

# NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE EU IN GEORGIA

## Georgia's External Communication: Grand Strategy and Tailored Approaches

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## Contents

Abstract .....	2
I. Introduction .....	2
Research Methods .....	3
Research Design .....	4
II. Goals and Strategic Objectives of Georgia's Foreign Policy .....	5
The National Security Concept of Georgia .....	5
Georgia's 2019-2022 Foreign Policy Strategy .....	6
Government Program 2020-2024 towards Building a European State .....	8
The 10-Year Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs .....	9
"Foreign Policy Focused on Western Values and the Country's Interests: 10-Year Vision, 10 Goals." .....	9
Summary of the Chapter .....	10
III. 2021-2022 Communication Goals and the Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs .....	11
IV. Georgia's Foreign Policy Agenda .....	13
The Georgian-USA Cooperation Agenda .....	13
The Georgian-German Cooperation Agenda .....	16
The Georgian-French Cooperation Agenda .....	17
The NATO-Georgia Cooperation Agenda .....	19
The EU-Georgia Cooperation Agenda .....	20
V. Key Foreign Policy Directions of Partner Countries .....	22
The United States .....	22
Germany .....	24
France .....	26
NATO's Political Agenda and Enlargement Policy .....	27
European Neighborhood and Enlargement Policies .....	29
VI. Conclusions .....	31
Recommendations: .....	36
References .....	39

## Abstract

The study aims to identify gaps and challenges in Georgia's implementation of its external communication strategy, and the country's compliance with the strategic objectives of the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The paper reviews strategic documents and explores the foreign policy agenda, analyzing these in the context of Georgia's cooperation with its strategic partners.

Data analysis demonstrates that there is a certain degree of mismatch in the setting of agenda priorities of cooperation between Georgia and its partners. The study finds that the country's external communication strategy uses a universal approach and does not fully consider the expectations, concerns, and interests of individual partners. Thus, the central recommendation of the study is to develop an external communication strategy with a very special focus on the protection of human rights, Rule of Law, and consistent advancement of institutional democracy in the country, as these are the areas where all our partners have special interests. At the same time, the external communication strategy should cover tactical components tailored to individual actors, which, based on thorough calculations, will better suit partner expectations and interests.

In addition, based on the findings, the study develops a set of recommendations for the elaboration of an effective and comprehensive umbrella communication strategy, with consideration of different aspects of a bilateral and multilateral cooperation agenda. Although the study focuses on Georgia's cooperation with the US, Germany, France, the EU, and NATO, part of the recommendations can be generalized and adapted to the specifics of other regions and countries as well.

## I. Introduction

In the contemporary era of informational technologies, strategic communication has critical importance. Informational diversity and a strained political agenda at both the local and international level underline the need for Georgia's state institutions to develop a strategic communication system and effectively pursue the country's strategic goals and objectives.

Historically, international relations were implemented using mainly traditional diplomatic channels, while print media or other media outlets were more rarely used. However, considering the dynamics and diversity of the informational streams in the era of informational and digital technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, strategic communications have become a critical instrument of international relations and foreign policy making. The already overloaded and diverse global political agenda has somehow been overshadowed by new global threats, among them Covid-19. In such an environment, prioritization in the global agenda of issues important to Georgia becomes much more challenging.

Disinformation and propaganda have become important tactical armaments in the current political context. It is extremely difficult to combat them without strategic approaches and, in particular, without well developed and effectively implemented comprehensive strategic communication plans. Although, most frequently, disinformation targets the internal audience of the country by attempting to undermine internal stability and democratic institutions, disinformation also has serious implications on the external political context.



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Special efforts are required in order to ensure that strategic aims are not obscured by the routines of international political processes, and to consolidate the support of the international community around Georgia's national interests and foreign policy priorities. One of the most important tools for such efforts is the development of an effective external communication strategy plan and a good structural/institutional mechanism for its implementation.

The global political process is very dynamic. The political agendas of countries and international / intergovernmental organizations are complex and multidimensional. As such, it can be difficult to set up a single constant plan of external strategic communication for the country. The tactical element of the strategy should be adaptable to the changing political environment, but at the same time, the strategic objectives and central axis of the external communication strategy must be constant and sustain logical continuity.

**The aim of this study is to explore and analyze gaps and challenges in the implementation of Georgia's external communication strategic, and its compliance with the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its mission. We further aim to define what the possible shortcomings or mistakes of the current strategy are and to identify what needs to be improved or changed in the current practice in order to see more tangible results.**

The study does not aim to critically analyze the strategic objectives of Georgia's state institutions, or even to revise them. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing aggression significantly challenge both the regional and global security system and its effectiveness. It has also considerably changed the attitude of the international community towards Russia for many years to come. At the same time, as a result of the Russian aggression, the climate of Euro-Atlantic cooperation is changing significantly, and the West is becoming more consolidated. It is difficult to predict how the shape of the new structure of international security will eventually look, but it is essential that the renewal of Georgia's foreign policy objectives should be carried out in light of this changing international system. This is especially true for the issue of normalization of relations with Russia, which seems irrelevant in the current extremely tense situation between the West and Russia. At the same time, such an unprecedented for many years, consolidation of the West can be seen as a historical momentum and opportunity for achieving Georgia's strategic objectives.

## Research Methods

The method of content analysis is used to determine the key variables of the study. In this regard, the study explores official state documents, policy positions, governmental programs and other formal documents of Georgia and its partner countries and intergovernmental/international organizations. In addition, the study explores relevant academic literature, policy briefs and other analytical sources. Data collection from multiple sources allows the determination of key explanatory variables and to compare and contrast them in an analytical framework of qualitative analysis so as to produce practical recommendations.

Due to the complexity of Georgia's strategic aims and its foreign policy priorities, the external strategic communication of the country targets almost the entire world. Some strategic aims include topics like attracting FDI or tourists, while other objectives are more regionally focused, aiming to ensure regional



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security and cooperation etc. It is important to highlight that one of the key priorities of the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the process of ensuring non-recognition of Georgia's occupied territories, which requires the state institutions to cooperate with almost all UN member states.

Such diversity in the strategic objectives necessitates an extraordinary and complex multidimensional approach in elaborating the country's foreign policy and subsequent external communication strategy. However, it is impossible to cover all the important policy issues in Georgia's external communication in the frame of one study. For research purposes, it is essential to make a case selection based on Georgia's key strategic objectives.

The study examines the main challenges and gaps in Georgia's communications strategy in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration and cooperation with its strategic partners. The study focuses on the US-Georgia cooperation and Georgia's EU and NATO integration. Additionally, the study explores Georgia's cooperation with two major European countries, Germany and France. The positions of these two countries in a large way determine Georgia's prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration, although bilateral cooperation with Germany and France also has significant importance for the country. While the research puts a focus on countries and intergovernmental organizations, the main findings and recommendations developed in the final section of the document can also be generalized and adapted to the specifics of other regions and countries.

## Research Design

The chapter that follows explores the goals and objectives of Georgia's foreign policy. In this chapter, the study reviews several important official documents of the country: The National Security Concept of Georgia; the 2019-2022 Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia; the Government Program 2020-2024; and the 10-year Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By reviewing these official state documents, the study identifies the key foreign policy objectives of the country and sets them as independent variables for further analysis.

In the third chapter, the study explores and reviews Communication Goals and the Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This review section helps to identify how the foreign policy objectives of the country are incorporated into the current external communication strategy of the ministry, and what form that strategy has.

Chapter 4 reviews agenda issues in Georgia's foreign policy towards selected countries (the US, Germany and France) and intergovernmental organizations (the EU and NATO), examines how foreign policy objectives are integrated into the external communication strategy, and analyzes the priorities of Georgia's partners and their expectations in relations with Georgia.

Based on the examination of academic literature and official and media sources, Chapter 5 reviews the key foreign policy direction of the partner countries, the EU, and NATO. The chapter identifies the key determinants, principles and actors that make up the policy approaches of these countries and organizations in the context of cooperation with Georgia.

The final chapter of the study compares and contrasts key variables highlighted in the earlier chapters. Critical analysis of the findings allows the study to identify consistencies and gaps existing between

Georgia's foreign policy agenda on the one hand and the attitudes of Georgia's partners towards this agenda on the other. Based on this analysis, the study develops a set of recommendations.

## II. Goals and Strategic Objectives of Georgia's Foreign Policy

As mentioned earlier in the paper, it is beyond the scope of the research to review Georgia's foreign policy goals and strategic objectives. Instead, the research seeks to study and analyze the main messages of the foreign strategic communication, messages which are based on Georgia's main strategic goals and objectives and aim to support their attainment. It is then important to identify independent variables which provide the basis for the country's foreign policy, and for the international relations carried out and led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the government as a whole.

Using the content analysis method, the research examines and reviews the following several state documents to identify these variables:

- The National Security Concept of Georgia (approved by the Parliament of Georgia on 23 February 2011);
- The 2019-2022 Foreign Policy Strategy of Georgia (approved by the Government of Georgia on 28 March 2019);
- The Government Program 2020-2024 towards Building a European State (approved by the Parliament of Georgia, together with the Cabinet, following the 2020 parliamentary elections);
- The 10-year Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### The National Security Concept of Georgia

In essence and content, the National Security Concept is an overarching document concerning circumstances, risks and challenges both within and outside the country. It is a fundamental document providing the basis for the country's key foreign policy documents. Specifics and the diversity of issues covered by the Security Concept demonstrate that each and every challenge and risk require a coordinated and orchestrated implementation of the policy both within the country and beyond its borders. Therefore, the Concept represents a fundamental document which lays the ground for other strategic documents also falling within the scope of the present research.

The Concept was approved in 2011 and, therefore, it may require revision and adaptation to newly emerging circumstances, specifically those that have come to the fore over the past 10 years, be they challenges or opportunities. Currently, government structures are working on a renewed version of the document. However, matters such as national values and national interests are likely to remain unchanged. Likewise, it is expected that strategic directions developed over the course of several decades will also be maintained.

According to the National Security Concept, the following are the national values of the country:

- Territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- Freedom;



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- Democracy and Rule of Law;
- Security;
- Prosperity;
- Peace.

Ensuring Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity tops the list of the country's national interests, followed by the development of democratic institutions and the strengthening of democracy, development of an efficient national security system, strengthening of national unity and civil consent, European and Euro-Atlantic integration, economic growth, energy security, regional stability, strengthening the transit role of the country, environmental security, cyber security, civil integration and preservation of national-cultural uniqueness, demographic sustainability, and relations with diasporas.

Deriving from the national interests, the Concept also lays down key policy directions, with a strong focus on the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty, paying close attention to de-occupation, the non-recognition policy, and threats coming from Russia. Foreign relations, including integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, partnership with the US, EU and NATO member states, stand out as particularly important policy directions.

