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WESTERN VECTOR OF GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

Abstract

The article discusses the crisis formed in the relations of Georgia and Ukraine following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February of 2022. Particular reasons for the deterioration of ties between Tbilisi and Kyiv have been emphasized in the paper. Despite the fact that the two countries share no border, and the Soviet Union was the only factor which pulled the countries together, positive relations between Georgia and Ukraine was visible from the start, after the break of the Soviet Union. Developing the positive relations was also a result of the desire to be more independent from Russia, as well as, closer toward the Western institutions such as the EU and NATO, which developed the friendship of the countries into a strategic partnership later.

In the article, there is also a discussion on the military cooperation of Georgia and Ukraine; the participation of Ukrainian volunteers at the war in Georgia's occupied region of Abkhazia and vice versa – military engagement of Georgian volunteers at the Ukrainian "Anti-terrorist Operations". (Lugansk, Donetsk). Additionally, the research emphasized in this case as well, that the reason of tension in the relation was the factor of Russia. The Government of Georgia did not exacerbate the already tough relations with Russia and with its over diplomatic announcements, left the particular trace on the quality of cooperation with Ukraine, lasting till today.

Keywords: Georgia, Ukraine, Russia, West, Geopolitics

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between the two sovereign states developed dynamically. Since 1991, the relations between Georgia and Ukraine have been on an upward trend and are becoming stronger and stronger. Diplomatic relations began in 1992, and in 1993, during an official visit to Kyiv, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze signed the Ukraine-Georgia Framework Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. Further, the relations will be further deepened and confirmed by the close partnership between the two countries. The close cooperation between Ukraine and Georgia consists of numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements and regulates virtually all areas of relations between the two countries. Ukraine is one of the largest and most important trade partners of Georgia. There is a free trade regime between Georgia and Ukraine, which is legally regulated in both bilateral and multilateral formats (Association Agreement with Europe, GUAM).

Our goal is to answer two questions, what is the reason for the close relations and strategic partnership between the two countries since the end of the Soviet period and what caused the strained relations between them following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine?

To answer these questions, we have presented the article in three stages. In the first part of the article we will briefly review the historical contours of the relations between Georgia and Ukraine. In the following sections we will discuss the different stages of these relationships. In the final part, we will summarize the prospects and problems of European integration of the two countries.

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Beginning of Georgian-Ukrainian relations and the first ambassador of Georgia to Ukraine

Although diplomatic relations between Georgia and Ukraine began in 1992, it should be noted that it would be better to call it a new format for "renewal", as relations between the two countries have been going on for centuries.

These two countries have much in common historically. In the middle Ages, Ukraine was the center of Eastern Slavic culture and it was called Kievan Rus'. However, since the 13th century, like Georgia, it passed from hand to hand. The country was first ravaged by Mongol hordes, then divided by Lithuania, Poland, the Ottomans, Austria-Hungary and Russia. The Cossack Republic was established here in the 17th century. Ukraine was reunited by Russia in the 20th century as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine. We will not stop at the parallel moments in the history of Georgia, but from the above it is already clear why the aspirations of these two people for freedom and independence are so strong.

We have the first information about the relations between the two countries from the 18th century, from the life of the Georgian poet Davit Guramishvili, who moved to Ukraine in 1760, in particular to Mirgorod, where he lived until the end of his life. Davit Guramishvili's "Davitiani" was created in Ukraine.[2] At the beginning of the 20th century, in 1913, the famous Ukrainian poet Lesia Ukrainka came to Georgia with her husband, but she died soon after due to illness.

The following documents on official diplomatic relations are in the archives of both countries, including the Decree of Independence declared by the Central Rada of Ukraine on November 7, 1917; The Act of Independence declared by the National Council of Georgia on May 26, 1918[3], etc. In 1918, after the independence of Georgia, in August of the same year, Viktor Tevzaia was sent to the Republic of Ukraine and a month later he was appointed the first ambassador to Kyiv.

If we characterize the beginnings of the relations between the two countries as a romantic period, the relations between the two countries during the invasion of Georgia by the Red Army and then during the Soviet Union are a struggle against a common enemy. In 1942, Stepan Bandera called on the Georgian people to unite in the struggle against the Soviet regime and for national liberation. Many Georgians who fled the country during the Red Army invasion of Georgia in 1921 settled in Poland. Many of them received military education, moved to Ukrainian territory and joined the Ukrainian rebel army against the Soviet regime.

