Abkhazia and South Ossetia or changed its position on Russian occupation of Georgian territory. However, according to Tbilisi, excessive attention to these issues could only harm Georgia's interests at present. This position of "non-resistance",¹² as critics of the Georgian Dream call it, stands in sharp contrast to the previous period when Tbilisi sharply reacted to any provocative actions of the separatist regimes or Russia. The major argument against "strategic patience" is that this policy has not brought any improvements, and the situation with the occupied territories remains tense. Russian border guards have built a barbed-wire fence between South Ossetia and Georgia. Furthermore, a conflict occurred on the demarcation line with Abkhazia in July 2016 when a Georgian citizen was killed by the Abkhaz police. Moscow's signing of agreements on "cooperation and integration" (2015)¹³ with Abkhazia and South Ossetia has shown that high conflict potential remains in the region, as the West has limited opportunities to influence the situation.

¹⁰ Michael Hikari Cecire, *What Does 'Strategic Patience' Mean in Current Context*, *Civil Georgia*, 03/19/2015, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28150>

¹¹ *Defense Minister Speaks of Upcoming NATO Summit*, *Civil Georgia*, 04/23/2016, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29116>

¹² David Beritashvili, *Georgia: the Lessons of the War of 2008, The Day*, 08/08/2016, <http://day.kyiv.ua/ru/article/den-planety-mirovye-diskussii/gruziya-uroki-voyny-2008>

¹³ *For details on Ukraine's position, see the Statement by the MFA of Ukraine on signing of the so-called "alliance and integration" treaty between the Russian Federation and the self-proclaimed republic of South Ossetia (Tskhinvali region, Georgia)*, 03/20/2015, <http://mfa.gov.ua/ua/press-center/comments/3182-zajava-mzs-ukrajiniu-zvjazku-z-pidpisannyam-tzv-dogovoru-pro-sojuznictvo-ta-integraciju-mizh-rf-ta-samoprogoloshenoju-respublikoju-pivdenna-osetijackhinvalyskij-region-gruzija>

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

Kyiv perceives the declining importance of foreign policy issues on Georgia's agenda as a reflection of Tbilisi's distancing itself from the regional problems due to Russian aggression at best and as its drift toward Moscow at worst. Currently, military cooperation between the two countries is focused primarily on training and rehabilitation of the personnel of Ukraine's Armed Forces and National Guard,¹⁴ although there is parallel volunteer military aid: about a hundred former Georgian servicemen are involved in the hostilities on the side of Ukrainian army.¹⁵ The official Tbilisi has distanced itself from these volunteers and only promised not to punish their participation in hostilities in Donbas.

On the other hand, a strong belief prevails in Georgia that Russian aggression against Ukraine would not occur if the international community showed greater determination during the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, i.e., the weak reaction of the West to the invasion of Russian troops in Georgia made the Kremlin confident that it would get away with the annexation of Crimea. Aggression against Ukraine, given the absence of any provocations by the latter, has become evidence of the Kremlin's aggressive policy against its neighbors. In this regard, Georgia has certain expectations that events in Ukraine will force the West to take more decisive steps to ensure security in the Black Sea region and counter Russia's attempts to control the post-Soviet states.¹⁶

¹⁴ *In particular, Ukraine is interested in Georgia's experience in mountain infantry training and the training of the special operations forces. See the statement by the press service of the General Staff of the AFU: <http://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2015/10/21/v-ramkah-oficzijnogo-vizitu-do-gruzii-vidbulasya-zustrich-nachalnikiv-generalnih-shtabiv-zbrojnih-sil-ukraini-ta-gruzii-/>*

¹⁵ *The interview with General Georgi Kalandadze, former head of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces of Georgia, Rustavi2, 01/20/2015. <http://rustavi2.com/en/news/7891>*

¹⁶ *Kornely Kakachia, The Ukraine Crisis: Repercussions on Georgia, http://www.academia.edu/11900526/The_Ukraine_Crisis_Repercussions_on_Georgia*

2.2. TOGETHER IN THE WAITING ROOM FOR THE EU AND NATO

Another aspect that brings Ukraine and Georgia closer is their desire to become members of the EU and the NATO: for years, Kyiv and Tbilisi have been moving together toward the common goal and implementing reforms in their own ways. However, in recent years the “package” approach to Georgian and Ukrainian integration with the EU and the NATO is gradually losing support among Georgian experts and officials, as Tbilisi is currently well ahead of Kyiv in terms of reforms. The fact that this “gap” might provoke conflicts between the partners has been evidenced by the situation with granting Ukraine and Georgia visa-free regime with the EU. The desire of Ukrainian representatives to sync the process so that the decisions on Ukraine and Georgia would be made at the same time angered the Foreign Ministry of Georgia¹⁷. On the eve of parliamentary elections, the Georgian authorities also needed good news from Brussels.

Unlike Ukraine, Georgia has shown more consistency and confidence in the area of European and Euro-Atlantic integration

Unlike Ukraine, Georgia has shown more consistency and confidence in the area of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Integration with Western political and security structures has been the objective of every Georgian government, while Georgia’s short-lived participation in the integration projects of post-Soviet space (CIS) was a forced move. Tbilisi made the first statement on its intention to become a full NATO member in 2002 under President Shevardnadze when Georgian parliament adopted a resolution to start the process of NATO integration. For Georgia, NATO membership is not only a matter of security but also a confirmation of its identity as a Western, modern European state.¹⁸ According to the analysts, the intensity of Georgian efforts to gain the NATO membership suggests that the Euro-Atlantic aspirations remain one of the key elements of Georgia’s foreign policy.

¹⁷ *The interview with former member of Georgian government, 31/08/2016.*

¹⁸ *Michael Hikari Cecire, Security and Symbolism: Georgia’s NATO Aspirations in Perspective // Georgian Foreign Policy The Quest for Sustainable Security, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2013, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_37002-1522-1-30.pdf*

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

In 2008, at the NATO summit in Bucharest, Ukraine and Georgia jointly announced their intentions to become NATO members. Eight years later, the delegations of the two countries came to the NATO summit in Warsaw with absolutely different agendas. While Ukraine is only establishing effective cooperation with NATO, Georgia considers the ways in which it can reap the benefits of its significant progress toward membership. Therefore, in cooperation with the Alliance Tbilisi seeks to follow an individual track, apart from Ukraine. And it is not only due to the gap in reforms in the security sector or the conflict in the Donbas (although these are also factors). The main reason is that for a long time there was a lack of clear public support for NATO membership. According to recent polls, the level of support for Euro-Atlantic integration has increased significantly in Ukraine, but it is still within the range of 50%, while integration with NATO is supported by 77% of Georgia's citizens.¹⁹ On the other hand, it should be noted that while supporting Euro-Atlantic integration, Georgians do not believe that NATO is able to guarantee the security of Georgia. When asked which country or organization could offer the most security for Georgia, only one in five respondents (23%) chose NATO, while 32% could not answer.²⁰

In cooperation with the Alliance Tbilisi seeks to follow an individual track, apart from Ukraine

On the eve of the NATO summit in Warsaw, Georgia's Defense Minister stressed that Georgia had to approach the issue of NATO membership realistically, as currently there is no consensus on further expansion among the 28 NATO member states. The summit decided to enhance the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package that provides support in 13 different defense and security areas related to military service sectors. A joint declaration confirmed Euro-Atlantic prospects of Georgia

¹⁹ *Results of the opinion poll conducted in Georgia from 23 February to 14 March 2016 by NDI via CRRC Georgia, involving 3,900 respondents, with the sample error of less than 1.6%. https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf*

²⁰ *The EU and Russia as the guarantors of Georgia's security have been both chosen by 13% of respondents. The highest rate of sympathizers of Russia has been shown by the national minorities residing on the territory of Georgia.*

and noted its significant progress toward the membership.²¹ One of the main achievements was the Alliance's confirmation regarding Georgia's participation in the NATO strategic dialogue on the security of the Black Sea region.²² At the same time, NATO representatives noted the need to involve Ukraine in the process.