### Georgia's 2019-2022 Foreign Policy Strategy

Georgia's current foreign policy strategy deals with global challenges that are as relevant for Georgia as they are for its partners. These challenges include terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism, cyber security, disinformation, and attempts to discredit democratic values, including those coming from Russia, etc.

Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Russian occupation and the accompanying threats, are within the focus of the document. Therefore, priority objectives are closely tied with these threats and include measures to ensure the non-recognition policy, protection of human rights and the general humanitarian situation in the Occupied Territories, return of IDPs, maintenance of a dialogue format with Russia, prevention of a possible escalation of the conflicts, and commitment to a peaceful resolution of those conflicts.

Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration forms the cornerstone of the document, which covers all existing cooperation formats with the EU and NATO. However, the strategy bypasses those burning issues that have hindered Georgia's accession to these organizations.

Matters relating to both the EU and NATO are rather specific. With regard to the EU, the strategy deals with the implementation of the Association Agreement and DCFTA, strategic partnership in the field of security, migration and mobility and related challenges, a roadmap for Georgia's membership to the EU unilaterally developed by Georgia, the Eastern Partnership format, etc. However, the strategy also talks about growing populism and Euroscepticism spreading within the EU as an important factor to consider as Georgia pursues its European integration agenda.

When it comes to NATO, the strategy overviews the work undertaken by the NATO-Georgia Commission and the activation of a political dialogue, application of an annual national program mechanism to support Georgia's accession, a substantial package as one of the key cooperation



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instruments, the special role that Georgia has been playing in Black Sea security, Georgia's participation in international missions, and trainings held under the aegis of NATO. In addition, the document highlights the importance of deeper cooperation with the NATO member states with regard to striking a consensus on Georgia's NATO membership.

The document puts an emphasis on democratic consolidation within the country and further strengthening of its institutions, as well as its acquiring the role of a regional leader. The document states that Georgia as a European democracy should strive towards contributing to ensuring peace, protection of human rights and strengthening the Rule of Law, both globally and throughout the region.

The document displays economic opportunities as an important platform for forming the country's foreign policy. It also pays a great deal of attention to matters pertaining to the implementation of economic projects, gaining the status of an East-West hub and implementation of related investments, communication and energy projects, establishment of free trade regimes with various regions and countries worldwide as a means to attracting investments, and bringing the idea of "regional hub" to fruition.

Partnership with the US is dealt with in great detail. The strategic partnership stretches over many years and, therefore, areas for cooperation are rather structuralized. The areas include, but are not limited to, defense and security, support to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, strengthening of Georgia's democratic reforms and democratic institutions, and trade-economic cooperation.

The document provides a general overview of Georgia's cooperation with Germany and France and focuses mainly on the importance of ensuring support from these countries for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. It highlights the importance of deeper economic and trade relations with and attracting investments from Germany and France.

The strategy highlights the importance of Georgia's contribution to the international security system, including its participation in international missions under the aegis of NATO.

The document also covers some of the global agenda items, such as the fight against international terrorism and transnational crime, non-proliferation of mass weapons, energy security and environmental protection, as well as Georgia's more active role in overcoming challenges identified by the global agenda.

The strategic objectives of Georgia's foreign policy also include economic diplomacy and the urgency to undertake more active bilateral and multilateral work in this direction. The document talks about the expediency of working with the private sector of partner countries to promote the economic opportunities offered by Georgia, strengthening of the institute of the economic attaché, and lobbying Georgian businesses. The strategy highlights that realization of the country's economic potential, capitalization on its strategic location, and its role as a transit connecting the East and West, are important foreign policy objectives.

According to the document, strategic communication is seen as a priority direction within Georgia's foreign policy and includes several components, among them: raising awareness about Georgia beyond its borders, raising awareness among the country's population about its foreign policy priorities, prevention of growing anti-Western propaganda, application of people's diplomacy, and ensuring greater civic engagement.



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The strategy highlights the urgency of a holistic approach by the state authorities when planning and implementing the foreign policy, as well as coordination and cooperation between government agencies.

### Government Program 2020-2024 towards Building a European State

In the aftermath of the 2020 parliamentary elections, the Parliament of Georgia endorsed a new cabinet of ministers and a new government program laying down the vision of the ruling party. For the purpose of the research, the study focuses on only that part of the program dealing with foreign policy and security.

Pursuant to the program, the construction of a European State is one of the priorities for the period between 2021 and 2024. "European State" is the main pillar of the document, with programmatic deliberation revolving around it in various directions, including foreign policy and security.

The part of the document concerning the government's vision also highlights matters relating to Georgia's European aspiration, which provides a framework for discussing foreign policy and security, as well as human rights and institutional strengthening. An important milestone stipulated by the program is Georgia's intent to officially apply for EU membership by 2024 (which was actually done in March 2022). Deepening cooperation with the EU in the areas of commerce, economy, transport, and energy is a necessary precondition for the attainment of the most important political objective: accession to the EU.

According to the document, the government is committed to effectively implementing the obligation pledged under the EU membership roadmap, Association Agreement and DCFTA, to ensure the country's integration into the European common market, deepened cooperation with the EU in the areas of commerce, energy, communication, etc., strengthening of Georgia's transit role, and to offer economic opportunities to the EU.

The government program pays attention to such issues as the de-occupation and peaceful resolution of the Georgian-Russian conflict, maintenance of a dialogue with Russia, protection of human rights, the response to the general humanitarian situation in the Occupied Territories, and the return of IDPs.

The program also focuses on Georgia's NATO membership prospects, which includes the development of Black Sea security and the special role that Georgia plays as an important and reliable partner in these processes. The government plans to develop a national strategy for Black Sea Security.

According to the program, the government plans to deepen cooperation with the US within the frames of the strategic charter in the directions of security, defense capacity building, de-occupation, the non-recognition policy, and in trade and economy. The government also plans to intensify works in order to conclude a Free Trade Agreement with the US. The government recognizes the special role that the US has played in the process of strengthening Georgia's democratic institutions, and the former's invaluable support to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration.

However, the government program is rather modest when it comes to matters pertaining to bilateral relations with the EU member states. The program is restricted to only general statements about the

importance of deeper relations with the partner EU countries, and bringing such partnership to a level of strategic partnership.

## The 10-Year Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

### “Foreign Policy Focused on Western Values and the Country’s Interests: 10-Year Vision, 10 Goals.”

On August 9, 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia presented a 10-year Action Plan entitled, "Foreign Policy Focused on Western Values and the Country’s Interests: 10-Year Vision, 10 Goals." The plan is based on the strategic goals and objectives of the country and sets out the 10 main directions of future activities:

- To achieve substantial progress in strengthening the country's sovereignty and restoring its territorial integrity;
- To submit the application for EU membership in 2024 and obtain candidate status by 2030;
- To develop a plan for Georgia’s NATO membership together with members of the alliance, and to achieve membership by 2030;
- To strengthen the format of existing bilateral strategic relations with partner countries, including EU member states, the UK and European Union, Ukraine, and countries of the Black Sea region;
- To establish a comprehensive military-political and trade-economic alliance with the US, based on the firm strategic partnership existing between the two countries;
- To sustain a balanced and mutually beneficial partnership with the states of the region;
- Normalization of relations with Russia and beginning of a real process of de-occupation and conflict resolution, based on the principles of Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- To launch an EU-Georgia dialogue on connectivity and strengthening Georgia’s leading role in the region, connecting East and West;
- To implement large-scale regional economic projects through active economic diplomacy, attract investments, promote exports of Georgian products, etc.;
- To strengthen diaspora organizations and develop cultural-educational centers.

The 10-year Action plan is based on existing strategic documents, but it sets additional midterm objectives and benchmarks in certain areas that are important variables in developing an external communication strategy.

Regarding Georgia’s EU membership, which is one of the key foreign policy objectives of the country, the plan sets additional benchmarks. One is the submission of the application for EU membership by 2024, and another is to gain candidate's status by 2030. The plan has a special focus on strengthening economic cooperation with the EU, and sets as an important objective to implement the investment plan proposed by the EU, entitled “Recovery, Resilience, and Reform.” This project envisages the consolidation of 3.9 billion Euros in investment in the implementation of large-scale economic projects.

The plan aims to expand and strengthen cooperation with the United States in all areas, and the central focus in this partnership is on security, economic cooperation, and trade. The plan sets as an important objective the signing of a Free Trade Agreement between Georgia and the US by 2030. The plan does not address issues of bilateral cooperation, such as democratic reforms, human rights, Rule of Law,



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or reform of the judiciary system. The plan sets as its objective Georgia's membership in NATO by 2030, yet it does not speak about the practical steps that will be made in order to eliminate existing contradictions regarding that NATO membership.

On the advancement of economic diplomacy, the Action Plan mostly speaks about implementation of large-scale economic projects and attraction of investments, however, there are several concrete projects mentioned in the plan which are set to be launched and implemented by 2030.

The 10-year Action Plan is not a document with detailed descriptions of actions and activities, but is available in the form of a public presentation that outlines the main elements of the plan. Special emphasis in the title of the Action Plan is put on Western values as a foundation for carrying out the foreign policy of the country, however, the content of the plan does not pay much attention to issues related to Georgia's human rights, Rule of Law and strengthening of democratic institutions.

## Summary of the Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the key state documents which identify and shape Georgia's top foreign policy priorities and respective directions. The review demonstrates that the documents are in line with each other. In spite of certain differences in wording or in the hierarchy of certain issues, they clearly formulate priorities and strategic objectives which then guide the country's international relations.

For further analysis, it is important to highlight these objectives once again:

- **Territorial integrity and sovereignty;**
- **De-occupation and non-recognition policy;**
- **Maintenance of a dialogue with Russia and prevention of possible escalation;**
- **Georgia's NATO membership;**
- **Georgia's EU membership / application by 2024 / candidate status by 2030;**
- **Cooperation with strategic partners;**
- **Promotion of Georgia's economic capacities and the realization of functions as a regional hub and transit / realization of the EU investment Plan "Recovery, Resilience and Reform";**
- **Creation of an image of the country as a democratic European State.**

Russia's aggression in Ukraine has affected the existing system of international relations and demonstrated the need to update Georgia's strategic documents, especially with regard to the dialogue with Russia, which in the current context can no longer be considered a pragmatic approach to preventing possible escalation. The new dynamic of Georgia's EU integration also has to be reflected in strategic documents, considering the already submitted application and membership self-assessment questionnaire. The analytical variables in the present study are unchanged and are derived from current documents; however, the analytical part of the study will take into account the current state and the changing political environment.

