EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF GEORGIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: EVOLUTION AND PROSPECTS

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In this article the author analyses the European integration process of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Are studied the main evolutions in the Georgia-European Union and the Republic of Moldova-Union European relations. Both states participate in European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership and have positive progress within these initiatives. However, there is no EU membership prospect for the countries. The main efforts of Georgia, as well as of the Republic of Moldova, at the moment are directed to sign the Association Agreement, to obtain the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement and visa liberalization. So, there are studied the actions of both countries in this direction. Also, the author underlines some recommendations that will improve the European integration of both, such as development of a national strategy of countries’ European integration, domestic consolidation through reform process and information of population regarding all issues related to European Union and European integration.

Key words: European integration, EU membership prospect, Eastern Partnership, Georgian European integration, European integration of Moldova.

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1. Introduction.

The success of the European Union foundation, the high level of its member states development and the benefits and advantages it offers, made this structure attractive from all points of view. Thus, the idea of integration into the European Union becomes one of the foreign policy priorities of the most post-socialist states, especially as the Western vector manifested itself as a viable political option in the context of a new world order shaping. Simultaneously, the process of European integration highlighted especially for the Eastern Europe countries the motivation and the necessary model for achievement of a stable democracies, functional market economy, initiation and development of reforms. In this context Georgia and the Republic of Moldova are the countries that also have expressed their European aspirations.

2. European integration of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova

The formalization of relations between the European Union and Georgia dates back to 1992, right after Georgia regained its independence. In 1993 three main trends of the European Union economic assistance to Georgia were established: financial, humanitarian (mainly food assistance) and technical. Next followed an important step for Georgia-European Union collaboration development. That is the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), signed in 1996 and ratified in 1999. [Chronology of Basic Events in EU - Georgia Relations, 2013] The PCA provides for wide-ranging cooperation in the areas of political dialogue, trade, investment, economic, legislative and cultural cooperation and it is seen as a European Union instrument intended for democratization and development of countries from post-soviet space. So, along

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with Georgia, this kind of agreement was signed by the European Union with 10 states, among which the Republic of Moldova in 1994 (ratified in 1998).

Certainly, this agreement had a positive impact upon both countries, as it catalysed the process of national reforms. This fact is very important, taking into account that countries that have declared its intention to obtain the European Union membership should accomplish the Copenhagen criteria, namely - political criteria – guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law; economic criteria - the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the European Union; legal criteria – the adoption of the entire acquis communautaire; and administrative criteria - to ensure the institutions stability and the ability to take on the obligations of European Union membership. As Heather Grabbe states, the conditions set out at the Copenhagen European Council were designed to minimize the risk of new entrants becoming politically unstable and economically burdensome to the existing Union, and to ensure that the countries joining were ready to meet all the European Union rules, with only minimal and temporary exceptions. This kind of European Union conditionality has a dual purpose as the conditions were formulated to reassure reluctant member states that disruption risks would be minimal, as well as to guide applicants.[Grabbe, 2002, p.251]

In this way should be mentioned that during the Shevardnadze's government Georgia had demonstrated some success. The first steps towards a market economy were made. The country became a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Council of Europe. It also succeeded with significant support from the International Monetary Fund in stabilising the country’s currency. The foundations were laid for media and press freedom and, most importantly, the country had succeeded in determining its foreign policy without outside interference. Even so, the country was still a long way from being a proper democracy.[Natsvlishvili, 2009, p.105]

After the „Rose Revolution” began a new phase in the collaboration of Georgia with European community. The strong commitment of the Georgian authorities to implement their reform plans, notably in the field of good governance, has been warmly welcomed by the European Union. As the result, the inclusion of Georgia in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) on 14 June 2004 and the adoption of EU – Georgia ENP Action Plan in 2006 had took

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place. These events were greeted by Georgia. The Action Plan implementation has contributed to the building of ties in new areas of cooperation and encourages and supports Georgia’s objective of further integration into European economic and social structures.[Chakhava, 2012, p.44]

At moment, Georgia is also a part of the EU’s Eastern Partnership (Eap), launched by Poland and Sweden in 2009 to deepen bilateral and multilateral engagement with Europe’s Eastern neighborhood. The EaP is meant to accelerate measures such as visa facilitation and association agreements, leading to eventual Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements. However, the EU has been clear that EaP does not offer membership prospects to its eastern neighbors. [Georgia in the West: A Policy Road Map to Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic Future, 2011, p.26]