The experience of the last five years shows that NATO appreciates the "stability" of Georgia's relations with Russia and separatist regions. Moreover, the Alliance noted that the Georgian Dream government did not slow down the pace of reforms and even "pushed harder" than its predecessors in certain areas.²³ According to Georgian analysts, there are areas in which Georgia is ahead of certain NATO members.²⁴ The fact of inclusion of Georgian forces in NATO's Response Force has even been regarded by the Ministry of Defense as evidence of Georgia's de facto integration into NATO's military structures.

The NATO-Georgian Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC), opened in Georgia in 2015, provides joint training for soldiers from the NATO member states and Georgia. Furthermore, the Defense Institution Building School, the only education center in the region that trains specialists on security issues according to the NATO standards and methodology, was opened. In addition, in 2014, as further proof of Georgia's special relations with NATO, it was included in the list of NATO's top five "most compatible partners" that have made a "special contribution" to the Alliance's operations worldwide.²⁵

²¹ *Joint statement of the NATO-Georgia Commission at the level of Foreign Ministers, 8 July 2016, Warsaw, Poland, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133175.htm*

²² *Georgia and the NATO summit in Warsaw: the Expectations Were Met, Golos Ameriki, 08/11/2016, <http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/nc-georgia-and-nato-summit-outcome/3413282.html>*

²³ *Georgia Looking Better for NATO, The National Interest, 05/23/2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/georgia-looking-better-nato-8510>*

²⁴ *Michael Hikari Cecire, Security and Symbolism: Georgia's NATO Aspirations in Perspective // Georgian Foreign Policy. The Quest for Sustainable Security, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2013, p. 74.*

²⁵ *Rasmussen: Substantive Package to Prepare Georgia for NATO Membership, Civil Georgia, Tbilisi, 09/05/2014, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27642>; Georgia is compatible with NATO, says Defence Minister Alasania, Agenda.ge, 09/05/2014, <http://agenda.ge/news/20616/eng>*

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

Even though it is a small country, Georgia has the largest contingent in Afghanistan among the NATO partner countries. Therefore, Georgia already has what Ukraine is still working to obtain – enhanced cooperation with the Alliance.

For years, Kyiv has been among the major military and political partners of Tbilisi. Even though the situation has changed by now, military and technical cooperation is one of the most active areas in the bilateral

Military and technical cooperation is one of the most active areas in the bilateral relations

relations. It includes the supply of Ukrainian armaments and military equipment and the maintenance of the latter. For instance, Georgians are interested in having former Soviet aircraft that remains in service with the Armed Forces of Georgia repaired at Ukrainian plants or at Georgian plants with the assistance of Ukrainian experts. Furthermore, Georgia is ready to cooperate with Ukrainians on modernizing SU-24 and SU-25 type aircrafts with electronic aviation safety equipment manufactured in Israel. Finally, Tbilisi is interested in Kyiv's assistance in modernizing Georgia's military industrial complex.

The general staffs of the two countries are in constant contact, and the visits of their heads take place on a regular basis. Ukraine's and Georgia's military units participate in multinational exercises under the auspices of NATO within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program. In 2015 and 2016, Georgian troops participated in the Sea Breeze exercises in Ukraine, while 15 Ukrainian soldiers have completed an international program of mountain training in Georgia.

The Georgian military is ready to assist its Ukrainian counterparts in training mountain infantry units and training Ukrainian soldiers according to NATO's standards in the Georgian Sergeants School. Tbilisi has also offered instructors to train snipers. In turn, Kyiv is ready to admit Georgian officers to Ukrainian military schools.

In the area of European integration, Georgia is also ahead of Ukraine on several criteria. It is the fastest reforming country in the Eastern Partnership. However, while the "package approach" in relations with NATO and the EU currently no longer meets the interests of Tbilisi and Kyiv, mutual coordination and exchange of experience on this

path could significantly strengthen both countries. Tbilisi has repeatedly stated that “Ukraine’s success is the success of Georgia and vice versa”.²⁶ For Georgia, a strong and successful Ukraine is a guarantee of greater stability and security in the Black Sea region. It is not possible to remain an “island of stability” and thrive in a stormy and troubled region. However, not only security and foreign policy but also internal reforms are at stake here. It should be noted that the success of Georgian reforms has undoubtedly been one of the catalysts of Ukraine’s movement for reforms, providing clear evidence that a post-Soviet country can fight corruption effectively. It is also important to note that the EU and NATO still tend to consider Ukrainian and Georgian issues as interconnected, regardless of their leaders’ intentions. Success or failure of one of these countries on the path of reforms would have a significant impact on the other’s communication with the EU and NATO.

The Georgian side has repeatedly stated the need for coordination of efforts between the three countries that have signed the Association Agreement with the EU and face common security challenges

The Georgian side has repeatedly stated the need for coordination of efforts between the three countries that have signed the Association Agreement with the EU and face common security challenges.

However, Tbilisi understands well that Ukraine should take a leading role in this process. Restoring active cooperation between the countries in the region is important for the efforts of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova against “creeping” Russian aggression in the post-Soviet space, and Ukrainian-Georgian partnership is crucial as a center of attraction for the others. Currently, this tripartite dialogue has only been launched at the civil society level and between the parliaments.

In April 2015, during the visit of the Georgian parliamentary delegation headed by the Speaker David Usupashvili, the establishment of a platform for the coordination of actions to implement the Association Agreement with the EU between the parliaments of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova was announced. As soon as a month later, the first meeting of the members of the parliamentary committees for European integration and foreign policy of Ukraine, Georgia, and

²⁶ *Interviews with Georgian politicians and state officials.*

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

Moldova took place in Tbilisi,²⁷ and the next one is scheduled for 2016 in Kyiv. In the final joint declaration, the committee heads stressed the importance of “coordinated diplomatic” efforts to address common security challenges and agreed to meet annually in order to “assess, coordinate, and set the political agenda for political association and economic integration”. On top of that, the decision has been made to establish interparliamentary working groups and maintain regular communication between the committees to exchange information and experience.

In the long term, it is in the interests of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova to develop relations such as those that exist between the Baltic States or the Visegrad Four. Certainly, ensuring the unity within the trio will take time. Analysts' advice is to start with small steps,²⁸ such as regular meetings to exchange experience on the implementation of the Association Agreement, coordination of actions in international organizations, or initiating joint infrastructure projects. These steps have been already voiced at the highest level. The next stage is to deepen economic cooperation in the areas of mutual interest.

2.3. UKRAINE AND GEORGIA: FRIENDS BUT NO LONGER ALLIES?

If a decade ago relations between Georgia and Ukraine were considered dynamic and strategic, they are described as passive and asymmetrical in 2016. Ukraine is losing its importance for Georgia, while Georgia is slowly disappearing from the agenda of Ukraine as it focuses all its attention and efforts on the European direction.

According to a Ukrainian official, “the team that is currently ruling Georgia does not seem to know Ukraine's place in its policies.”²⁹ However, the situation is not better on the Ukrainian side: when

²⁷ *Senior MPs from Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine Agree to Boost Coordination, Civil Georgia, 05/06/15, http://www.civil.ge/eng_old/article.php?id=28245*

²⁸ *Emerging trio in the post-Soviet scene? The New Eastern Europe, 03/08/2016, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1913-emerging-trio-in-the-post-soviet-scene>*

²⁹ *Interview with a representative of Ukrainian government, 16/03/2016.*

forming the policies toward Georgia, Kyiv takes into account situational interests. A lack of strategic vision is combined with a lack of operational planning and coordination for achieving common goals and overcoming common threats.³⁰ Significantly, for over a year now no Ukrainian Ambassador has been appointed yet to this country in the South Caucasus.