### III. 2021-2022 Communication Goals and the Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The communication plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Georgia is based on the documents reviewed above. The analysis of materials received from the MFA allows the study to establish links between these documents and matters covered in the country's strategic documents, as well as their agreement with Georgia's partner organizations and countries, which is the subject of the following chapters.

The MFA, together with Georgian embassies and diplomatic missions, developed an action plan based on the Foreign Policy Strategy for 2019-2022. The MFA defined a general framework for embassies and missions to develop activity plans, which are then brought together in a unified communication strategy.

The communication plan covers seven directions which are consistent with the strategic objectives. It envisages the conducting of campaigns under each of the following directions:

- Georgia's European integration;
- Georgia's integration into NATO;
- De-occupation, peaceful resolution of the conflict with Russia, the regional security environment;
- Georgia's economic capacities;
- Georgia – a modern European country;
- Tourism, cultural diversity, Georgian wine and cuisine;
- 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of Georgian independence (since this last campaign is of a temporary nature, it was not included in the scope of the research).

The communication plan establishes a common approach to be considered and reflected in separate communication plans and in the activities of individual embassies. The document mentions those countries that are skeptical towards some of Georgia's strategic objectives, such as a membership of NATO and the EU. However, there are no specific approaches or activities aside from an entry according to which Georgia should prioritize activities in these countries.

The MFA also defines a target audience, one which remains the same across all countries regardless of their size and importance for Georgia. The target audience includes media and journalists, NGOs, academic circles and think-tanks, influencers, parliamentary groups, and diasporas.

The key message within the EU membership campaign is Georgia's intent to apply for membership in 2024 and, as such, the campaign focuses on promoting all positive processes taking place in the country that are related to the Georgian-EU partnership. Among these are the Association Agreement and the effective implementation of the AA agenda, Georgia's special role within the Eastern Partnership, its democratic reforms, its economic capacity, its role as a transit and a regional hub between the EU and Eastern countries, and its outstanding contribution to ensuring global security. At the same time, the campaign aims to profile Georgia as a European country with an ancient European civilization and highlights Georgia as an important country for the EU and its member states. However, the document does not specify the reasons for which Georgia bears such significance for Europe.

Like the EU membership campaign, the key messages within the NATO membership campaign are built around showcasing the progress made by Georgia as an aspirant country, and its active participation in NATO-led programs, missions and partnership formats. It also promotes the role of the country as a reliable partner, its commitment to democratic reforms and loyalty to democratic values, the role it has been playing in ensuring global security and strengthening the defense capacity, its efforts to get closer to NATO standards, implementation of the substantial package, its outstanding role in protecting Black Sea security and as a forerunner in the region, effective application of the integration mechanisms in NATO, the role of the country as a reliable security hub in the region, and its logistic, economic and transit capacities.

One of the key messages within the NATO membership campaign is the benefit that Georgia can provide for the Alliance upon its accession; however, as in the EU campaign, the document does not specify the nature of these benefits.

With regard to membership of both organizations, the document highlights the importance of paying close attention to so called “skeptical” countries. Yet it does not specify what different approaches should be employed in relation to such countries.

As a conclusion, the messages within both campaigns are universal and are placed within the same strategy. The document does not differentiate between specific tactical approaches based on interests and the positioning of certain countries, be they skeptical or supportive.

The document underlines the importance of peaceful resolution of the conflict with Russia, and de-occupation. Key emphases in this regard include problems relating to the occupation, more specifically, occupation as one of the gravest challenges to regional security; the urgency for the greater involvement of the international community in conflict resolution processes (US, EU); the importance of the protection of human rights in the Occupied Territories and the general humanitarian situation there; problems faced by IDPs, hindering Georgia's sustainable democratic development by means of disinformation and propaganda; efforts to disrupt and discredit democratic values; and the hybrid war. The document also underscores Georgia's peace policy and reconciliation with the Abkhaz and Ossetian people.

The key message regarding Georgia's economic potential conveyed in the document is the promotion of Georgia as a stable and developed state, with a highlighting of its investment, export, business and transit potential; Georgia as a transit hub with free trade regimes with various countries; Georgia's investment potential; its successes in the implementation of economic reforms; and its top international rankings.

Messages voiced through the economic campaign tend to be universal and less considerate of the possible varying interests of the states. Judging by the content of the documents, it is difficult to observe any ongoing global economic infrastructural or investment projects whose realization will be beneficial for both Georgia and its partner countries.

The campaign promoting Georgia as a modern European country focuses mainly on the popularization of Georgia as a European State by highlighting its historical and cultural heritage, as well as the democratic reforms ongoing in the country. Messages often display Georgia's successful participation in scientific and cultural programs and projects. However, the document largely ignores issues that are critical for European democracy, including human rights and Rule of Law.



When it comes to the tourism and cultural diversity campaign, the document mainly seeks to promote Georgia's interesting and unique culture, and aims at attracting visitors. The main emphasis is put on wine, cuisine, and Georgia's historical past. In prioritizing a marketing angle, the document does not consider the foreign policy context of the campaign.

## IV. Georgia's Foreign Policy Agenda

The present chapter provides an overview of items on Georgia's foreign policy agenda which are derived from the strategic documents discussed earlier in the paper, and which at the same time are based on the real political process. In addition, the chapter also deals with the top political priorities of our partners and their expectations of Georgia.

The study employed both discourse and content analysis methods and examined various sources, including official channels, academic literature, and information released through media outlets. The study is focused on key messages voiced through official meetings, and other forms of communication made by representatives of Georgia, and those of our partner countries and organizations. Analysis of the main trends identified through the research reveal those matters that constitute the core of the communication between the parties. The study identifies questions highlighted by the Georgian authorities, and the response to and acceptance of these matters by Georgia's partners.

### The Georgian-USA Cooperation Agenda

Relations between Georgia and the US stand out for their significance in Georgia's foreign policy and the country's international relations. The US has made a significant contribution to Georgia's state-building since the latter regained its independence, and it continues to do so. Both parties consider the cooperation as a strategic partnership and prioritize it on their respective agendas.

2009 marked a significant phase in the strategic cooperation, with Georgia and the US signing a charter of strategic cooperation which made the bilateral cooperation more structuralized and systemic. Within the frames of the charter, the parties set up a strategic partnership commission and identified strategic areas for that partnership, including in democracy, defense and security, trade and economy, people to people contacts and cooperation in the sphere of culture. The charter includes issues that pertain not only to bilateral relations, but also to US support to Georgia's foreign aspirations, close cooperation and joint actions against global threats.

In order to identify the issues prioritized by both parties and that sit high on the cooperation agenda, the research studied statements made by representatives of both Georgia and the US since 2014, a period characterized with a multiplicity of meetings. The same period has seen visits paid by US officials of various levels, including the Vice-President and Secretary of the State. Likewise, representatives of Georgian authorities also visited the US to hold meetings with high ranking members of the US leadership.

As mentioned earlier, the cooperation agenda has largely been based on matters identified in the Strategic Partnership Charter. However, these matters can also be ranked according to the



significance attached by either party. Accents mostly match, however, there have been some dissenting approaches.

The Georgian-USA strategic partnership provides a framework for all meetings held between the parties. Both Georgia and the US routinely underscore the importance of this partnership. On the one hand, the partnership with the US serves as a safeguard, with a broad meaning, of Georgia's statehood, while on the other, the US views it as cooperation with a trusted, loyal and stable partner and a main ally in the region. Therefore, meeting agendas always pay tribute to the partnership, as well as to prospects and the importance of its future development.

The Georgian-USA strategic partnership enjoys support from both political parties in the US. Congress has repeatedly reaffirmed its support by means of respective statements or normative acts. The importance of the strategic partnership has never been questioned by any of the White House administrations. However, there have certainly been different approaches to regional priorities. Likewise, all major political parties have declared their support to the Georgia-USA strategic partnership. This support has been voiced through political statements and cemented by resolutions passed by the Parliament of Georgia (Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on the Foreign Policy of Georgia, 2016).

Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty have been unconditionally supported by the US, whose authorities make supportive statements at all levels and on all possible occasions. The US has routinely expresses its unequivocal and unconditional support to Georgia in response to the Russian aggression and with regard to various humanitarian problems in the Occupied Territories. The official language of the US authorities is extremely explicit and harsh when it comes to assessing Russia's actions, and the US appreciates Georgia's restrained policy approach towards Russia's provocative actions and supports its peace policy and efforts to build relations with Abkhaz and Ossetian de-facto authorities. Lately, the US has been paying close attention to fighting disinformation and propaganda instigated by Russia as hybrid threats, and to strengthening Georgia's capacity to tackle the issue (U.S. House Passes Bipartisan Georgia Support Act, 2019).

Building Georgia's defense and security capabilities is an area which has been highly prioritized by both parties, and it has yielded tangible results. This is a priority item at all high-level meeting agendas and is underpinned by the security agreements made between the two states, an agreement which was recently extended for an additional six years (Mitchell, 2021).

Georgia's integration into NATO is also regarded as a priority issue. The US has played an outstanding role as a key lobbyist for Georgia's accession to NATO, and as the strongest supporter of the military, political, and economic reforms that are critical for NATO membership. Georgia, in turn, has contributed significantly to international peacekeeping missions under the aegis of NATO by sending its troops to NATO led missions, an act that has been highly praised by Georgia's partners including the US and NATO.

The US has been equally supportive of Georgia's EU aspirations and considers Georgia's accession to NATO and the EU as a process of the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic space, which, in turn, implies not only membership of these organizations but also Georgia's integration into the Western democratic community.



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Trade and economic relations represent one of the priority areas under the partnership charter, however, the political agenda is mostly limited to general statements and confirmation of good will to further deepen cooperation in this direction. The Georgian authorities have repeatedly stressed the importance of signing a free trade agreement with the US, despite the lack of any clear messages from the US executive authorities (though no categorical rejection has been expressed publicly). The matter is also reflected in the strategic partnership charter under future areas of cooperation. The possibility of signing an agreement has also been supported by the US legislative body in the form of a bipartisan resolution (2018) and an act (2019) in support of Georgia. The US ties the rise of its economic activities and increase in US investments to Georgia's internal political processes, and especially to the independence of the judiciary system in the country (Georgian Prime Minister, U.S. Secretary of State Hold Phone Talk, 2020).

The US expressed interest in the Global Silk Road Project and praised Georgia for holding a wide-scale economic conference – “Silk Road Forum” in 2015 (Georgian FM Meets U.S. Deputy State Secretary, 2015). However, the stance of the US incumbent authorities towards this global project, known currently as the “Belt and Road Initiative,” is extremely negative (Wintour, 2021).