In 1989, the first and last president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, held a referendum on maintaining the Soviet Union in another form, in which Ukraine participated, but Georgia did not. Georgia declared independence on April 9, 1991, and Ukraine on August 24 of the same year. A few months later, on December 25, 1991[4], the United States recognized the independence of both countries.[5] It was after this that a new diplomatic relationship between the two countries began in 1992.

The post-Soviet era in the relationship between the two countries

As I have already mentioned, after gaining independence from the Soviet Union, both countries considered each other as strategic partners and established close political and cultural relations.

These two countries have one thing in common between the post-Soviet countries. This is the European vector of their strategic development. This path gathers strength despite the difficulties. Ukraine, like Georgia, is considered by the EU to be an important but difficult political partner. The political dialogue between the EU, Georgia and Ukraine began in 1994, when the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed. This

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[2] Kekelidze K., Baramidze A. (1969). History of Old Georgian Literature (V-XVIII centuries). Tbilisi, p. 77.

[3] Act of Independence of Georgia May 26, 1918. http://www.archivesportaleurope.net/ead-display/-/ead/pl/aicode/GE-00000002568/type/fa/id/GE_NAG-CHA_Independence/unitid/GE_NAG-CHA_Independance+-+1 (last visited 07 April 2024)

[4] Act of Restoration of State Independence of Georgia. https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/32362?publication=0 (last visited 06 April 2024)

[5] Dobbs, M. "Soviet Georgian Republic Proclaims Independence". Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/04/10/soviet-georgian-republic-proclaims-independence/f0c3d67c-e38e-46f7-8a27-0991eab22080/ (last visited 01 April 2024).

document focused on the need for economic and social reforms. The framework for political discussions was modest. The 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement entered into force in 1998. Negotiations on a free trade agreement between Ukraine and Georgia and the European Union began in 2008.

The Association Agreement between Georgia and Europe was ratified in 2014.[6] Attempts to sign the agreement in Ukraine began in 2014, but Yanukovych refused to sign the agreement at the last minute. 2014 On June 27, Ukraine's new President Petro Poroshenko signed the economic part of the Association Agreement with the European Union, describing it as "Ukraine's first but crucial step towards EU membership". Thus, despite everything, the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was finally concluded on 1 September 2017. According to this agreement, both Georgia and Ukraine enter a process of cooperation with the European Union and to integrate economic policy and harmonize legislation.

In the 1990s, Ukraine provided significant military assistance to Georgia, and many Georgian officers (including Georgia's future Chief of General Staff, Vakhtang Kapanadze) studied at the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and the Border Troops Academy. In 1997, Ukraine handed over the first fully armed warship, the Griff, to Georgia free of charge. Only after this step Georgia received similar assistance from other friendly countries – Germany, Turkey, the United States, but Ukraine was the first. It is clear that this was not an easy step on the part of Ukraine, given the Russian factor. Ukraine provided wheat to Georgia for $ 1 million in 1993 on a soft loan.

Although Ukrainian law prohibited participation in conflicts outside the country, up to 300 Ukrainian volunteers participated in the 1992-93 battle for Abkhazia's territorial integrity in Georgia. Their arrival was organized by the Ukrainian National Assembly and the National Defense Organization of Ukraine – the same organization "Una-Unso". Senior commander of "Una-Unso" Yuri Shukhevich wrote: "Our main goal was to prove to Georgia, as well as to Chechnya, that we will protect the freedom of all the people who are trying to free themselves from the yoke of Russia. "And secondly, to show Russia that if it had its nose in Ukraine, there would be forces there, other than the collaborators and their agents, who would have put up a fierce resistance to it."

Relations were further strengthened after the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Both countries have a pro-Western political orientation and a strong desire to join NATO and the European Union. The close friendship between Presidents Mikheil Saakashvili and Viktor Yushchenko played an important role in the political and cultural unity of the two countries. In 2007, Georgians unveiled a monument to Taras Shevchenko in Tbilisi, while Ukrainians unveiled a monument to Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli in Kyiv. Although their bid to join was rejected in 2008, NATO promised in the Bucharest Summit Declaration that the two post-Soviet applicants would definitely become members of the Alliance, although it did not say when or how this would happen.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko reaffirmed his support for the Georgian people during the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008. After the August war, Kyiv and Tbilisi signed a Strategic Partnership Charter with Washington[7]. In 2009, Ukraine and Georgia joined the EU Eastern Partnership program with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and Belarus. In the summer of 2014, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the European Union.[8]

Since the spring of 2014, Georgians provided comprehensive assistance to the Ukrainians in overcoming the confrontation with Russia. For the last five years, Georgian politicians have been employed in high-ranking positions in the Ukrainian state services. From March 1, 2019, citizens of Ukraine and Georgia can travel to both countries only on the basis of ID cards. Earlier, in 2015, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko appointed former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili as a governor of Odessa Oblast, Ukraine's largest region[9].