A lack of strategic vision is combined with a lack of operational planning and coordination for achieving common goals and overcoming common threats

Today, Georgia's main foreign partners are the United States, the European Union, and Turkey. Turkey is a political and economic counterweight to Russia in the region, being not only a major source of investments for Georgia but also a partner in the security sphere.³¹ And while the weight of Ankara in the region and Turkish activity in Georgia are increasing, Kyiv's potential and opportunities are dropping, particularly due to slow reforms and continued hostilities in the Donbas. In this context, the dialogue on simplifying the customs procedures is indicative. While the customs authorities of Georgia and Turkey are already engaged in electronic information exchange (eTIR), Ukraine and Georgia (within the framework of GUAM) are only considering the conditions of such exchange for approval.³²

For the last two years, both Georgian and Ukrainian officials have been trying to hide the problems in bilateral relations, stressing mutual respect, understanding, and friendship instead. Off the record, however, Georgian politicians and commentators, unlike the diplomats, admit that the current state of relations between Ukraine and Georgia is rather poor. The keys to strong friendly relations between the two countries are common values, goals, and mutual trust. All these components have been maintained during the presidencies of Viktor Yushchenko and Mikheil Saakashvili. However, with the election of Viktor Yanukovich in 2010, Kyiv and Tbilisi have

³⁰ *Interview with a former member of Georgian government, 31/08/2016.*

³¹ *Diba Nigar Göksel, Turkey and Georgia: Zero-Problems? June 2013, Policy Brief, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkey-and-georgia-zero-problems>*

³² *Statement of the press service of the State Fiscal Service of Ukraine, 07/26/2016, <http://sfs.gov.ua/media-tsentr/novini/260096.html>*

taken different paths. The period of 2004–2009 was marked by regular exchanges of visits, as well as joint initiatives and statements at the international level. Georgia and Ukraine acted as a true tandem, able to become a vehicle of change in the post-Soviet space.³³ However, in the post-revolutionary period, the strategic partnership between the two countries has not developed into sustainable cooperation at the institutional level; as in the previous period, personal contact between elites played a major role. The Ukrainian-Georgian partnership has not gone beyond high-profile declarations and symbolic steps. Therefore, it remains extremely vulnerable to any political changes.

Current Georgian-Ukrainian relations lack mutual trust. Ukrainian politicians, who took over the leadership after the Revolution of Dignity, had close friendly relations with Saakashvili and members of his government. The crushing defeat of the United National Movement in the 2012 elections was a real surprise for both Ukrainian political and expert circles, especially given the fascination with the success of Georgian reforms. Certain distrust of the new Georgian leadership has only intensified after the Revolution of Dignity, when Georgia took a cautious and waiting position on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. At the same time, Georgian leaders were also suspicious of their Ukrainian counterparts who did not hide their sympathies for the former's political opponents.

For the last two years, both Georgian and Ukrainian officials have been trying to hide the problems in bilateral relations, stressing mutual respect, understanding, and friendship instead

Georgian observers started talking about a certain atmosphere of mistrust in bilateral relations³⁴ after the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili repeatedly postponed his visit and then canceled it. Among the reasons for his "non-visit" to Kyiv, he informally mentioned his unwillingness to "accidentally" run into individuals who are wanted in Georgia in the Ukrainian capital. Over the past two years,

³³ Hanna Shelest, *Two Canaries, Two Coal Mines: The Mirror Symbolism of Georgia and Ukraine. // Georgian Foreign Policy. The Quest for Sustainable Security, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2013, p. 138.*

³⁴ *A number of Georgian observers have reported the cooling in bilateral relations, see: Are Georgian-Ukrainian Bilateral Relations Deteriorating? Eurasia Daily Monitor (Vol. 12, Issue 58), 03/30/2015.*

neither the President, nor the Prime Minister, nor the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada has been to Georgia on an official visit.

The Ukrainian-Georgian partnership has not gone beyond high-profile declarations and symbolic steps. Therefore, it remains extremely vulnerable to any political changes

The cancellation of the Georgian prime minister's visit to Kyiv was compensated with a number of bilateral meetings during international forums. In the first half of 2016, there were several meetings between foreign ministers of Ukraine and Georgia at various international venues.

Moreover, the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko separately met with the Prime Minister of Georgia Kvirikashvili in Munich in February 2016. It should be emphasized that the dynamics of visits at the level of the heads of states is much more intense, which, incidentally, was characteristic of the previous periods. The Georgian President Margvelashvili visited Kyiv twice, in June 2016 and in February 2015. Both presidents regularly communicate by telephone.

In 2015, the intensity of mutual visits at the level of ministers (more than 10 out of over 100 other visits of Ukraine's official representatives to Georgia) was the highest in the recent years. In turn, a number of Georgian ministers have visited Kyiv, including the Minister of Health, the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Justice, and others.

Therefore, compared to Yanukovich's period when the contacts were almost completely frozen, Ukraine and Georgia have experienced a "real boom" in bilateral relations in the past two years. However, the lack of full confidence and understanding overshadows the bilateral dialogue. It should also be emphasized that the benchmark period for those who take a more critical view is not Yanukovich's presidency, when the agenda of the two countries was different, but the previous, "post-revolutionary" period of 2004-2009. Just like then, Georgia and Ukraine are again on the "same page" in their foreign and domestic policy objectives.

On the other hand, even at its zenith, Ukrainian-Georgian partnership after the Orange revolution³⁵ remained unchanged in terms of

³⁵ *A total of 17 visits took place in 2004-2008: the President of Ukraine visited Georgia seven times, while his Georgian counterpart had ten visits to Kyiv.*

institutionalization and meaningfulness. Loud declarations and ambitious plans have rarely reached the implementation stage, and joint regional initiatives have lacked specific projects or goals. Both Kyiv and Tbilisi felt the fatigue of symbolic and ritual expressions of Ukrainian-Georgian friendship. At present, diplomats and experts from both sides seek to build bilateral relations around specific interests, fill them with specific meanings, and ensure regular contacts. A Georgian Dream member has said in an informal conversation that the presidents and prime ministers should meet when they have to sign something, while the working groups should do all preliminary work.

The Georgian side has repeatedly stated that Saakashvili “has usurped the Ukrainian agenda”.³⁶ After his retirement from presidency, charges were pressed against the former president, and the Georgian Prosecutor’s Office demands his extradition. However, Ukraine became a place of refuge for Saakashvili and even gave him citizenship and a high official position. These steps have caused irritation in Tbilisi. The fact that Saakashvili, as the Head of the Odesa Oblast State Administration, has repeatedly criticized the current Georgian authorities in public domain only worsens the situation. Moreover, Georgia’s special services stated in October 2015 that Saakashvili and his allies were preparing a coup.

Both Kyiv and Tbilisi felt the fatigue of symbolic and ritual expressions of Ukrainian-Georgian friendship

The official Tbilisi’s persistent attempts to raise the issue of Saakashvili and his extradition have only caused irritation. Kyiv has repeatedly made it clear to Tbilisi that his issue is closed for Ukraine,³⁷ while the statements of the Head of the Odesa Oblast State Administration do not reflect the official position of Ukraine. Furthermore, Ukraine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs also believes that Ukrainian-Georgian relations would only benefit if Georgians took the question of the former Georgian president and his associates off the table.

³⁶ Interview with a representative of the GD party, 05/08/2016.

³⁷ Interview with a representative of the MFA of Ukraine, 02/02/2016.