When it comes to economic cooperation, the Georgian side strongly focused on the construction of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port and the urgency of the involvement of US companies in this process. The US authorities politically supported the project and noted their belief that the construction was an opportunity for Georgia to escape the economic influences of China and Russia (Secretary Mike Pompeo Reaffirms Strategic Partnership in Meeting PM Bakhtadze, 2019). However, due to internal processes, the format of the project was changed by Georgia and the future of the project, as well as the potential involvement of US companies, remains undecided.

Ongoing democratic reforms in Georgia have always been on the Georgia-US cooperation agenda. These issues are also reflected in the strategic partnership charter. The US is one of the most powerful supporters of Georgia's democratic reforms, tying it to various dimensions, including bilateral cooperation, which is to be based on shared democratic values, the outstanding role of Georgia as a forerunner of democratization in the region, and the country's accession to Euro-Atlantic structures. Democratic reforms, as a particularly important area of that cooperation, have always been on the agenda, regardless of changes in the US political leadership. Emphasis on certain matters is linked to Georgia's domestic situation. The independence of Georgia's judiciary draws the consistent interest of the US leadership. The past few years have seen growing criticism towards the situation in Georgia's judiciary system, with a statement made by the US Secretary of State being particularly harsh (Recent Judicial Appointments in Georgia, 2021) .

Human rights and Rule of Law, media pluralism and strengthening of multiparty democracy, and fair and competitive elections are other items on the cooperation agenda. The initially positive evaluation of Georgia's progress in these areas expressed by the US leadership has since been replaced by growing criticism and discontent.

## The Georgian-German Cooperation Agenda

Georgian-German relations have been built on important historical pre-conditions that existed during the times of the First Georgian Republic, as well as in the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Germany was the first state to establish diplomatic relations with Georgia, contributing significantly to the newly independent Georgian republic in its successful pursuit of recognition of independence.

The study focused on the dynamics of Georgian-German relations in the recent past, identifying those issues that sit high on the top-level meeting agendas.

The study examined high profile visits and meetings between Georgian and German leaders, and identifies those issues which have been part of high-level meetings, based on the analysis of messages articulated during said meetings in the period since 2014.

It should be noted that the period since 2014 has been marked with a multitude of high-level meetings between the presidents, prime-ministers and foreign ministers of Georgia and Germany. While there have been certain changes to agendas, the core issues have remained unchanged.

One of the priority issues that has been part of all agendas is Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, of which Germany has been unconditionally supportive. Other agenda items include matters pertaining to Georgia's occupied territories and occupation-induced threats, IDPs, and the state of human rights in the Occupied Territories. At the beginning of the reporting period, an emphasis was put on Georgia's pragmatic policy towards Russia, and efforts to deescalate the situation were assessed by German counterparts as positive. While Germany has maintained its commitment to unconditionally support Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, phrases such as 'occupation' and 'annexation' are rarely used in official language. Only once did Chancellor Merkel name it as occupation, during a meeting with Georgian students (Lomsadze, 2018; Mello, 2020).

Matters pertaining to Georgia's integration into the **EU** and **NATO** have long been on the Georgian-German agenda. However, discussions around these issues have been marked with striking differences between the two parties. More specifically, the key message of the Georgian party is EU and NATO membership, which sets the tone for discussions of any partnership program or format, while the German party focuses more on the partnership process and the effective use of existing formats in both directions, not necessarily tying them to accession.

The agenda for economic cooperation is rather general. The Georgian authorities promote the country as a space for new economic opportunities; however, there have not been any public talks on specific projects. The only project that may be qualified as more or less sizeable discussed by the parties concerns the construction of an underground gas storage facility, for which Germany pledged to allocate a loan (150 million Euro). Later, the amount allocated for the project was used to cover expenses related to the pandemic situation in the country, and, therefore, the future of the realization of the gas storage project is uncertain (Jalagonia, 2021).

The agenda for the meeting between Georgian and German presidents held on 7 October 2019 was rather diverse. Along with traditional items, such as the Occupied Territories, the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, the parties touched on such issues as sectoral cooperation and circular migration, and cooperation in the areas of tourism, culture, and education.

Yet, the items were of a rather general nature, without many specifics (Zurabishvili Meets German President, Chancellor in Berlin, 2019).

Over the past few years, democratic reforms ongoing in the country, and Germany's particular interests in these issues, seem to have gained growing significance for bilateral formats. These matters include but are not limited to development of a pluralistic society, justice system reform, changes to the electoral legislation, and the urgency to depolarize the political situation. The joint statement by German and French foreign ministers issued in December 2020, echoed the negative internal political developments, and called for more democratic reforms in Georgia (Germany, France Encourage Georgia Continue Democratic Reforms, 2020).

While there have been a multitude of high-level meetings, and areas for cooperation are seemingly diversified, Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty seem to be almost the only issue both sides agree on, and for which Germany has been unconditionally supportive. However, the stances of the parties on other agenda items seem to be more divergent.

While Germany does not oppose Georgia's accession to the EU and NATO, it has remained reticent about specifying dates. With regard to the EU, Germany emphasizes the importance of existing formats. They believe that the Association Agreement and DCFTA are important formats, and efforts have to be made in order to implement them as fully and effectively as possible.

Germany has also refrained from referring to a specific timeline when it comes to Georgia's accession to NATO. However, they acknowledge that Georgia will become a member state sooner or later. At this point, Germany holds that the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package is the important instrument that Georgia needs to focus on. When it comes to relations with Russia, Germany has been cautious and has tried to avoid fueling tensions, a course of action shaped by historical preconditions and present economic interests. Germany has said it believes Georgia's attitude towards Russia to be confrontational (Kakachia, Betger, Lebanidze, Palmi, Sarjveladze, 2019).

On reviewing the high-level meetings, it was revealed that Germany was interested in supporting Georgia in building pragmatic and dialogue-oriented relations with Russia. However, Georgia's accent on a pragmatic approach toward Russia has changed, and more emphasis is being put on the security and humanitarian aspects of the issue. Further, the process of the country's Euro-Atlantic integration is framed as securing the country from Russian threats. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the German dialogue-oriented approach toward Russia changed.

## The Georgian-French Cooperation Agenda

Georgian-French relations, unlike Georgian-German ones, are marked with less intense dynamics. However, these relations are of critical importance to Georgia. Since Georgia's regaining of independence, France has repeatedly rendered vital assistance to Georgia, including a ceasefire agreement with Russia during the August War brokered by French President Sarkozy, and it continues to do so in certain directions.

There are multi- and bilateral cooperation formats covering certain areas. However, like Germany, France also belongs to the camp of so-called skeptical countries which at this point do not support Georgia's accession to the EU and NATO.



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The research aimed to identify political agenda items which lie at the core of Georgian-French cooperation, and the extent to which the stances of France and Germany are consistent or divergent from Georgia's strategic objectives.

The political agenda of Georgian-French relations is rather modest. There have been some attempts made by Georgian authorities to expand the cooperation to diverse areas. In 2019, the parties established the Dimitri Amilakhvari Georgian-French Dialogue format, which aims to develop partnership in politics, security, trade and economy, education, and culture (1st meeting of historic French-Georgian Dimitri Amilakhvari dialogue format to be held in Paris, 2019; Jalagonia, 2021).

Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, for which France has repeatedly confirmed its unconditional support, has been a central item on all high-level meeting agendas. Georgia enjoys France's support in such matters as peaceful conflict resolution, reconciliation of a society divided by conflicts, resolution of the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Territories, and the annual UN resolution on the status of IDPs.

France has displayed ambiguity towards Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. On the one hand, it supports the close cooperation of Georgia with both the EU and NATO; however, like Germany, France has also exhibited certain skepticism towards Georgia's accession to these organizations in the coming future.

France has expressed gratitude for Georgia's contribution to peacekeeping missions within NATO-Georgian cooperation. France has also emphasized the importance of full and effective implementation of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package. At some point, France committed to strengthening Georgia's air defense capabilities within the Substantial Package (French Defense Minister Visits Georgia, 2016) as a result of which the parties signed an agreement concerning the purchase of air defense equipment and set up a joint training center. However, the purchase of air defense systems, which is the most significant deal between Georgia and France in the field of defense, was linked to a domestic political conflict within the ruling coalition in 2014-2015, and led to a controversial interpretation of the issue. Statements made by high-rank French politicians demonstrate that they are ready to contribute to strengthening Georgia's defense capacity, however, no new process has been observed so far (Georgian, French Presidents Meet, Pledge to Deepen Ties, 2019).

As mentioned above, France belongs to the camp of countries which are skeptical of Georgia's European integration. However, France supports Georgia's cooperation with the EU, emphasizing the importance of effective implementation of the Association Agreement.

The economic cooperation agenda also seems rather modest. The parties have repeatedly voiced willingness to deepen economic cooperation, however, the desire has not gone beyond general political statements, without any significant or tangible initiatives, aside from 483 million EUR of aid allocated by the French Development Agency for Georgia (with 33 million EUR as a grant and the remaining amount in the form of a loan) to be spent in the fields of water resource management, agriculture, urban development and transport, energy, social welfare and healthcare.

Georgia plans to broaden the scope of the existing and rather limited cooperation agenda through the Dimitri Amilakhvari Dialogue and tripartite German-French dialogue formats. However, specific agenda items are yet to be determined.



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## The NATO-Georgia Cooperation Agenda

As early as the late 1980s, as Georgia was embarking on the fight for its independence, the idea of Georgia's membership of NATO caught the public attention. However, back then, the idea was something of a utopian ideal, and the prospect of Georgia's NATO membership was more an act of revising cultural and value-related views than a geopolitical statement based on pragmatic calculations. Today, we can say that what started out as the spontaneous and emotional 'outcry' of a freedom fighter has snowballed into a strategic objective of Georgia's foreign policy, one which rests upon both the country's political standpoint and a pragmatic geopolitical choice. This choice consists of ensuring Georgia's defense and security in close interaction with the democratic commonwealth. Georgia's NATO aspiration is enshrined in the Constitution and enjoys strong public and political support.

In 1992, Georgia, as a young democracy, started taking its very first steps towards NATO, and managed to establish initial cooperation formats. The same year, Georgia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which in 1997 was reformed into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), offering a multilateral cooperation format for NATO member states and partner countries. In 1994, Georgia joined the Partnership for Peace program, marking the start of ever-deepening cooperation between NATO and Georgia in the areas of defense and security.

At the 2002 Prague Summit, Georgia submitted an official application for NATO membership. In 2004, the country was granted an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). While IPAP is not a Membership Action Plan, it nevertheless obliged the country to undertake various reforms, paving a way towards membership. An intensive dialogue around issues pertaining to membership was launched in 2006.