Anyway, the EaP represents added value for Georgia. After all, Tbilisi considers the EaP a higher level of relations with the European Union, where Georgia is treated as a partner and not simply as a neighbor, as it is referred to in the European Neighborhood Policy. While the Association Agreement, visa liberalization, and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) are perceived as important achievements in themselves, the Georgian government views them as necessary steps to full integration with and membership of the European Union.[Khidasheli, 2011, p.102]

Thus, David Rinnert notes that negotiations on an Association Agreement, that officially began in Batumi, Georgia on July 15th 2010 are a significant fact. The ratification of a Georgian-EU Association Agreement will replace the outdated PCA as a legal basis for bilateral relations. By launching Association Agreement negotiations, the European Union has indicated that the EaP’s incentives are credible and achievable for partner countries even though it may take long until an Association Agreement will be finalized. In June 2010 Georgia and the EU signed a visa facilitation agreement, that entered into force in 2011. Nevertheless, continues Rinnert, the new visa facilitation agreement cannot be considered as a substantial improvement of the current situation. The official document is similar to previous EU agreements with Eastern European states including Russia. It contains a visa fee reduction for Georgian citizens from 60 EUR to 35 EUR as well as several procedural simplifications and a reduction of required visa application documents.[Rinnert, 2011, p.11]
At the same time, there is an opinion that in its relations with Georgia, the EU has offered more demands than rewards, even though Georgia has performed on par with or exceeded Ukraine and Moldova in a number of areas, from curbing corruption to improving border management and governance. Though Georgia’s reform process is far from complete, active EU engagement can ensure that Georgia remains anchored in the West and continues on a path of pro-Western reforms. [Georgia in the West: A Policy Road Map to Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic Future, 2011, p.26]

However, according to the European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries of November 2011, Georgia performs rather well. It is the best in Management, second best in Approximation after Moldova, and third best in Linkage, after Moldova and Ukraine. Georgia shows the best scores for “Rule of Law,” “Market Economy” and “Education and People-to-People” in Approximation, and the second highest score on “Assistance,” after Moldova, and “Environment,” after Belarus. It seems that Georgia has done well in the areas where there has been political will to reform. Georgia proved less advanced only in “Political Dialogue” and “Trade and Economic Integration,” where it is barely ahead of Azerbaijan and Belarus. This means that these areas need more attention, particularly on the part of the European Union, not only Georgia. It is important to note that Georgia is lagging behind Armenia in “Political Dialogue” due to the fact that Armenia participates in peacekeeping missions with the EU and is thus more advanced in CFSP/ESDP cooperation, which is a part of “Political Dialogue.” [European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries, 2011, p.15] The same Index realized in 2012 underlines that Georgia is the best performer of DCFTA, talks on which started up in March 2012. In addition, it has the least number of mutual trade barriers with the EU. This puts Georgia in a good position to successfully manage the talks and finalise them in the not-so-distant future. Also, Index confirms that Georgia needs to apply more effort in “Freedom, Security and Justice”, because even if it is doing better than Armenia and Belarus, Georgia is far behind Moldova and Ukraine and on the same level as Azerbaijan. [European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries, 2012, p.29]

At its turn, European Commission in its document”Implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy in Georgia Progress in 2012 and recommendations for action” of 2013,
notes that as a result of progress on reforms for deep democracy and respect of human rights, Georgia benefited from an additional allocation of EUR 22 million under the Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation Programme (EaPIC) in 2012. Georgia also made significant progress in implementing the visa facilitation and readmission agreements, and continued to implement reforms in the areas related to mobility in a secure environment. The EU launched a visa dialogue with Georgia in June, and started preparing a Visa Liberalization Action Plan, which was formally handed over to Georgia in February 2013. [Implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy in Georgia Progress, 2012] Meanwhile, it is attested that Georgia should work and achieve progress on the remaining key recommendations. So, Georgia is invited to address shortcomings in the electoral law; reform the justice system; increase the accountability and democratic oversight of law enforcement agencies; enhance Georgia’s engagement policy towards the breakaway regions and improve reconciliation/conflict resolution; continue to strengthen media pluralism and independence, and the freedom of expression and opinion; adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation; continue to advance sectoral reforms and ensure good quality approximation to the EU acquis communitaire in order to pave the way for finalisation of the Association Agreement, including the DCFTA.[ Implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy in Georgia Progress, 2012]