2.4. COMMON ECONOMIC INTERESTS: TRANSIT, ENERGY, AND TRADE

Georgia is called the western gate to the South Caucasus for its strategic location in the region: transport corridors and oil and gas pipelines run through its territory. Due to considerable investments, particularly from Russia and Turkey, Georgia has succeeded in improving its transit potential. After the ban imposed by Moscow on transit of Ukrainian goods through the Russian territory, Ukraine is most interested in Georgia's transit potential: the TRACECA transport corridor (Europe-Caucasus-Asia) runs through the South Caucasus. Currently, Georgia is actively expanding cooperation with China, presenting itself as a convenient logistics and transport hub with ample opportunities for investment. The two countries are negotiating a free trade agreement.³⁸

After the ban imposed by Moscow on transit of Ukrainian goods through the Russian territory, Ukraine is most interested in Georgia's transit potential

On 15 January 2016, a container train was given a test run: it left Chornomorsk heading along the Ukraine-Georgia-Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan-China route (via the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea). The train arrived in China on 31 January. The route took 16 days instead of the planned two weeks due to delays in Kazakhstan. Early in February 2016, another freight train arrived in Azerbaijan from Ukraine³⁹. This direction of the New Silk Road is attractive for Ukraine. However, there are some serious obstacles to this project.

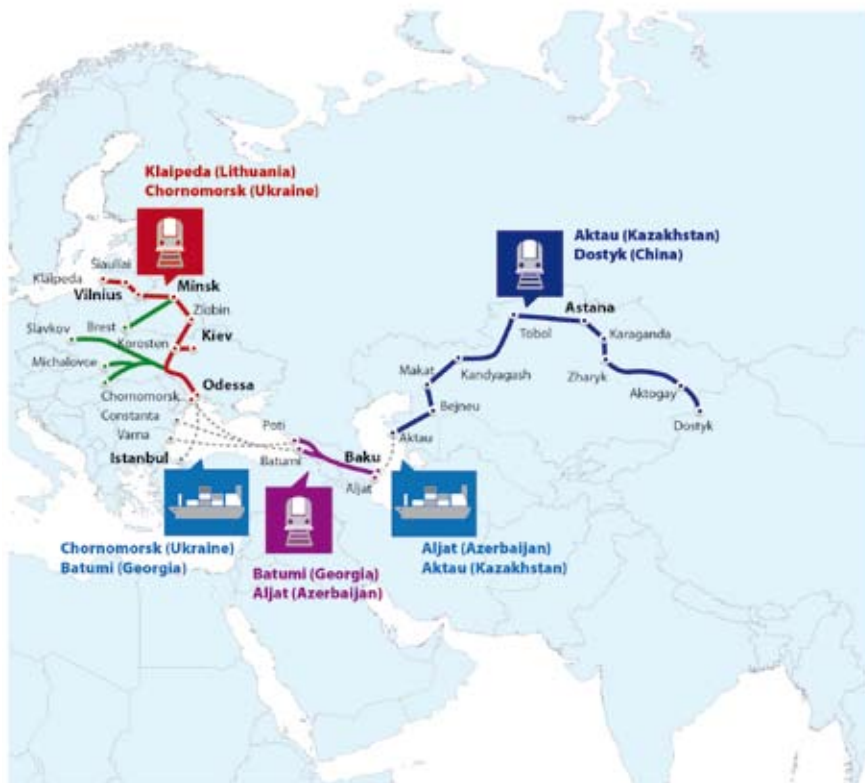
In order to make the project economically viable, tariffs need to be unified and reduced. Another problem is the narrow infrastructure in the Caspian Sea region and in Kazakhstan. For instance, a single Ukrainian ferry can carry 109 cars, while an Azerbaijani one can take only half of that number. Furthermore, such factors as temperature and time (the average projected time of cargo

³⁸ Revaz Topuria, *Georgia: The Key to China's 'Belt and Road'*, *The Diplomat*, 04/28/2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/04/georgia-the-key-to-chinas-belt-and-road/>

³⁹ See the statement by Interfax-Ukraine of 02/12/2016, <http://interfax.com.ua/news/economic/324261.html>

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

Picture 1. New Silk Road



Source: Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine

transportation to the final destination in China is about two weeks) should be taken into account. Another important issue is loading container trains on their way back, which, in fact, would require reorientation of some existing freight flows from the northern (Russian) and southern (Turkish) directions. Without that, the New

Silk Road through Georgia and Ukraine will not develop as fast as desired by Kyiv and Tbilisi.⁴⁰

In an effort to increase the attractiveness of the project, Kyiv decided to combine it with the Viking freight train running between Chornomorsk and Klaipeda. In February 2016, Ukraine and Lithuania signed a memorandum on adding the Viking container train to the New Silk Road.⁴¹ However, some experts are doubtful that this train will be in demand among carriers, as the Transcaspien corridor project and the Viking project target different cargo flows.⁴²

At the beginning of September, within the framework of the International Maritime Forum held in Batumi, the representatives of the governments of Ukraine and Georgia signed an agreement on the organisation of a direct international railway-ferry service via the two countries' ports. Negotiations on the implementation of the through rate and the simplification of customs procedures are still ongoing⁴³.

While Georgia is becoming a window to Central Asia and China for Ukraine, Ukraine is connecting Georgia with the EU member states. Kyiv is currently one of the two major air gates connecting Georgia with the EU.⁴⁴ Therefore, flight connection with Ukraine is of strategic

⁴⁰ For details on the opportunities and limitations of Ukraine's participation in the New Silk Road, see: Leonid Litra, *Ukraine: Perspectives on Eurasian integration // Absorb and conquer: An EU approach to Russian and Chinese integration in Eurasia*, ECFR, June 2016. http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/absorb_and_conquer_an_eu_approach_to_russian_and_chinese_integration7039

⁴¹ *The Viking combined transport train started running in 2003. The participants of this project are Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, and Bulgaria (since 2012). The total distance of the route between Chornomorsk (Ukraine), Minsk (Belarus), and Draugiste (Lithuania) is 1,766 kilometers.*

⁴² *Expert: a train from Ukraine to China, combined with the Viking train will not be in demand among the carriers*, UNIAN, 02/04/2016, <http://economics.unian.ua/transport/1255106-obednaniy-z-vikingom-pojezd-z-ukrajini-dokitayu-ne-bude-zatrebuvaniy-pereviznikami-ekspert.html>

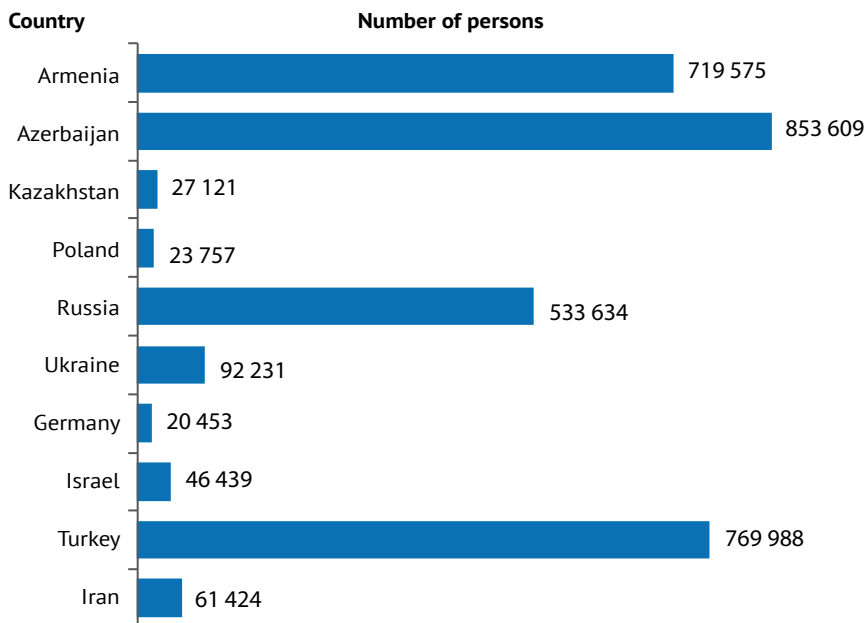
⁴³ *The announcement of the press service of the Ministry of Infrastructures of Ukraine*, 13/09/2016 <http://mtu.gov.ua/news/27605.html>

⁴⁴ *Interview with Tedo Dzharidze, Head of the Georgian Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs.*

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

importance for the development of the tourism sector, which is vital for Georgia. Every year, the number of tourists coming to Georgia from the EU and Ukraine (especially after the annexation of Crimea) increases. In the first seven months of 2016, Georgia welcomed 92,000 tourists from Ukraine. Overall, Ukraine is the fifth biggest supplier of tourists to Georgia.⁴⁵ Cheaper and expanded flight connection between Ukraine and Georgia would significantly increase this flow.