Expectations had been raised for the 2008 Bucharest Summit, with the country expecting to be awarded a Membership Action Plan (MAP) that would mark the beginning of the final stage leading to membership. However, because of controversy between influential members of the Alliance (the USA vs Germany and France), Georgia's application was turned down. A declaration issued at the end of the summit indicated that Georgia would ultimately become a NATO member, but without specifying concrete dates. The decision made at the Bucharest Summit has repeatedly been reflected in numerous summary documents, declarations, and communiqués; however, NATO member states have not yet managed to reach a final consensus on Georgia's membership.

The NATO-Georgia Commission, established in 2008, has contributed to a more invigorated partnership. The Commission is a lead body for the development of annual national plans which are designed to prepare an aspirant country for membership. 2014 was marked with the development of a substantial package for Georgia, designed to support Georgia in strengthening its defense capacity and preparing for NATO membership. The package has been revised several times. The substantial package is the main instrument with regard to practical cooperation between NATO and Georgia.

Obviously, Georgia's accession to NATO is the main item on the NATO-Georgia partnership agenda and, therefore, all other items are focused on this central objective. Due to the internal context within the Alliance, the member states have failed to achieve a final consensus regarding Georgia's membership. As such, membership continues to top the partnership agenda. However, there are other issues that represent shared interests of the parties and constitute a wider cooperation agenda, among them cooperation in the areas of defense and security, Georgia's participation and constant readiness to participate in peacekeeping missions and to contribute to global security, and democratic reforms



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within the country. It should be noted that vocal criticism towards recent developments in the country may damage NATO-Georgia relations.

Black Sea regional security has been at the center of attention for the past few years. Georgia has made significant efforts to demonstrate its outstanding capacity and to contribute significantly to ensuring Black Sea security. The Georgian authorities plan to develop a national strategy in accordance with the government program reflecting these issues.

As of today, Georgia remains one of NATO's closest allies, and a significant contributor thereof. NATO has praised ongoing reforms being undertaken in the country in the areas of defense and security. Georgia has been viewed as the forerunner in the region with regard to political, economic and democratic reforms; however, in spite of a broad cooperation agenda and a history of successful cooperation, the membership prospect remains ambiguous.

## The EU-Georgia Cooperation Agenda

The origin of EU-Georgia relations goes back to the onset of Georgia's independence. An early stage of technical and humanitarian assistance was followed by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which defined new directions and areas for cooperation. However, such cooperation was limited to the harmonization of Georgia's legislation and covered practically all spheres of the country's legal framework.

The following years saw many new directions in the EU-Georgia cooperation identified and agreed upon. The EU has become one of the major contributors to building and developing Georgia's state institutions. All-encompassing bilateral cooperation and the EU's technical and financial assistance programs cover the overwhelming majority of social, economic and political spheres. Importantly, the EU brokered a ceasefire agreement in 2008 and struck an agreement to deploy its monitoring mission along the Line of Occupation in Georgia. One of the results of the ceasefire agreement was a peace talk format known as "The Geneva International Talks" involving, alongside EU representatives, other international actors, including the UN and OSCE. Even though no tangible results have been achieved within the format to date, as an international venue, it continues to be seen as a much needed instrument.

The EU and its institutes use all possible occasions and venues to express their support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. This support is reflected in all relevant documents and statements, including decisions of the European Parliament.

One of the most important achievements within bilateral relations is the successful completion of the Visa Liberalization process, which has first and foremost yielded tangible outcomes for the country's population. As early as during negotiations, as well as after the deal had been sealed, the issue of Georgian migrants came to the fore in EU-Georgia relations. However, the issue then moved from EU-Georgia to the agenda of bilateral Georgia-Germany and Georgia-French relations.

In 2017, the Strategic Security Dialogue was launched between Georgia and the EU, which provides a venue for annual high-level meetings and aims at strengthening cooperation in defense and security. Georgia has been participating in EU crisis management operations in the Central African Republic and Mali and, by doing so, contributing to the fight against global threats.



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Today, there are two main formats in EU-Georgia relations. The first of these formats is the Eastern Partnership, a bilateral format which, in addition to Georgia, includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. The second format is the Association Agreement (AA), together with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA), which, in fact, may be considered as a peak in EU-Georgia relations. The signing of the AA marked an end to an important stage in EU-Georgia relations and a beginning of a far deeper partnership. Both directions are diverse in scope, as are the issues they cover in all social, cultural, and political areas. However, the main theme of both formats, as well as other sub-formats, is Georgia's future membership in the EU.

The multilateral cooperation process of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) is heavy in content and effectively covers all spheres of social and economic cooperation. The EaP aims to create a space of shared democratic values, prosperity and stability in the EU's eastern neighborhood. Over the course of 12 years of Eastern Partnership membership, Georgia has moved considerably closer to the EU and secured such important achievements in bilateral relations as the Association Agreement.

Effective implementation of the AA and DCFTA implies fundamental reforms in practically every sphere. However, Georgia unilaterally elaborated a road map of membership to the EU, which envisages the implementation of reforms in Georgia's institutional and legal systems. The road map aims to ensure that the country meets all membership criteria and eliminates all barriers to accession to the EU when consensus among the members on Georgia's membership is achieved. However, since 2019, Georgia's EU membership road map has been less often mentioned publicly by high officials as a guiding document.

The signing of the Association Agreement did not diminish the importance of the Eastern Partnership for Georgia, and it and other participating countries continue to reap the benefits of the format. Three of the six Eastern Partnership countries have signed association agreements with the EU, since they share a common strategic objective to join the EU. Those Eastern Partnership countries with association agreements with the EU (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova) created an Associated Trio, with the aim of acting in coordination within the Eastern Partnership towards the ultimate goal: EU membership.

The EU positively assessed the establishment of this new cooperation format, and the high-level summit of the Associated Trio was attended by the President of the Council of the European Union. The EU's support for this initiative was also demonstrated in the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit on 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2021. The Declaration underlined the importance of the launch of the Associated Trio format and supported the countries' attempt to deepen relations with the EU and develop cooperation between the countries of the Trio for the advancement of their EU integration agenda (Eastern Partnership Summit, 2021).

The economic recovery and investment plan initiated by the European Union in the framework of the Eastern Partnership should also be mentioned. According to the plan, the EU will allocate 2.3 billion Euros to the region via grants, and will mobilize 17 billion Euros in public and private investment. The initiative, entitled 'Recovery, Resilience and Reform,' was supported within the Eastern Partnership Summit and was reflected in the summit's Final Declaration, signed by all the member states on 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2015. This process is a key tool for the EU's economic and political participation in the Eastern Partnership region. However, it should be underlined that the implementation of this investment plan is strongly linked to and conditioned by the successful implementation of ongoing reforms within the countries in the spheres of Rule of Law, judiciary, and the fight against corruption (Eastern Partnership Summit, 2021).

Georgia has implemented reforms in the areas of human rights, the penitentiary system, science and innovations, agriculture and transport, public services, energy, regional development, and decentralization. European institutions and partners have in the past proclaimed Georgia as a regional forerunner with regard to the implementation of democratic reforms. However, recently, there has been growing criticism coming from the European Commission and the European Parliament in relation to concerning developments in human rights protection, Rule of Law and other issues.

The DCFTA has been viewed as further stimulus for the development of trade relations between Georgia and the EU. The signing of the DCFTA has led to greater trade turnover and worked as additional stimulus for attracting investments. Georgia set the goal of joining the common European market to ensure greater integration of the Georgian economy in said market. Georgia positions itself as a space for economic opportunity, as a transit crossroad between Asia and Europe, and as an alternative transport and energy hub. Several economic projects have been named in the 10-Year Action Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which need to be more detailed and better promoted.

All the cooperation formats mentioned above, regardless of their diverse agendas, are nevertheless centered around the key objective – accession to the EU. This very objective is manifested in the title of the government program and dominates key messages. One of the keys declared as an intermediate objective of the 10-Year Action Plan, to be attained by 2024, is the submission of an application for official membership of the EU, and according to that plan, to gain candidate status by 2030. However, the application was in fact submitted in March 2022, and now the key objective is to gain candidate status as soon as possible.

## V. Key Foreign Policy Directions of Partner Countries

### The United States

The United States' foreign policy derives mostly from the country's global status. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US has been the leader of the democratic world. After the Cold War ended, the country became an almost single superpower, significantly shaping the world order.

As a country with a powerful presidential institute, the presidents' views and values have always played a central role in forming the US foreign policy. At the same time, the foreign policy is also shaped by the bureaucracy of the executive authorities (the President's Administration, the State Department, etc.), as well as by the legislative body. The US foreign policy is consistent with regard to strategic goals and objectives. However, certain priorities tend to change along with internal political cycles and challenges in the international system. In order to better understand the US foreign policy priorities, it is important to analyze the personal views expressed by the US presidents. However, we will also consider the emphases made by other US structures.

The policies pursued by President Trump at the global level had little in common with traditional approaches and strong roots in the US. Trump's criticism of Europe, one of the prominent examples of these policies, considerably undermined the traditional spirit of Trans-Atlantic cooperation. At the same time, the US walking out of various international agreements and offering harsh criticism of the international system made cooperation between the EU and the US almost dysfunctional (Blockmans,



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2021). In spite of such rocky relations between the US, the EU and NATO, the US policy towards Georgia did not change much, with the Trump administration continuing to support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and NATO enlargement in general, since the latter issue is an integral part of the US grand foreign policy strategy, with certain inbuilt political consensus (Shifrinson, 2020).

When the new administration took over the White House, it was declared that the US foreign policy would be revised in many directions. This obviously depends on President Biden's personal views, approaches and experience. The majority of seats held by the Democrats in both chambers of Congress is likely to set a positive tone for relations between the White House and the Capitol, including in the area of foreign policy, for the foreseeable future.

The Biden Administration strongly capitalizes on diplomacy as a key instrument of US power, and cooperation with partners based on democratic values. The current US administration considers the current democratic crisis, growing populism and illiberalism, threats to the Rule of Law, weaponized corruption, polarization and global inequality as some of the most pressing problems of today. Therefore, emphasis is being made on attempts to revitalize democracy and fight against autocracies (Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, 2021)

President Biden has paid close attention to making the global economy healthier, in alliance with democracies and in such a form that will help eliminate global inequalities and human oppression practices, leading eventually to the creation of a non-discriminatory economic environment. Unlike his predecessor, Biden supports the new trade agreements designed to set fair rules for trade and economic relations worldwide. However, in this case, too, Biden's approach is centered around human rights, especially the rights of workers, and safeguards for high standards of environmental protection. Such agreements should be signed with great transparency so that they support the empowerment of not only individuals but the middle class. President Biden believes that China's trade agreement policy fundamentally violates these principles. Therefore, he argues that China's growing economic potential, which has been undermining the process of forming fair trade and economic order, must be responded to with the joint efforts of partner states, so as to fight off China's intimidating practices, including those of human rights abuse (Biden, 2020). The US openly confronted China's "Belt and Road Initiative". At the June 2021 G7 summit, the participants struck a deal to develop an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative projects which will be based on democratic and transparency principles and boast a high quality (Wintour, 2021; Biden, 2020).

