The Eastern Partnership: Georgia’s Perspective

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Outline

• Introduction
• Current challenges in Georgia
• Successes and failures of EaP in Georgia
• Further recommended steps For the EU
• Conclusion
• European integration as a cornerstone for Georgia’s foreign policy;

• Establishment of the EaP:
  - EU’s response to the Russia-Georgian war,
  - Gives Georgia the confidence for the real prospect of rapprochement with the EU and practical benefits of the process,

• Signature of the Association Agreement (AA)-a qualitatively new level of relations with the EU.
Current challenges for Georgia

• Russian resistance for Georgia’s European path and ‘frozen’ conflicts;

• Increasingly skeptical society and the lack of awareness of the opportunities that the EU represents;

• Problems related to the approximation process with the EU.

• Economic hardship and the need for strengthening of state and democratic institutions;
Relationship with Russia

- Russia remains greatest foreign and security challenge for Georgia;

- Use of a wide range of instruments to retain influence over Georgia and intensifying the pressure whenever Georgia attempted to enhance its relations with the West:
  - Economic embargoes,
  - The expulsion of Georgian citizens,
  - The occupation of Georgia’s territories,
  - Direct interference in domestic politics.
  - Remittance blockage,
  - Stoking domestic discord and anti-EU sentiment.

- Reinforcing the position in Georgia’s breakaway regions;

- Spreading of false myths about the EU in Georgian society.
The popular support for the EU in Georgia

• 69% of Georgians support the EU integration process (2014 EU Neighbourhood Barometer, Spring)

• The lack of information regarding the process of integration of Georgia into the European Union,

• The lack of awareness of opportunities created by Georgia’s rapprochement with the EU,

• Increased number of Euro-Skeptics in Georgian society.
The process of approximation with the EU laws
• Extensive reforms with the painful and unpopular steps

• The sensitivity of issues for Georgia’s traditional society (e.g. Anti-discrimination Law);

• Need of qualified people and experts (in fields like phytosanitary, transporation);

The need for strengthening of state and democratic institutions

• Still fragile democracy
• The case of broadcasting company ‘Rustavi 2’:
  - human rights,
  -media freedom,
  -internal political power straggle in the country.
EaP’s tangible results for Georgia

• The first peaceful constitutional change of power in 2012:
  - Georgian Dream were elected to power.

• Liberalization of trade and trade-related issues and improved business climate:
  - 8th place in the ease of doing business ranking,
  - 22nd freest economy in the world.

• Widely addressed improvement in human rights
  - An anti-discrimination law;
  - A Personal Data Protection and a labor inspection Inspector’s offices;
  - A “green border” has been introduced at most checkpoints (meaning improved infrastructure and living conditions for border guards).
EaP: Shortcomings

• EaP does not suit the declared ambitions of the country-EU Membership perspective;

• Not sufficient technical assistance for a full implementation of the ambitious DCFTA provisions;

• A limited capacity for diplomacy and crisis management and an absence of the effective strategy to response the conflicts in Georgia;
Future actions

• To give to Georgia a reassurance:
  - Granting visa free regime and giving a credible membership perspective
• Assistance against Russia’s intervention or any other types of conflict in order to ensure Georgia’s stable security situation:
  - To increase a political and diplomatic engagement to mitigate conflict dynamics,
  - To focus on lessening the destabilizing aspects of EU–Russia competition.
• To assist, both technically and financially Georgian authorities, in the implementation process of the AA;
Future actions

• To increase communication activities with the population as well as with the government:
  - A comprehensive information strategy,
  - Regular contacts with civil society and the media,
  - To work with the government in a pragmatic fashion
  - To build trust with the administration and improve its image as an impartial facilitator,
  - Do not shy away from criticising the government if there are grounds for it!
Conclusion

• Georgia enjoys strong political support from the European community;
• The EU still has no clear concept of how to deal with the long-term EU membership aspirations of the country.
• The association agreement provides some framework for developing closer relations between the EU and Georgia but in the dimension of hard security European foreign policy has a huge void to fill.
• Notwithstanding the above mentioned challenges, the EU association is a strategic development route for Georgia, which has no better alternative.
Thank you for your attention!