Graph 1. Foreign visits registered in January-July 2016



⁴⁵ Data from the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) for January-July 2016, <http://gnta.ge/statistics/>

Georgia has recently put in a lot of effort to establish itself as an energy hub in the region. It is now an important part of the existing chain of pipelines from the east to the west. In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline were built in its territory. Furthermore, the old north-south gas supply route from Russia to Armenia is still functional.

A while ago, Kyiv was considering a number of energy projects designed to create an alternative to Russian energy supplies. All of them had Georgia as an integral part: for instance, the White Stream project for the transportation of Caspian gas through the South Caucasus and the Black Sea to Europe. Another idea was to deliver oil in the Eurasian oil transport corridor from the Caspian Sea, through Georgia and the Black Sea to Ukraine and then through the Odessa-Brody⁴⁶ pipeline and its extension to Plock (Poland).

The AGRI (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector) project to transport gas from the Shakh Deniz gas field with subsequent liquefaction on the Black Sea coast of Georgia and further transportation to Romania by LNG tankers has not worked out, either. Ukraine supposed that it would join the AGRI project and would build a regasification terminal on the Ukrainian Black Sea coast. Joint energy projects are now unrealistic, given the low energy prices.

These projects have certain potential. However, their implementation requires, first of all, the political will of Ukrainian and Georgian leaders. The second requirement is the stabilization of the situation in the Black Sea region. The third one is the interest of the European Union in Georgian-Ukrainian energy cooperation.

Georgia is also interesting for Kyiv as a market for Ukrainian products, primarily agricultural: despite the fact that Georgia's

⁴⁶ *During the visit of Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko to Azerbaijan in July 2016 the restoration of the "Odessa-Brody" pipeline project was mentioned. See the announcement of the press service of the Presidential Administration <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/peregovori-petra-poroshenka-ta-ilhamaliyeva-ukrayina-i-aze-37649>*

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

agricultural sector employs about 50% of the population and provides more than 10% of GDP, 70% of agricultural products have to be imported.⁴⁷ In terms of trade turnover with Georgia, Ukraine ranks fifth (5.2%) after Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and China. Food and agricultural products account for more than 50% of Ukraine's total exports to Georgia.⁴⁸ Ukraine remains a critically important supplier of a number of goods. For example, according to the Trade Map website, 35.35% of the milk imported by Georgia, 41.54% of sunflower oil, 29.52% of cocoa and cocoa products, 68.75% of tobacco, and 37% of iron and steel came from Ukraine in 2015.⁴⁹

Georgia plays a much smaller role in Ukraine's foreign trade. According to Georgia, bilateral trade turnover reached USD515 mln in 2015 (a 24% decrease from 2014): USD455.1 mln in Ukraine's exports and USD59.8 mln in imports.⁵⁰ Ukraine mostly imports Georgian mineral water, wine, alcohol, tangerines, ferroalloys, and railway locomotives. Ukraine is the second (after Russia) biggest importer of Georgian wine. In the first quarter of 2016, Georgian wine exports to Ukraine reached almost 1.5 million bottles. To compare, Russia imported nearly 6 million bottles. About a dozen Georgian wine companies have their offices in Ukraine.

Georgia is also interesting for Kyiv as a market for Ukrainian products, primarily agricultural

In terms of business climate, this South Caucasian country is very attractive for Ukrainian business. Ukrainian companies have the potential to exploit the free industrial zones in Kutaisi and Poti, as well as the free tourist zone in Kobuleti. There may also be promising projects in the energy, transport, and agricultural sectors, particularly road construction, reconstruction of the existing roads, or the construction of new hydroelectric and thermal power plants, including the supply of certain types of equipment. The region's largest pig breeding production complex was established in Bolnisi

⁴⁷ Volodymyr Kravchenko, *Georgia's Dreams and Realities*, *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, 01/16/2015, http://gazeta.dt.ua/international/mriyi-i-realiyi-gruziyi-_html

⁴⁸ *Trade and economic cooperation between Ukraine and Georgia, data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, <http://georgia.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-ge/trade>

⁴⁹ *Bilateral trade between Georgia and Ukraine*. Accessed at: <http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral.aspx>

⁵⁰ *Data from the Embassy of Georgia in Ukraine*.

with Ukrainian investments. Moreover, Ukrainians launched the construction of a modern greenhouse complex in Gardabani in 2014.

In 2012, there were about 50 companies with Ukrainian capital in Georgia. Until recently, the most active one has been the Privat financial and industrial group, which has shares in Georgia's banking sector, tourism (Gudauri ski resort), and metallurgical industry (Georgian Manganese). In early 2015, PrivatBank sold its subsidiary to the Bank of Georgia, the largest commercial bank in the country, for about USD50 mln.⁵¹ The Privat Group owns the Chiaturmarganets plant, the Zestafoni Ferroalloy Plant, and the Vartsihe hydroelectric power plant. The Chiaturmarganets plant is of strategic importance for Georgia, as manganese is one of Georgia's main export items.

A lack of significant investments from Ukraine is a major problem for the bilateral relations

However, the total volume of Ukrainian investments in Georgia's economy (USD37.6 mln as of March 2015) is small.⁵² A lack of significant investments from Ukraine is a major problem for the bilateral relations.

Ukrainian companies are not rushing to invest in Georgia, viewing its market as an insignificant one. Moreover, Ukrainian business in Georgia is forced to compete with more powerful Russian investors.

Among the traditional issues of Ukrainian-Georgian relations in the economic sphere is the implementation of the agreement on cooperation in fishing, signed in August 1996. It allows Ukrainian fishing vessels to operate in a part of the Black Sea which is under Georgia's jurisdiction. The agreement expires in August 2016, and Tbilisi does not intend to prolong it. The meeting of the Ukrainian-Georgian Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation, announced in 2016, will be a good opportunity to resolve these issues.

⁵¹ *PrivatBank sells its Georgian subsidiary financial institution to the Bank of Georgia, 03/10/2015, <http://delo.ua/finance/privatbank-prodal-svoe-gruzinskoe-dochneree-finuchrezhdenie-bank-290326/>*

⁵² *Trade and economic cooperation between Ukraine and Georgia, data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://georgia.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-ge/trade>*

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD GEORGIA AND GEORGIA'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE

Ukrainian diplomacy assesses the current state of relations between Ukraine and Georgia as the one corresponding to the conditions of their development. One way to improve these conditions is to deepen trade and economic cooperation among the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development member states. The last summit of the leaders of the GUAM member states was held in 2008, but a Kyiv-initiated meeting between the prime ministers of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan will take place in November 2016. The governmental level of the meeting shows that Kyiv is currently primarily interested in the economic dimension: creating a common economic space⁵³ and more efficient use of transit corridors for the transportation of goods and energy. Azerbaijan, which has chosen a different foreign and domestic policy course, is certainly out of the political triangle of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. However, its presence is the key to the implementation of economic and energy projects that are important for the three states. On the other hand, the success of the initiative will depend on the willingness of the member states to invest their time and resources into the activities of the GUAM, which, given its past performance, is seriously questioned by numerous observers.