The new US policy, in response to global threats, will also be different, seeing the new administration attempting to reclaim the role of leader in multilateral decision making, and to consolidate partners. Among the main challenges with regard to security, the new US administration highlights the pandemic and similar biological threats, climate change, cyber security, collapse of the international economy, humanitarian crises, extremism and terrorism, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The US believes that China, with its economic, military, diplomatic and technological capacities, poses a major threat to stability and the open world order. However, in spite of this criticism, US leadership believes that the US should cooperate with China with regard to matters relating to climate change, global health and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Biden, 2020).

The US policies towards NATO and the general format of Trans-Atlantic cooperation have also changed. The US considers NATO to be a particularly important factor in its national security and believes that alliances formed around democratic values are of critical importance for the empowerment of the organization. However, it is important to keep a focus on threats coming from

Russia, including cyber-attacks, disinformation, and weaponized corruption. Biden supports harsh policies in response to Russia's destructive actions.

Even though Biden leans towards soft power and diplomacy as key instruments of the US influence, he nevertheless believes that maintenance of the country's military capacity is a critical precondition. He is in favor of downsizing international missions, and undertook concrete steps in this regard at the outset of his presidency when the US withdrew its troops from Afghanistan.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to the US proving its potential to lead the process, to act in close coordination with NATO and Alliance member states, and to strengthen the Trans-Atlantic partnership.

## Germany

Germany's positioning on the international arena and the pillars of its foreign policy define the country's cooperation with partner countries, including Georgia. For the purpose of the research, we find it important to highlight key directions in Germany's foreign policy in order to identify consistencies and gaps by comparing the foreign policy priorities of the two countries.

Germany's foreign policy, characterized by both continuities and changes, are to be viewed as an attempt to adjust to certain circumstances. However, Germany always stays true to its goals and strategic directions. Continuity characterizing the German foreign policy derives from specifics of how this policy is formed. Although, formally, Germany's executive authorities are responsible for defining the country's foreign policy, in reality, the policy is shaped by a consensus struck between various actors, including ministries representing diverse political groups within the coalition government. Parliamentary committees, political groups, influential individuals outside of authorities, organizations and NGOs also have a say in the process (Mello, 2020). The policy shaped in such a complex political environment rarely revised.

When it comes to shaping Germany's foreign policy priorities, historical preconditions are given particular importance. During the Cold War, Germany pursued Trans-Atlantic and pro-European policies. Willy Brandt<sup>1</sup>'s Ostpolitik was a new eastern policy which provided a framework for Germany's traditional relations with its eastern neighbors, including Russia (Mello, 2020).

German foreign policy is centered on the following five main directions:

- **Sovereign Europe;**
- **Trans-Atlantic cooperation;**
- **Peace and security;**
- **Democracy and Human Rights;**
- **Multilateralism.**

The EU lies at the heart of Germany's foreign policy, shaping its main foreign policy course. Germany prioritizes the strengthening of the European Union, cooperation with its member states, economic development in the territory of the EU, creation of a common foreign and security policy, and support

<sup>1</sup> Germany's Chancellor between October 1969 and May 1974



for the EU's shared stance in the global system (Germany's Foreign and European Policy Principles, 2019).

The strengthening of Eurosceptic parties throughout the EU, including Germany, has influenced the latter's European policy. Germany now exhibits more caution with regard to further EU enlargement. However, the German foreign policy remains largely Euro-optimistic.

Beyond the EU, the US remains Germany's main partner, and Trans-Atlantic cooperation is one of its top priorities even if there are dissenting views with regard to various issues (for example, critical positions of the former president towards Trans-Atlantic cooperation). Use of the EU as a main foreign policy platform and its influences in the Union, coupled with a strong focus on trans-Atlantic cooperation (NATO and North America), allows Germany to effectively carry out its foreign policy strategy and anchor the country under an international security umbrella, while keeping up its positive reputation in Europe (Helwig, Siddi, 2020) (Mello, 2020).

Germany is committed to ensuring security and peace globally through such multilateral formats as the EU, NATO, UN, OSCE, G7, and G20. First and foremost, this commitment implies diplomatic efforts to deescalate conflicts and mitigate crises. The disarmament policy, crises prevention and stabilization, and post-conflict peacebuilding constitute important strands within Germany's multilateral policy, while humanitarian assistance is an important part of the country's peace and security policy. Germany is among the largest donors when it comes to humanitarian assistance, crises prevention, mediation, and stabilization (Germany's Foreign and European Policy Principles, 2019).

Strengthening democracy, human rights and Rule of Law are among the important strands of Germany's foreign policy. More specifically, Germany supports interventions and initiatives fostering civil society; advocating for human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, women's rights and gender equality, rights of the child, minorities and persons with disabilities; and freedom of belief and expression. Germany believes that only the protection of these principles makes it possible to ensure lasting peace and security, and that human rights constitutes a critical precondition for peace and security (Germany's Foreign and European Policy Principles, 2019)

Germany pays great attention to ensuring sustainability and fairness in globalization, a precondition for peace and security. Therefore, Germany's foreign policy encompasses such issues as climate change, migration, sustainable development, energy and resource security, environmental protection, digital technologies, cyber security, and free access to the internet (Germany's Foreign and European Policy Principles, 2019).

Traditionally positive relations between Germany and Russia have been shattered by Russia's record of violation of international law, including the annexation of Crimea and cementing of anti-democratic governance methods. Germany supported the introduction of sanctions against Russia (Helwig, Siddi, 2020; Mello, 2020). However, regardless of such harsh measures, Germany continued to lean towards maintaining a dialogue with Russia and its belief that Georgia's current attitude towards its northern neighbor was confrontational (Kakachia, Betger, Lebanidze, Palmi, Sarjveladze, 2019; Kinkartz, 2022), a stance that contradicts, at least to some degree, Germany's efforts to normalize relations with Russia.

Germany's reaction at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis proved to be linked to its traditional foreign policy-making. The newly elected Chancellor had to consider the diversity of the coalition government and at the same time the traditional divide in his own party on the Russia issue. Germany's position was thus at first inclined towards dialogue and diplomatic resolution of the crisis, and lacked harsh



criticism toward Russia, unlike the United States and other NATO member states. On the other hand, Germany tried not to undermine the Trans-Atlantic partnership and to express readiness to act in coordination with the allies (Chazan & Seddon, 2022).

However, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when it became obvious that diplomatic attempts to avoid the war had failed, Germany's Russian policy changed significantly (Kinkartz, 2022). It is still difficult to say how much Germany's approach to NATO and EU enlargement will change, but given the dynamics of the evolving political environment, it is possible that approaches will affect other areas of German foreign policy as well.

## France

French foreign policy and its international role stems from historical roots and is linked to the French political identity (Rapnouil, Shapiro, 2017). Even though France is a multi-party democracy, it has maintained a strong presidential institute, which means that the personal views and perception of the country's leader significantly shape the French foreign policy. However, while the past few decades have seen leaders with drastically dissenting views coming to power, the tenets of the French foreign policy have remained unchanged. There have been certain tactical adaptations in response to processes unfolding in the country as well as internationally. Today, the French foreign policy is centered around both historical continuity and President Macron's personal preferences and perceptions. The current foreign policy of France is marked with independence and openness, features deriving from historical roots and linked to a political consensus known as the "de Gaulle - Mitterrand doctrine" (Alarcón, 2014).

Openness is one of the most important characteristics of the French foreign policy, at the core of which stands the belief that the country must stay connected with processes ongoing at the global level, and that it must actively contribute to the global agenda formation. France is open to economic relations and investments and has demonstrated high regard for international organizations and multilateralism; however, it views its own role not only as a participant, but as an active contributor to and author of political and economic agendas (Alarcón, 2014). France has an ambition to be a key player in forging dialogues and striking peace deals throughout the world as a strong European state, while the EU has to play the role of an influential balancing power (Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words, 2019). The Paris Peace Forum, established on Macron's initiative (Duclos, 2020), is of particular importance in this regard. France positions itself as a one of the leading states of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and actively promotes the importance of issues related to climate change all over the world (Tertrais, 2017).

Independence is a traditional French foreign policy virtue and a characteristic of nearly every French leader. France's alliance and cooperative relationships - particularly its membership of the EU - are key to maintaining French sovereignty. This stance sets the tone for France's positioning towards the EU on the one hand, and to NATO on the other, which differs from the rest of the European countries. France does not accept NATO as a main determinant of the country's status on the global stage, therefore, it is inclined more towards further strengthening European defense (Alarcón, 2014).

France's attitude towards the EU project, which constitutes the core of its foreign policy, is unequivocally positive. However, France does not shy away from criticizing developments within the Union, characterizes it as a moral crisis leading to growing Euro-skepticism and populism. France

believes that it is critical to implement important economic and political reforms within the EU. Along the line, France has been rather skeptical towards EU enlargement, and argues that the European Neighborhood Policy should not be oriented on membership (Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words, 2019).

France's current attitude towards NATO has largely been shaped by strained relations with the US. The stance taken by the Trump administration towards NATO and the trans-Atlantic cooperation generated certain skepticism in France concerning NATO's effectiveness as Europe's security umbrella. Therefore, President Macron decided to shift the focus from NATO to the EU's military sovereignty and the creation of a European defense system (Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words, 2019). The skepticism has been further cemented by uncoordinated actions undertaken by the NATO member states (in particular, Turkey's course of action in Syria) and NATO's overwhelming attention to Russia. At the same time, France believes that the excessively strong focus of some NATO's member states (especially, Eastern European countries) on the US is damaging to European sovereignty (Stewart, 2021).

Certain views of the French authorities with regard to its foreign policy can be characterized as ambiguity. This is mainly determined by the domestic political context. However, such ambivalence allows French leadership to pursue a more flexible foreign policy in certain areas. France's policies towards Russia have also been ambiguous to a certain extent (Alarcón, 2014). France remained supportive of a dialogue and deeper cooperation with Russia, seeing it trying to get Russia back into the European space, and to gain certain influence over this process (Duclos, 2020). France supported the dialogue with Russia within the NATO format, and argued that it will create more guarantees for Europe's security. At the same time, France believed that Russian-European dialogue would deliver a blow to a potential Sino-Russian alliance and make Europe less dependent on the US with regard to European security (Stewart, 2021).