In this context, the objective of EU membership should be seen as a way of continuing the country’s modernization. As, Papava and Tokmazishvili affirm, the hope of EU membership has been a significant catalyst for change in Georgian society. The vision of joining a larger Europe without barriers has motivated the government to transform the country’s economy and deepen economic and political integration during the pre-application period.[ Papava, Tokmazishvili, 2006, p.29]

Thus, in order to prepare country at domestic level for European integration, in 2004, the office for European of State Minister and Euro-Atlantic Integration was created under the government, and was entrusted with the task of deepening cooperation with NATO and the European Union, ultimately achieving full political, legal, military, economic, and cultural integration. To oversee Parliament’s fulfillment of obligations undertaken by Georgia towards
the EU, the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration was created. [Khidasheli, 2011, p.96]

Thus, main functions of the office of State Minister and Euro-Atlantic Integration regards the implementation of coordination and monitoring of activities of the executive branch of the Government of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Its European Integration Coordination Department focuses on coordination of activities on the European integration of the Government of Georgia, Ministries and other state agencies; assistance to approximation of Georgian legislation to the legislation of the EU; executing functions of the secretariat of the state commission on Georgia’s European integration; coordination of implementation of Georgia-EU action plan within the scope of the EU Neighborhood Policy; coordination of Georgia’s participation in the EU initiative “Eastern Partnership”; coordination of issues related with the “Partnership for Mobility”; assistance to approximation of Georgia and EU political, business and non-governmental circles. [The Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 2013]

Also, from 2004 activates the Georgia’s EU Integration Commission. It is chaired by the Prime Minister of Georgia. The State Minister’s Office on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration is charged to deal secretariat’s tasks of this commission. The commission’s tasks are focused on the facilitation of the process of Georgian integration into the European Union and coordinate the line ministries’ activities in this regards and preparation of the recommendations and proposals for the Government of Georgia, facilitating effective cooperation of Georgia with EU and its Member States in the political, economic, cultural, legal and other fields. It also supports implementation of the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan (ENP AP) and discusses ongoing implementation process; facilitates harmonization of Georgian legislation with the EU acquis communautaire and discuss information on the implementation of the recommendations of the EU-Georgia Cooperation Council, Committee and Subcommittees. [Georgia’s EU Integration Commission, 2013]

At the same time, European integration requires informed support from the Georgian public, which can be achieved only through better informing the public and conducting wide and open discussions in order to overcome the difference of opinions still existing in connection
with the steps that need to be taken in order to get closer to Europe. Therefore, the Georgia National Platform elaborated in cooperation with the State Ministry for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia the “European Integration Communication and Information Strategy of Georgia (2013-2016). The strategy defines the communication framework with the national and international society on Georgia’s EU integration process with its benefits and obligations. Implementation of the Strategy contributes to awareness raising of its target groups on the challenges, opportunities and commitments of the European integration process and facilitates mobilization of the international community.[ Newsletter. Activities of the Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2013]

In general, Georgians are enthusiastic about Europe and look forward to EU integration as a tool for resolving major problems, and think that integration is a realistic prospect. [Georgian Public Opinion, 2009,p.2] According to the dates provided by the report elaborated by Caucas Research Resource Centers in 2011, eighty percent of Georgians would vote to join the EU (79% in 2009), and 88% think Georgia should be a member of the European Union, up from 81% in 2009. People are also more confident about Georgia’s readiness to integrate than they were in 2009. Thirty-eight percent of Georgians say the country will be ready to join the European Union in five years or less (up from 31% in 2009), while a third believe Georgia actually will join in five years or less. However, these results should not be taken to mean Georgians are delusionally optimistic about the prospects of EU membership. Thirty-one percent don’t know when Georgia will be prepared for membership, while 37% don’t know when Georgia actually will join. Similarly, many Georgians are not overly optimistic when it comes to evaluating their country’s relationship with the EU. While 5% of Georgians say it is very good and a further 43% say quite good, 41% characterize the relationship as neutral [Knowledge and Attitudes toward the EU in Georgia, December, 2011, p.8]

Speaking about the Republic of Moldova, European integration was declared as its main foreign policy objective. Like Georgia, the Republic of Moldova do not have the real prospect to obtain the EU membership and it is also a part of European Neighborhood Policy and Eastern Partnership. Moldova’s progress within this initiative is appreciated as very good, being estimated by the European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries as the best
performer coming first in Linkage, Approximation and Management. In fact, the margin between Moldova and Georgia in this performance is very slim, suggesting that both countries perform at about the same level. [European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries, 2012,p.14]