⁵³ *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, 07/05/2016, http://dt.ua/ECONOMICS/groysman-zaproponuvav-stvoriti-zonu-vilnoyi-torgivli-v-ramkah-guam-212918_.html

3. EXISTING AND POTENTIAL RISKS AND CONFLICTS

3.1. WIDENING GAP IN TERMS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Georgian leaders have made significant efforts to win the trust of the Western partners and demonstrate their consistency in reforms. The EU has praised the implementation of the visa regime liberalization action plan and noted the “impressive reforms” carried out by the Georgian authorities. Although the relations between Tbilisi and Brussels are not cloudless, the two parties have managed to establish dialogue on sensitive issues,⁵⁴ and Georgia is now undoubtedly the leader in terms of the pace of European integration. If reforms in Ukraine continue to be delayed, especially in the area of fighting against corruption, Tbilisi’s desire to follow a separate track in the dialogue with the EU will only grow. This widening gap is dangerous, as it would weaken both countries, in particular their ability to counter threats and promote their agenda on the European level.

Probability. High. The challenges faced by Ukraine today are familiar to Georgia: from countering aggression to fighting corruption. Tbilisi certainly understands that reforms take time, but the Georgian authorities cannot allow their country to be hostage to this process.

How to avoid? Ukraine and Georgia have the same goal, which is the broadest political and economic integration into Europe, and the same tool to achieve it, the Association Agreement. Currently, each country which has signed the Association Agreement is moving in a parallel track. However, given the experience of Central and Eastern Europe, coordination and exchange of experience in the process of European integration could significantly ease the way for each country. Given its potential, Ukraine should become a leader in this process by initiating regular meetings at the highest level between representatives of the

⁵⁴ *EU Commissioner Tells MEPs Georgia Made 'Impressive' Reforms, Civil Georgia, 01/20/2016, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28925>*

three countries to discuss common challenges and objectives. Coordination and communication at the governmental and parliamentary levels should be enhanced. Currently, this kind of dialogue in a full-fledged form exists only at the level of civil society. Overall, it would not only strengthen the positions of the associated countries in their communication with the EU, but could also give additional momentum to effective reforms.

3.2. DILUTION OF THE BILATERAL AGENDA

The lack of specificity in the bilateral agenda has always been a symptomatic feature of Ukrainian-Georgian relations. Certainly, the leaders of the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Roses had warm friendly relations, but their bilateral contacts lacked real substantive cooperation, and joint regional initiatives lacked specific projects and objectives.

Probability. High. Currently, neither Kyiv, nor Tbilisi has strategic vision for the future relations between the two countries. A shortened list of common interests and goals combined with passivity and inertia in the bilateral contacts in future could lead to further distancing between Ukraine and Georgia.

How to avoid? Ukraine and Georgia should learn lessons from their past cooperation to build a more pragmatic and substantive partnership. Both countries should finally move from intentions and declarations to action plans and look at the meaning rather than rituals. Ukrainian-Georgian relations require small, but substantial steps, such as opening new flight routes, expanding the list of traded goods, linking new services with each other, and exchanging best practices. Cooperation between the ministries of justice of the two countries is a good case in point. After exchanging visits, both ministers of

justice agreed to establish working groups for communication and cooperation at the specific level.⁵⁵ Ukraine is actively studying Georgia's experience in reforming the administrative services sector. Other possible areas include activities in international courts and drafting legislation with regard to occupied territories. For instance, Georgia has already filed lawsuits against Russia in international courts. Second, since the conflict in the Donbas has a risk of becoming frozen, Ukrainian lawyers should consider the legal mechanisms of "co-existence" with the occupied territories. Over the past two decades, Georgia's policies toward its occupied territories have ranged from complete blockade to understanding of the protracted nature of the conflict and developing long-term strategies to engage and establish contact with the local population.⁵⁶ The exchange of experience with maintaining economic relations with the occupied territories, the problems of IDPs, border security, and countering other consequences of occupation will help both sides develop prudent strategies in this area.

Today, the most problematic direction of cooperation is law enforcement. The lack of trust and effective communication between the law enforcement agencies of the two countries is evidenced by an unpleasant incident associated with the deportation of a Georgian criminal lord. The official Tbilisi reacted sharply to what is otherwise an ordinary event, and the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia Giorgi Mgebrishvili even referred to the "Odesa provocation" in his statement.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Kyiv reminded the Georgian counterpart that the man was not on the international wanted list, and Georgia

⁵⁵ *Interview with Tea Tsulukani, the Minister of Justice of Georgia, 06/01/2015,* http://www.eramedia.com.ua/article/221095-tea_tsulukan_susplstvo_ma_rozumti_yak_reformi_yidut_chomu_bez_t/

⁵⁶ *See: Ukraine's Strategy for Building Relations with the Population of Crimea and Donbas. Lessons Learnt from Georgia for Ukraine // Institute of World Policy, 2015* http://iwpp.org.ua/img/Ukraines_Strategy_final.pdf

⁵⁷ <http://www.apsny.ge/2016/soc/1469383736.php>

had not applied for his extradition. Therefore, in accordance with international norms, Ukraine was not obliged to inform Tbilisi about the deportation. The situation was worsened by sharp statements the Prosecutor General of Ukraine Yuriy Lutsenko made with regard to the Georgian authorities.⁵⁸ In this situation, Kyiv should initiate a meeting at the level of the ministers of internal affairs and exclude from communication any individuals that can cause a negative reaction in Tbilisi.

3.3. FREEZING OF POLITICAL RELATIONS DUE TO THE “SAAKASHVILI FACTOR”

The former President of Georgia Saakashvili is often called the main problem of current Ukrainian-Georgian relations. Initially, the Georgian government reacted strongly to the appointment of Saakashvili and members of his team to the highest public offices in Ukraine, which even led to a cooling in bilateral relations in 2015. However, Kyiv and Tbilisi have managed, by joint efforts, to ease tensions and restore positive dynamics in 2016.

Probability. Medium. Currently, the Saakashvili factor is not critical and poses no threat to relations between the two countries. On the other hand, Saakashvili's entry into the Ukrainian government would quickly reduce the “temperature” of bilateral relations, although the sympathies between the two peoples would remain.

How to avoid? Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs believes that the issue of the former Georgian president should be taken off the table in the bilateral relations. However, the problem for Tbilisi is not only Saakashvili but the “Georgian task force” in general. The main concern is that they could convert their success in Ukraine

⁵⁸ *Yurii Lutsenko's statements caused misunderstanding and raised eyebrows among Georgia's parliamentary majority, Georgia Online, 07/17/2014, <http://www.apsny.ge/2014/pol/1405618026.php>*

into political capital in Georgia and strengthen the positions of the United National Movement. On the other hand, it seems that Georgian partners tend to exaggerate Saakashvili's influence and role in Ukrainian politics.

Both sides are guilty of the cooling of relations. Each of the two governments is responsible for a distorted perception of the other. Ukraine and Georgia cannot afford having the long-standing friendly relations between the two countries to depend on the political fate of a single person. Kyiv should clearly express support for the choice of the Georgian people and willingness to work closely with any government of Georgia. Such a clear statement would also be a signal to the part of Georgian society which believes that Ukrainians have become victims of Saakashvili's manipulations. Another important positive step could be an official visit of the President or Prime Minister of Ukraine to Tbilisi after the parliamentary elections in Georgia. The ball is now in Ukraine's court, and mutual trust between the two countries depends on Kyiv's position. The meeting between the heads of the GUAM member states, scheduled to take place in Kyiv in the fall of 2016, could be a great opportunity for re-establishing contacts. The fact that the meeting will take place after the parliamentary elections is clearly positive, as it will allow the parties to focus on the strategic issues of bilateral cooperation and avoid the unnecessary politicization of the visit.