The French policy of cooperation with Russia has not been marked with effectiveness during Macron's presidency. Aside from a few meetings held within various formats, inclination towards dialogue has remained the rhetoric. This approach has failed to cultivate strong support within the EU member states, especially among the Eastern European countries. Moreover, it has brought about some damage to French-Polish relations (Stewart, 2021).

At the outset of the Ukraine crisis, France's actions were in full compliance with its Russian policy approach of the last several years. Like Germany, France was reluctant to criticize Russia's actions in Ukraine's neighborhood. France was trying to prove its leadership role in European security and was the first to assume the role of mediator of diplomatic negotiations between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine in order to ensure the de-escalation of the process (Cohen, 2020). Now, as in the case of Germany, France's Russian policy is undergoing changes as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, although unlike Germany, in France, no declared manifestation of a fundamental rethink in policy has yet been made.

## NATO's Political Agenda and Enlargement Policy

The current agenda of the Alliance is far broader and more diverse than in the early days of the organization. NATO, a global military and political alliance, aims at ensuring the security and freedom of its member states through military and political means. Today, NATO is the most powerful military



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and political alliance globally. Unsurprisingly, the organization's political agenda reflects global challenges. NATO has gone through numerous enlargement processes, as well as reforms. Some of the processes aiming at its renewal are still ongoing, in order to better respond to the challenges of today's world.

NATO should be viewed as one of the most important platforms of Trans-Atlantic cooperation, one whose power and influence over the global political process has largely been shaped by the climate of Trans-Atlantic cooperation and orchestrated and coordinated approaches to challenges. The climate of the Trans-Atlantic cooperation was shattered by President Trump's drastically negative attitude toward NATO and its European member states. Actions undertaken by the Trump Administration caused strains in the relationship between the US and NATO's European members. Not only did Trump demand a revised scheme of financial contribution, he also started questioning NATO's significance for US security, resulting in harsh reactions from European leaders. The Trump policies generated the need for the creation of a new system of European autonomous security. However, this idea appeared controversial among the leaders of the European states (Belkin, 2021).

The stance of President Biden has considerably changed the climate within the Alliance. Unlike his predecessor, President Biden believes that NATO is the most important instrument for ensuring security not only in Europe and North America but also globally (Belkin, 2021). Judging by the latest NATO summit, the partnership spirit within the Alliance has been restored.

The 2021 Brussels Summit has been viewed as an important tipping point for important renewal of the Alliance. The final communiqué endorsed by the leaders of the NATO member states effectively lays ground for a reform agenda and at the same time defines renewed visions and assessments vis-à-vis global challenges, including international terrorism; weapons of mass destruction; control of conventional weapons; new destructive technologies; hybrid threats; migration and trafficking; pandemics; climate change; energy security; human security in regions ridden with conflicts and crises; women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects; corruption; ineffective governments and challenges to democracy; aggressive and authoritarian states; and the actions of China and Russia.

NATO has launched preparatory work for the development of a new strategic concept which is designed for a more global and ambitious agenda, and aims at the institutional, structural, and political strengthening of the Alliance. This includes NATO's capacity building, increased contribution to the protection of democratic values, and deeper cooperation with the allies.

As mentioned above, there has been a positive dynamic in the partnership between NATO and the US. President Biden supports the initiative of the Secretary General to reform the Alliance. However, there is a series of issues which are subject to disagreement between the member states, including the relationship with Russia, a rather painful issue for Georgia. While the US is more in favor of a deterrent policy against Russia, European states, such as Germany and France, support a two-level approach: A combination of active dialogue and a deterrence policy (Belkin, 2021). The text of the communiqué is strikingly balanced and is built on both approaches. On the one hand, the communiqué highlights efforts taken by NATO throughout the years within a dialogue format with Russia, while, on the other hand, stressing the fact that Russia remains a source of many problems in many directions, including weapons of mass destruction, hybrid threats, provocative actions, etc. Importantly, the Russian occupation/annexation of Georgian and Ukrainian territories represents an important agenda item. On the other hand, the communiqué stresses that NATO is ready to normalize the dialogue with

Russia. However, the Alliance expects that Russia will also demonstrate willingness to engage and back off from its aggressive actions (Brussels Summit Communiqué, 2021).

Dissenting approaches towards the Russian question among the US and influential European member states also led to ambivalence towards Georgia's membership of the Alliance, by far the most pressing issue for Georgia. In the Brussels Communiqué, the NATO member states reiterate their support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty and express their gratitude for Georgia's contribution to peacekeeping missions. They also praise the democratic and defense reforms ongoing in Georgia and confirm that NATO maintains an open-door policy.

Yet another issue of great importance for Georgia within NATO communiqué is NATO-Georgia cooperation in the frame of Black Sea Regional Security in response to Russia's actions that aim to destabilize the region. . Against this backdrop, the communiqué underscores the importance of the NATO-Georgia substantial package

(Brussels Summit Communiqué, 2021).

The Black Sea region is an important area for competition between the West and the Russian Federation in the perspective of the European future. Russia is interested in restoring its historical influence over the region and undermining the influences of the Euro-Atlantic commonwealth. However, opinions with regard to the Black Sea regional security concept differ across the NATO member states. While Romania supports wider scale maritime trainings, Bulgaria disapproves of this idea. Turkey, in light of its recently improved relations with Russia, is inclined towards maintaining the status quo. Nor are influential NATO members enthusiastic about the Black Sea region (Flanagan & Chindea, 2019; Helwig, Siddi, 2020). Therefore, strengthening security in the Black Sea area may remain a controversial issue. The US position towards this issue, and the extent of its efforts to prioritize Black Sea security on the new agenda, will have significant bearing on this matter.

Where, ahead of the Ukraine crisis, controversy was still observed among NATO members, the situation gradually changed after Russia invaded. Today, we see good coordination of action among NATO members, as well as consolidation of the organization. NATO no longer talks about formats of a constructive dialogue with Russia, and all attention has shifted to stopping the Russian aggression and strengthening the security of those NATO member states neighboring Russia (Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government, 2022).

It is difficult to predict how Russia's invasion of Ukraine will change NATO policy, both within the organization and on its further enlargement. However, in the face of existing challenges, transatlantic cooperation is entering a new phase, and that could well open a window of opportunity for Georgia's membership.

## European Neighborhood and Enlargement Policies

The EU is one of the most diverse and structurally complicated political and economic intergovernmental and supranational unions, one which has developed gradually and expanded over the course of several decades. Today, the EU is one of the most influential supranational unions, with a huge economic capacity and political influence globally. The EU, considering its essence, follows multi-dimensional and diverse political and economic agendas, covering relationships between the



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member states, as well as the work of common European structures and institutions, defining a shared European political agenda and determining its positioning in the global system.

Naturally, the agenda of the EU as a global actor is strikingly diverse, and includes such matters as global security and crises, human rights and democracy, climate change, environmental protection, energy security, IDPs and migration crises, humanitarian crises, development cooperation, economic development, etc. The global European agenda pays close attention to its neighborhood policy in several dimensions. Europe is interested in securing stability and a peaceful democratic environment in its neighborhood. In addition, it strives to support and contribute to the introduction of those fundamental values that are at the very heart of the Union.

The EU, both internally and externally, is seen as a successful model of political and economic integration. However, growing skepticism in member states during recent years, coupled with radical rights and leftist movements strengthening their political power, has led some to question the success of the European project. Brexit has visibly shaken the idea of the durability of the unity of the EU.

It is important to have a good understanding of the EU, and the system, with its specifics, that shapes the EU's political and economic agenda. Particularly critical is understanding the key dimensions which create the decision-making system within the EU. On the one hand, this is the EU and its institutions influencing its functioning and development, including the EU's international role. However, the Council, the highest structural unit of the EU, is the ultimate instance of the decision-making process, made up of leaders of the member states. These leaders are first and foremost accountable to their voters, and therefore guide their decisions by their respective national interests and objectives. There is a third dimension which also influences political processes within the Union, both in supranational institutions as well as national policies. These are political groups established in national parliaments as well as in the European Parliament. More specifically, several political groups which dominate the European Parliament and coordinate their actions, at least to a certain level, with national political groups, and create joint European political families. Even though there is certain coordination among these European political subjects, there are also controversies. The EU politics and its political agenda are shaped by all these dimensions, and decision-making takes place in light of such a complex configuration.

Against this backdrop, a common foreign and policy dimension is complicated, seeing a blurred line between supranational and national foreign and security policies, and controversies with regard to European enlargement. As mentioned in the previous chapter, economically powerful and politically influential member states have demonstrated certain skepticism towards future enlargement.

There is full consensus in the EU with regard to its partnership with Georgia within the frames of the Association Agreement and Eastern Partnership. However, there are differences in how the EU and Georgia interpret the final goal of this cooperation. The EU sees this cooperation as a significant instrument for Georgia's democratic development and a driver for its social, economic, and political reforms, but not as an instrument for preparation for membership. Georgia sees this cooperation as an instrument for Georgia's democratic development and a driver for its social, economic, and political reforms, but not as an instrument for preparation for membership.

As mentioned, the European Union expressed a positive attitude towards the establishment of the Association Trio (Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova), and it welcomed the creation of the regional format, yet, at the same time, it remained cautious about the membership issue of the three countries. The



priority framework of EU cooperation with the countries of the region remains the Eastern Partnership format, which is proved by the introduction of a large-scale economic investment plan that should stimulate another wave of regional reforms.

As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there has been some change in attitude towards Ukraine's accession to the European Union. On the basis of this, first Ukraine and then the other countries of Associated Trio applied to join the EU. While there is still no consensus within the EU on granting candidate status to members of the Association Trio, it is already a fact that Ukraine's application for membership has provoked a new discourse and slightly increased the probability of a positive resolution of the issue. We can also consider this as a momentum for Georgia, but special efforts are important for a final solution of the issue.

## VI. Conclusions

The review has underlined those main issues that derive from Georgia's foreign policy strategic goals and objectives, and which lay the foundation for the country's foreign policy agenda and respective external communication strategy. The study and resulting recommendations do not intend to provide answers to all the policy issues and challenges currently faced by the country; on the contrary, the study highlights the areas where additional research is needed in order to achieve more comprehensive, but at the same time more focused and tailored, policy approaches.

The review has helped to ascertain consistencies and identify gaps existing between Georgia's foreign policy agenda on the one hand and the attitudes of our partners towards this agenda on the other. Although the study has a specific focus on countries and intergovernmental organizations - the US, Germany, France, the EU, and NATO -, the main findings and recommendations developed in this section can be generalized and adapted to other countries and areas as well.