At moment, within its European integration process, the Republic of Moldova is focused on three main tasks: to sign Association Agreement, to obtain visa liberalization and to conclude the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. In January 2010 negotiations began between Moldova and the EU over an Association Agreement (AA). The negotiations are based on four main thematic blocks: 1) political dialogue, reforms and cooperation in foreign and security policy; 2) economic and sector cooperation; 3) justice, freedom and security; 4) people to people cooperation.[ Căldare, 2011, p.185] Even if in the March 2013 took place the last round of AA negotiations, there are doubts regarding the possibility of its signing in the autumn 2013. This fact is dictated by the political crises and, respectively, the instability generated by it. However, if the AA will be signed, this event will be attested as a real success of Moldovan diplomacy, especially if it will be obtained the prospect of EU membership.

The dialogue on setting up the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union was started as part of the Association Agreement with the EU. The set up of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU is a priority for the Republic of Moldova because once the commitments are fulfilled nationally, the DCFTA will not only attract foreign investors to the Republic of Moldova, but will contribute to launching the domestic producers on the Community market. According to the study conducted by the European Union, the Moldova-EU Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement will boost the Moldovan exports by 16%, while the GDP of the country will increase by 5.6%. According to the timetable agreed during the visit of the European Commissioner for Trade, Mr. Karel de Gucht to Chisinau, the negotiations will be completed by Summit of the Eastern Partnership to be held in November 2013, in Vilnius.[ Bucataru, 2012, p.4]

As for visa liberalisation, Moldova has set as a goal to complete the Action Plan on Visa Liberalization with the EU by 2013. At the current stage it is developed the second phase of the visa dialogue that is related to the more practical component part and, namely, the implementation of the legislation. In a research regarding the progress made by Republic of

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Moldova in implementing the Action Plan for visa liberalization is underlined that Moldova accomplished 86% of the required conditions. [Chinea, Ciucu, Cojocariu, 2012]

Meanwhile, as Bucataru V. notes, among the results obtained by the Republic of Moldova by using the framework of the Eastern Partnership on the bilateral dimension can be mentioned also: a) Implementation of the Republic of Moldova - EU Mobility Partnership, implementation of projects and initiatives in the field of document security, migration policies, fighting illegal migration, contributes directly to the implementation of the requirements set by the EU in the context of visa liberalization for Moldova. The development of the extended migration profile and the assessment initiative of the Mobility Partnership as a tool of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility are considered pilot practices that will be replicated to other countries that are already implementing Mobility Partnerships; b) The Accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Energy Community (May 2010), which implies, in particular, the fact that the Republic of Moldova undertook the commitments stipulated in the Energy Package II and III; and 3) Regional development, in addition to the Memorandum of Understanding, a joint declaration related to the dialogue on regional policy was signed. Recently, the European Commission introduced a new instrument, namely pilot regional development programmes intended to finance short-term programmes that will contribute to strengthening the social, economic and territorial cohesions of the partner states in Eastern Europe, thus, contributing to the economic integration and convergence with the European Union. The European Commission has allocated 2 million euros to the Republic of Moldova for 2012 - and 5,000,000 euros for 2013. [Bucataru, 2012, p.7]

At the same time, Republic of Moldova should focus further on the domestic reform process. There are still problems in different fields as human rights observance, fight against corruption and reform of judiciary system. In such a way domestic readiness of the country has the same importance as the collaboration with European Union. In this context it should be mentioned that the European integration of Moldova is seen mainly as a responsibility of government. Thus, through the priority actions in the field of European integration, besides those discussed above, the Moldovan government lists: the involvement of entire society, all political forces and relevant external actors in the transformation of Moldova in a European country with
a real perspective of EU membership; harmonization of national legislation with acquis communautaire; consolidation of judicial and institutional framework; etc. [Programul de Activitate al guvernului Republicii Moldova, 2011]

In order to coordinate the processes of Moldovan European integration, at institutional level, was firstly established the General Department for European Integration within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova. Later, to strengthen national institutions work and initiative on European integration and to promote the strategy of accession to the European Union, according to Government Resolution of 2003, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was created the Department of European Integration. Osoian, 2010] Simultaneously with the creation of this subdivision, the similar departments were created in all ministries and departments. Thus, in 2005, the name of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, was completed with the phrase „and European Integration”. In 2002, according to presidential initiative, was created the National Commission for European Integration. It was reorganized and from 2009 activates the Governmental National Commission for European Integration of the Republic of Moldova. It is headed by the Prime-minister and its structure consists of ministers. Monitorul Oficial, 2009