3.4. DOMINATION OF PERSONAL ASSESSMENTS OVER STATE INTERESTS

Currently, the greatest threat to the bilateral relationship is the emotional statements made by some Ukrainian politicians and officials which can easily be perceived as "unfriendly" by some Georgian politicians.

Probability. Medium. The relations between Ukraine and Georgia are not the classical relations between two states. Presently, the Georgian direction stands somewhat apart in Ukraine's political discourse, given the integration of Georgian actors into Ukrainian politics

and close personal contacts between Ukrainian and Georgian politicians. As a result, the MFA of Ukraine is losing its monopoly on the formation of messages and agenda in the relations between the two countries.

How to avoid? Currently, the official position is that the Ukrainian government does not comment on internal developments in Georgia. However, such detachment often makes room for other voices in practice. Communication with Georgia now involves a wide range of speakers (from the Head of Odesa Oblast State Administration to the General Prosecutor) who are not actually authorized to make any statements on foreign policy or comment on the internal situation in a friendly neighbor country. Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has become one of many voices (and not the loudest one) heard in Tbilisi. The situation is worsened by the fact that Tbilisi is used to perceiving the emotional statements of any Ukrainian official as an expression of the position of the Ukrainian state. The same is true of Kyiv. Thus, the top-priority objective is to restore the traditional principles of communication between the two nations and build pragmatic relations guided by the prevailing considerations of mutual benefit. Otherwise, there is a risk of consolidating a tendency of regarding Georgia as a friend but not necessarily a partner or ally.

4. STAKEHOLDERS, INTEREST GROUPS, AND GROUPS OF INFLUENCE

Georgian political circles are divided into two uncompromising camps, and despite the fact that both parties declare their commitment to the course on rapprochement with the EU and NATO, the degree of public recriminations excludes any possibility of achieving mutual understanding, at least in the short term. This constant confrontation between two political teams fuels the division within society still consumed by heated debates about Saakashvili's legacy and, hence, the future of his political force, the United National Movement (UNM). Four years after the sensational victory in the parliamentary elections, the popularity rating of the Georgian Dream party has dropped significantly, but the coalition formed by Ivanishvili remains the biggest political force in the country. In August 2016, a mere 25,8% of Georgians expressed full support for the GD, 25,5% supported the UNM, and 19% were undecided (two months before the elections).⁵⁹

According to a March 2016 poll, 39% of Georgians believe that their country is moving in the wrong direction. However, almost as many (36%) do not notice any changes for the better or for the worse. In 2012, 60% were optimists.⁶⁰ These sentiments could be explained primarily by a lack of economic success rather than geopolitical considerations. For instance, 66% of the respondents evaluated the current economic situation in Georgia as poor, which is not surprising given the devaluation of the Georgian currency and rising prices.

Economic issues remain among the priorities of the population (unemployment, poverty, and inflation), while the issue of territorial integrity is gradually relegated to the background. In 2009, nearly 50% of Georgians named territorial integrity among the top three national issues, while their share dropped to 23% in 2016. This shift is

⁵⁹ *Results of an opinion poll conducted by GfK in 3-18 August 2016, Georgia Today, 24/08/2016, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/4515/Poll-Finds-48.3%25-of-Georgians-Disapprove-of-Current-Government>*

⁶⁰ *Results of an opinion poll conducted in Georgia from 23 February to 14 March 2016 by NDI via CRRC Georgia, involving 3,900 persons, with the sampling error below 1.6%. https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202016%20poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_vf.pdf*

understandable, given increased fatigue and an understanding that the issues of the occupied territories cannot be resolved in the near future.⁶¹ This pragmatism of Georgian society has been reflected in the agenda of the current government formed by the GD party, which, despite its name, has consistently emphasized the pragmatism of its government. As noted by Georgian analysts, the GD, unlike the UNM, is less homogeneous in terms of ideology, combining both openly pro-European politicians and those who are nostalgic about the Soviet past.⁶²

Against this background of recriminations, we could expect an increase in the popularity of a third political force. Currently, the third place on Georgia's political scene is contested by the State for the People party established by the opera singer Paata Burchuladze, Irakli Alasania's Free Democrats, and Labour Party. These parties declare their commitment to the European course and try to distance themselves from both the GD and the UNM.

As in Ukraine, no political force in Georgia with serious ambitions can openly declare sympathy for Russia. Moreover, parties with pro-Russian slogans face serious opposition, for example, the Centrist party was excluded from the election race.⁶³ In the meantime, political forces and organizations are emerging in Georgia that are using patriotic and populist rhetoric to campaign for a "third way" for Georgia with a focus on the country's own capabilities and neutrality. One such party, the Alliance of Patriots, is considered pro-Russian, along with the Democratic Movement – United Georgia led by Nino Burjanadze. Furthermore, NGOs and parties that openly support the Eurasian Union have intensified their activities in the country, which was unimaginable a few years ago.

The main risk lies in the expanding economic presence of Russia, which is gradually restoring its positions in Georgia

⁶¹ *The following issues are viewed by Georgians the most important indicators when voting for parties: economic policy (41%), the stand on healthcare policy (14%), national security issues (11%), and positions on the rule of law and foreign policy (9% and 8%, respectively).*

⁶² *Interview with Ghia Nadia, President of Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development, Ukrainskyi Tyzhden, No. 30 (454), 07/28/2016.*

⁶³ *Party Stripped of Registration for Georgian Parliamentary Elections amid 'Pro-Russia' Outcry, Radio Free Europe, 08/18/2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/caucasus-report-georgia-party-out-of-elections-after-pro-russia-ad/27931601.html>*

However, given the existing public support for European integration (even taking into account a certain level of disappointment), it is extremely unlikely that Tbilisi will change its foreign policy vector. The main risk lies in the expanding economic presence of Russia, which is gradually restoring its positions in Georgia.

Even under President Mikheil Saakashvili, many strategic assets of Georgia were acquired by the Russian capital. These include energy companies, steel plants, Borjomi mineral waters (owned by the Alfa Group), etc. Lukoil, Beeline, and other Russian companies have opened their offices in Georgia. Russia's Vneshtorgbank purchased the United Georgian Bank with all its assets, and Sberbank owns Liberty Bank. In late 2014, Rosneft purchased 49% of shares in one of the largest oil traders of Georgia, strengthening its positions in both Georgian ports and the region in general.

Ukraine and Georgia do not, in general, have groups of influence among each other's elites – only some groups in individual sectors of the economy. Nevertheless, politicians of the two countries maintain close communication with each other. For instance, the Group of Friends of

The major lobbyists for Georgia and Ukraine are Ukrainian and Georgian societies

Ukraine, headed by the representative of the Georgian Dream Georgi Topadze, was established in the Georgian parliament. This group consists of 46 MPs, including the Speaker David Usupashvili. The Verkhovna Rada has a group for interparliamentary relations with Georgia, headed until recently by Ivanna Klympush-Tsyntsadze.