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[6] Info Center. Georgia and the European Union. https://old.infocenter.gov.ge/euinfo-the-association-agreement/ (last visited 02 April 2024).

[7] Ministry of foreign affairs of Georgia. Information on the signing of the Strategic Partnership Charter between Georgia and the United States. https://mfa.gov.ge/News/%E1%83%98%E1%83%9C%E1%83%A4%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9B (last visited January 9, 2024)

[8] Georgia signs Association Agreement with the EU. https://agenda.ge/en/news/2014/1551#gsc.tab=0 (last visited 01 April 2024); KMU. Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine. www.kmu.gov.ua/en/yevropejska-integraciya/ugoda-pro-asociacyu (last visited 02 January 2024).

[9] Liklikadze, K. "Why the Ukrainian organization "Una-Unso" fought for the territorial integrity of Georgia" http://georoyal.ge/?MTID=4&TID=3&id=2437&fb_comment_id=1415953928648171_111566 (last visited April 01 2024)

Escalation of Tensions

In March 2017, Ukraine, then a temporary member of the UN Security Council, adopted a resolution in support of Georgia's territorial integrity. Georgia and Ukraine also maintain military ties. In 2018, Georgia and Ukraine participated in Operation Noble Partner 18, while Georgian soldiers and Ukrainian Marines conducted the exercise together.

Outwardly calm, but still distant relations between the two countries were again strained over the issue of Ukraine's autocephaly. Moreover, Ukraine has questioned Georgia's political support. The case concerns the restraint of the Georgian government and the Georgian Orthodox Church on the newly adopted autocephaly for Ukraine. The Georgian government has even refrained from commenting on the matter. The Georgian Church has always tried to define positions not on the basis of politics, but on the basis of ecclesiastical canons.

The position of the Georgian Patriarchate regarding the Ukrainian Church has been assessed by some as Russian influence. However, there were two opinions: one (constantly aggressive or radical) believed that this was the result of the Russian Church's demand and a manifestation of the Russian orientation of the Georgian Church, and the other saw the recognition of the new Ukrainian Church as a threat to Russia's recognition of the Abkhazian Church.

The Georgian Church has said that it is true that it supports the independence of the Ukrainian Church, but it must be the common will of the people and the result of the agreement of the Churches. The independence of the Church should bring unity and peace to the country and it should not become a cause of controversy both in Ukraine and throughout the Orthodox world.

Ukraine's new president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has appointed Georgia's third president and former governor of Odessa as his adviser on reforms. The governments of both countries have concluded that Ukraine and Georgia simply do not have the means not to cooperate. Of course, Georgia and Ukraine have a huge potential for cooperation, primarily because of common problems. Both countries face an existential threat due to the violation of their territorial integrity.

Conclusion

A review of different periods of history between the two countries showed that the crisis was any issue related to a third country – Russia. It is clear that in addition to the pro-Western foreign policy course announced by both countries, Russia's support for the democratization of post-Soviet countries and their possible membership in European and Euro-Atlantic structures is perceived by Russia as a major national threat. Accordingly, in response, Russia has resorted to a foreign policy of self-determination to secure its expansion interests and invaded Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014 and 2022.

We can conclude that Georgia and Ukraine have a huge potential for cooperation, primarily due to common problems, not to mention economic and cultural aspects.

Now that the capitals of both countries need to take advantage of this potential, build on the achievements of the past and take steps to deepen relations. One of the reports of the international organization "Freedom House" states that "Georgia and Ukraine have very important strategic positions on the northern and eastern shores of the Black Sea – on the western and southern flanks of Russia. Their strategic partnership could be the center of alternative political gravity for all forces in the former Soviet Union that oppose Putin's authoritarian, revanchist regime. In fact, their alliance may be the agent of democratic change for the entire former Soviet Union (excluding the Baltic states), where the rule of law is the order of the day."

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