However Republic of Moldova do not have a national strategy for European integration. In 2005, was adopted the European Strategy for European Integration of the Republic of Moldova in which have been included, in fact, practically all the problems of development of the Republic of Moldova, and by which solution depends on the country's European future. As a domestic document, the strategy aimed at preparing the country for accession to the European community, considering the integration as a fundamental national interest. Therefore it includes, for each domain of activity, the analysis of the legislative background of the Republic of Moldova, the analysis of the institutional framework, the formulation of existing problems, and short-medium term priorities. [Strategia Europeană a Republicii Moldova, 2005] But, this strategy can not be regarded as effective and essential one for the European preparation of the Republic of Moldova, being too general and having no concrete methods for achieving the purposed objectives. Moreover, this strategy cannot be find on the governmental official resources, but only on some
web pages of the non-governmental organizations. So, it can be appreciated as a good work of civic society, and unfortunately, nothing more.

Also, National Human Development Report of 2012 clearly shows that the Moldovan government needs a better strategy to inform the public regarding Moldova’s European integration vector in order to consolidate the people’s support. One of the most striking findings of the survey is how much people’s expectations and beliefs diverge regarding the European integration process. Some of the findings should be of concern for the Government. So, about half of the Moldovan population is not able to describe at least in broad terms the current integrationist status of their country. Only 36 percent of the people said that Moldova is neither part of the EU nor the Customs Union but Moldova wants to join the EU. Another example reflecting how poorly informed citizens are is the fact that more than 62 percent of Moldovans believe that currently the Republic of Moldova is negotiating with the European Union the country’s accession to the EU, while 54 percent believe that a topic of discussions between Moldova and EU is the possibility of legal employment of Moldovans in the EU. In fact, none of the two topics are currently being discussed between Moldova and the European Union. More than 39 percent of the citizens surveyed recognized that they are rather uninformed about Moldova’s European integration process, while 23 percent said they are poorly informed. [Aspirațiile europene și dezvoltarea umană a Republicii Moldova,2012 p.45]

Researches underline that it is critical, at this stage, that every citizen be involved in the social, economic and political life in order to perceive and know the essence of change, new regulations, rights and responsibilities they have. This can be accomplished by: developing an effective and multidimensional communication strategy with the public; a massive information campaign concerning the essence of reform, the progress made, legislative changes carried out, practical implementation; developing communication tools, or using the existing ones to spread information concerning values, principles, European standards and their correct explanation; promoting, as actively as possible, the results of social, infrastructural, economic and environmental project carried out with the support of the EU; facilitating access to information regarding the activities of the EU and EU member states in the Republic of Moldova; communicating, promoting and explaining the benefits and disadvantages of European
integration and other integration models; and setting up platforms for communication, discussion and training concerning the reform process, domestic and foreign policies of the state.[Bucataru,2013] Yet, there are some positive evolutions in this field, as civic society realize studies regarding the situation European integration of Moldova, some specific web sites as infoeuropa.md and europa.md work successfully and several centers of European information activate.

3. Conclusions

Thus, it may be stated that both, Republic of Moldova and Georgia have, generally, similar issues in their European integration process. There is no EU membership prospect. Both states are in the process of transformation and modernization and have difficulties with corruption, human rights, judicial system and territorial problems. However, there is, also, a certain progress that brings Georgia and Moldova closer to European Union.

At the same time, there can be delimited some recommendations that will improve the European integration of both countries. So, firstly it is necessary to develop a national plan or strategy for preparation of states’ accession to the European Union, which would determine the own path of Georgia and Moldova forward European integration vector. This kind of strategy should include not only the country’s modernization, but also preparation of the population for the status of European citizens. In this context, it is welcomed a complex strategy of population’s information regarding all issues related to the European integration and European Union. Secondly, it is necessary to create a highly trained team consisting of experts in various fields of European integration. Also, it is important that in European integration should be involved not only the government, but also civic society. Finally, it is impossible to go to Europe without bringing Europe at home. Therefore, correct formulation of domestic policies of European integration, the creation of mechanisms for their achievement and strengthening of the relations with Member States of the European Union will indisputably contribute to the achievement of the EU membership.

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