According to her, Ukrainian MPs are interested in Georgian reforms, as well as in Georgian experience of dealing with IDPs and resolving the frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The major lobbyists for Georgia and Ukraine are Ukrainian and Georgian societies. According to a poll conducted by the Razumkov Centre, 16.5% of Ukrainians still see Georgia among Ukraine's strategic partners.⁶⁴ Support actions organized in Georgia in the

⁶⁴ *Results of an opinion poll conducted by the sociological service of the Razumkov Centre from 6 November to 12 November 2015. The poll involved 2,008 respondents aged 18 or older in all regions of Ukraine, excluding Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts; the sample represented the adult population of Ukraine. http://www.razumkov.org.ua/upload/1449050147_file.pdf*

midst of the tragic events in Kyiv and after the beginning of Russian aggression evidenced a strong emotional bond between the two nations. Some Georgians even went to the Donbas to defend the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The Georgian National Legion is part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and Georgians were the first foreigners who officially joined the AFU.

At the same time, mutual sympathies between the two peoples are maintained not because of Ukraine's humanitarian policy but in spite of it. Academic and student exchange is almost non-existent, and cooperation between cultural and educational institutions is almost negligible. The number of students from Georgia in Ukraine's higher educational institutions decreases year after year, whereas in the past Ukraine used to be a kind of alma mater for Georgian political and business circles⁶⁵. Georgians now choose European and American colleges and universities for their children. As a result, connections between Ukrainian and Georgian political and business elites, which are currently not very strong anyway, are starting to unravel.

Academic and student exchange is almost non-existent, and cooperation between cultural and educational institutions is almost negligible

Contacts between the NGOs of the two countries cooperating in joint projects funded by various foreign foundations, the European Union, and the United States are fairly close. These projects help exchange information, achieve an understanding of political positions, and find common solutions. One obvious outcome of these contacts is the sharing of the positive experience of Georgian reforms. In 2010, the Institute of World Policy launched a massive information campaign aimed at spreading information about the changes that had taken place in Georgia. This unprecedented initiative was continued in 2015 when the IWP together with Caucasian House organized a series of working visits for Ukrainian experts and journalists to

⁶⁵ *Ukrainian education was particularly popular during the Soviet era: Kyiv University had a special agreement with the Tbilisi's one under which the exams at the Faculty of International Economics and Law could be passed in Tbilisi. For more, see IWP policy paper "Ukraine's Soft Power in the Region: The tool for effective foreign policy", Kyiv, 2011, http://iwp.org.ua/img/myaka_syla_eng.pdf*

study the pros and cons of Georgian reforms, as well as Georgia's policies on the occupied territories.

The problems with the promotion and dissemination of Ukraine's soft power in Georgia can be vividly illustrated by the fate of the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Ukrainian-Georgian School in Tbilisi, established in 1999 and relocated to a new building in 2007. After the optimization of the school system in 2011, the school was closed. The teachers and students from several schools were moved to school No. 43, which was also named after Hrushevsky. However, this school does not have a Ukrainian class now, because they failed to find students to fill at least half of the class, according to the Embassy of Ukraine. Children from Georgian and mixed families prefer other foreign languages, including Russian.

Therefore, although Ukrainian community in Georgia is growing⁶⁶ and the presence of Ukrainian business is expanding, the Ukrainian language is gradually displaced by Russian. The situation could be changed through academic and student exchange or by expanding the opportunities for education in Ukrainian universities. Students in the Tbilisi and Sukhumi state universities still have courses in the Ukrainian language and literature, while Kyiv Taras Shevchenko National University offers Georgian language and literature studies.

Various cultural events and educational exchange are vital to maintain interest, mutual understanding, and sympathy between the two peoples. In other words, Ukraine's soft power in Georgia is an investment in the future of bilateral relations. While Ukrainian cities regularly host Georgian cultural events with the strong support of the Embassy of Georgia, similar actions are much less frequently initiated by the Ukrainian diaspora in Tbilisi and other Georgian cities. This striking disparity is well illustrated by Georgian restaurants that keep springing up in Kyiv and the frequent tours of the Sukhishvili ballet.

⁶⁶ *After the beginning of armed hostilities, there was a mass outflow of Ukrainians from Georgia. According to the last official population census (January 2002), the number of Ukrainians fell to 7,000 persons. According to unofficial data, 20,000 Ukrainians currently reside in Georgia.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first step of the Ukrainian government must be the appointment of an Ambassador of Ukraine to Georgia: the absence of the head of the diplomatic mission not only does it limit the range of contacts with Georgian officials, but it gives the impression to Tbilisi that Georgia is not an important country for Ukraine.

Ukrainian-Georgian relations have always been based on mutual respect and unconditional support. This approach, combined with utmost delicacy and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of each other, will allow the two states to maintain friendly relations. The relations between both countries have to depend on institutions, not individuals.

Any comments or statements on the internal affairs of Georgia should be made through diplomatic channels or persons responsible for Ukraine's foreign policy.

Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova should establish communication and coordination on European integration issues at the governmental level. It will be a very strong signal to the EU that all three states value this process and are learning on their own.⁶⁷ This so-called Black Sea Trio⁶⁸ could apply the successful experience of the Visegrad Four as a role model. Moreover, it would be easier and less expensive for the three states to organize information and advocacy activities in the EU. However, the feasibility of this idea is largely dependent on Ukraine's success in implementing the Association Agreement as a confirmation of Kyiv's leadership. Organizing regular meetings at the governmental level could be the first step in this direction.

⁶⁷ For details, see: Leonid Litra and Ivane Chkhikvadze, *EU Membership Perspective for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine: Impossible, Forgotten or Hidden? Discussion paper by the Institute of World Policy, 2016, <http://iwp.org.ua/eng/public/2097.html>*

⁶⁸ *Emerging trio in the post-Soviet scene?, The New Eastern Europe, 03/08/2016, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1913-emerging-trio-in-the-post-soviet-scene>*

Unconditional mutual support at all international forums and coordinated actions to restore territorial integrity. Coordination in the international arena should be enhanced, especially in terms of countering security threats in the Black Sea.

As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Ukraine has the opportunity to more frequently initiate discussions on territorial integrity and Russia's aggressive policies, including those toward Georgia and Moldova. If Ukraine constantly raised these issues (not only in the UN, but also in other international organizations), it would increase the value of Kyiv to Tbilisi and Chisinau.

Kyiv should deepen cooperation with Tbilisi in the military-technical sphere: Ukraine is interested in Georgia not only as a market for military equipment and armaments, but also as a partner for reforms aimed at transition to the NATO standards.

For Georgia, strengthening the Black Sea cooperation format with the EU member states and Turkey is most desirable for both economic and security considerations. Ukraine should initiate consultations between the two countries to develop a common strategic vision for the region's future.

As for economic dimension, Kyiv is mainly interested in Georgia due to the latter's transit potential. The value of this country increases due to Russia's announced ban on the transit of Ukrainian goods. One of the priority tasks for Ukrainian authorities should be resolving the problem of tariff unification (with regard to the route from Ukraine to China) and introducing electronic information exchange between the customs authorities of the two countries.

Projects in the sphere of hydroelectricity could be another promising area, where Georgia and Ukraine may be helpful to each other. Georgia as a mountainous country is interested in developing this sphere, and Ukraine has the necessary expertise.

A number of problems, which Ukrainians have been coping with as a result of the partial occupation of their territory during the last two and a half years, have already been solved by the Georgian government and NGOs. It would be advisable to the recently created Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs to involve

Georgian experts into the elaboration of a strategy for Ukraine for the resettlement of IDPs and the building of relations with the occupied territories.

Increasing Ukrainian investments, specifically through the participation of Ukrainian companies in the implementation of large infrastructure projects aimed at strengthening Georgia's transit capacity.

Strengthening Ukraine's soft power in Georgia through joint youth forums, academic and student exchange, and Ukrainian culture days in Tbilisi. Promotion of modern Ukrainian culture in Georgia and contemporary Georgian culture in Ukraine could contribute much more to maintaining close relations between the two nations than official statements by Ukrainian and Georgian officials.

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