As mentioned above, the cooperation between Georgia and the US is seen by the parties as a strategic partnership, with a partnership agenda that is diverse and rather structured. However, the review found that there are certain issues that cause some asymmetry. More specifically, Georgia focuses more on issues relating to defense and security and the development of economic relations, while the US prioritizes democratic reforms, human rights, Rule of Law, and related issues. It should be noted that a US focus on such issues is nothing new, as, regardless of which party is leading the US administration, the US prioritizes democratic reforms within its bilateral cooperation.

The review also found that the new US administration prioritizes democracy, human rights and Rule of Law even more, having made them central to the country's foreign policy. Therefore, all core policy issues and global challenges are viewed and assessed from this perspective. By tradition, these issues also dominate the foreign policy priorities of Germany and France. Ensuring democratic reforms, human rights protection and Rule of Law also represents a precondition for accession to the EU and NATO. These issues are also prioritized on Georgia's foreign policy agenda and are enshrined in the state's policy documents. This is a field where Georgia's domestic political processes come into play with the implementation of the foreign strategic goals and objectives. As such, Georgia's western partners have paid close attention to processes unfolding in the country. **Protection of human rights, Rule of Law and consistent advancement towards institutional democracy should be prioritized within the foreign communication agenda.** At the same time, criticism coming from the West in

relation to ongoing processes in the country, political polarization, the need for a justice system reform, minority protection, etc., may significantly damage Georgia's relations with its Western partners and create a fundamental barrier to the attainment of Georgia's foreign policy objectives.

Georgian-French and Georgian-German relations significantly differ from those between Georgia and the US; however, these relations are equally important for Georgia and are tightly linked to the attainment of the country's strategic objectives. The review revealed that due to its limited-in-scope agenda of bilateral relations, Georgia fails to fall within the strategic interests of France and Germany. Steps that have been taken towards establishing bi- and trilateral cooperation formats are seen as an advancement, however, **dialogue formats need to cover more specific and practical issues that are oriented not only on Georgia's interests, but which take into consideration the political, economic and other interests of France and Germany.**

The unconditional and unequivocal support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty reiterated by the US, Germany, and France, as well as NATO and the EU, is undoubtedly a significant achievement of Georgia's diplomatic efforts. This support is important, especially in light of Georgia's intensive diplomatic efforts to ensure non-recognition of its occupied territories. However, it should be taken into consideration that support to the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty is determined not only by a willingness to support Georgia but also by a commitment to the internationally recognized principle, which is important for the modern democratic community and for the protection of the international legal order.

There is a slight difference among the stances of Georgia's partners when it comes to the occupation and threats coming from Russia. The US approach to these problems is fully consistent with Georgia's interests. The US does not shy away from criticizing Russia's actions, while Germany and France employ softer approaches. Attitudes in NATO and the EU largely depend on the positions of their member states. However, the soft policies of Germany and France towards Russia are gradually changing in parallel with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The German government has already openly stated a fundamental reconsideration of its Russian policy, yet France is still restrained.

The review demonstrates that the current US administration is determined to pay close attention to partnership with democratic states while responding to global threats. This implies first and foremost a substantial revision of its Trans-Atlantic cooperation, with certain steps already having been taken within the frames of the NATO summits, as well as during the G7 meetings. However, there are still certain controversies inside of the organization. This was first demonstrated by the signing of a new security pact between the US, UK and Australia, a pact that caused controversies among NATO European members. In light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the climate of Trans-Atlantic cooperation is definitely improving, and we are observing the process of consolidation of the Alliance.

When it comes to Georgia's relationships with NATO and the EU, close attention should be paid to two dimensions. The first is NATO and the EU as organizations with their own structures and institutions. In this dimension, Georgia has made substantial progress. The second dimension is the member states of NATO and the EU, which make their political decisions mostly based on their national interests. As we see, there is no consensus with regard to Georgia's membership among the member states in either organization. This is the dimension where Georgia should employ a more focused approach. In particular, **special tactical adjustments are needed in order to bridge the gap between the approaches and expectations of Georgia, and of Germany and France as countries**

**skeptical of Georgia's membership in NATO and the EU.** It is important to correctly understand these differences.

France has different approaches to the EU and NATO, and views the two organizations in a contradictory manner to some extent. More specifically, following skepticism towards NATO as a European security umbrella, France talks about the need to develop the European defense system, a trend that must be considered in Georgia's communication strategy. **It is therefore critical that Georgia display the Euro-Atlantic project not as a single project of its Western aspiration, but differentiates between the two directions, providing different sets of arguments and communication messages for NATO membership on the one hand and for EU membership on the other.**

Germany's attitude towards NATO and the EU is less contradictory than that of France. However, for Germany, NATO and the EU are different concepts, and it would be easily understandable for Germany if **Georgia employed different argumentation and communication with regard to these issues.** Even more so considering that Germany, as a European state, considers NATO first and foremost as a security umbrella for Europe, with its stance to NATO largely depending on the general Trans-Atlantic cooperation climate, which, as mentioned, has been rather changeable of late.

The reasons for the skepticism demonstrated by Germany and France towards Georgia's membership of NATO and the EU are diverse and, as such, it is impossible to overcome it with a general communication strategy, however comprehensive that may be. **Georgia must employ a differential tactical approach towards Germany and France, with tailored approaches to membership issues in NATO and the EU.**

Naturally, it is too much to anticipate that Germany and France would easily change their skepticism. However, considering the fact that both the French and German foreign policies are subject to adaptation within a certain timeframe and under certain circumstances, and that the current Trans-Atlantic cooperation agenda is going through an important transformation, we may have the realistic expectation that Franco-German skepticism may be subject to change in the mid- and long-term perspectives. It is difficult to presume the final shape of the policy approaches of Germany and France towards Russia, but what is definitely true after the Russian invasion of Ukraine is that their traditional policy approaches towards Russia are subject to fundamental changes and provide a window of opportunity for Georgia, as well as for Ukraine, to move ahead with their EU and NATO integration aspirations.

France's skepticism towards Georgia's NATO membership derives from two grounds: the country's criticism towards NATO and Trans-Atlantic cooperation, and France's attempts to involve Russia in dialogue and prevent tensions by refraining from further enlargement of the Alliance, including Georgia's membership. The influence of Russia on skepticism towards Georgia's accession to NATO is also seen in Germany's case. Yet both factors may change. First, the Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered a consolidation of the Trans-Atlantic partnership. President Macron now speaks about the strategic renewal of the Alliance, where before he called NATO a "brain-dead organization." Secondly, Russia's aggression, and unsuccessful attempts by Germany and France to broker a de-escalation through diplomatic means, has resulted in clearly diminishing the idea of sustaining dialogue and partnership with Russia, both in Berlin and Paris. Such a change in policy approaches does not automatically mean that Germany and France are rethinking Georgia's NATO integration, but **in such a transformative political environment, Georgia should seize the opportunity and capitalize on**

**novel impulses of global cooperation within strategic communication and push for the integration of Georgia's question in the wider agenda of Trans-Atlantic cooperation. To this end, Georgia should take advantage of its strategic partnership with the US and consolidate other supportive countries as well. Georgia must consolidate those NATO member states which support Georgia's membership and back harsher policies towards Russia.** In doing so, **Georgia can maximize efforts to exert stronger pressure within a multilateral format by relying on a powerful advocacy network.**

The dynamic is rather diverse in relations between the EU and Georgia. On the one hand, Georgia is growing closer to the EU through the Association Agreement, with the Association Agenda effectively having been turned into the national development strategy for Georgia. Regardless of criticism with regard to some of the more recent developments, there has been significant progress. Yet, like the NATO case, there has been some persistent ambivalence towards the key foreign policy objectives due to the lack of consensus. **In order to adopt a more robust and effective external communication strategy, the Georgian authorities must consider the specifics of the EU, it being a multi-layered and multi-dimensional decision-making structure. Each of these dimensions has its own role and influence on decisions made within the EU. Therefore, it is critical that the communication strategy define tactical steps with regard to these dimensions.**

As mentioned above, France and Germany's skepticism derive from complications existing in Europe, including growing Euro-skepticism and populism. Naturally, these issues are beyond the scope of Georgia's strategic communication. However, it is important that **while advocating for membership, Georgia consolidate support within the EU. Accumulation of broader support within the EU, even if this support comes from smaller EU member states (Visegrad and Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, etc.), will be more noteworthy for the country, that defines its own foreign policy in the capacity of the EU leaders, in particular for Germany and France.**

According to the initial plan, Georgia's application for membership in the European Union was to be submitted in 2024. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine accelerated the process and the application has already been submitted, together with those of the other countries of the Associated Trio. Despite somewhat altered attitudes within the EU, there is still no consensus among the EU member states on the Union's further enlargement. But the general political climate in the EU and its member countries has changed so much that the issue of granting candidate status to Ukraine, and consequently to Georgia and Moldova, is now being formally discussed, and the probability of a positive decision from the EU institutions is quite high. Without a doubt, the Russian invasion in Ukraine and the ongoing war have created historical momentum and windows of opportunity, firstly for Ukraine, but also for Georgia and Moldova. In this context, rising criticism from the EU institutions toward Georgia, the highlighting of democratic backsliding and deterioration of the standards of protection of human rights, the Rule of Law and freedom of media in the country, certainly have a negative effect on the process. Therefore, the **external communication strategy should emphasize the issues of reforms in the country, with particular focus on human rights and the Rule of Law, strengthening of democratic institutions, and protection of socio-economic rights, with particularly intensive communications with France and Germany.**

Georgia's approaches to international economic relations mostly rest on the idea of creating a regional hub in the country through the implementation of related infrastructural and logistical projects and the establishment of free trade regimes with both western and eastern countries. Georgia has shared



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interests with the US. However, there are also certain controversies with the approaches of the current administration. More specifically, the review has shown that a window of opportunities is being opened with regard to signing a trade agreement between the two countries. Current, the US administration is more open towards trade agreements, however, ensuring human rights protection (including labor rights) and environmental standards are important preconditions for signing a deal. At the same time, the US frowns upon trade relations with China, believing that the latter violates international trade norms and human rights. Georgia has already concluded a free trade agreement with China and considers it as an important economic opportunity for Western companies in Georgia.

The US has voiced criticism towards a global transport project known as the Belt and Road Initiative launched by China. Georgia happens to be actively engaged in this project. The West, led by the US, has been working on developing alternative global economic projects aiming at economic recovery, as well as at weakening China's growing economic and political influences in the world. It is important **that Georgia revise its approaches in light of these developments and focus more on economic projects initiated by the US and G7 countries in order to extend Georgia's involvement in these projects. To this end, Georgia should not only communicate the country's economic potential to its partners, but take targeted action to attract the interest of large financial and industrial groups by offering specific wide-scale regional and transnational projects with possible co-investment conditions from the Georgian side, be it in the transport, energy, financial or other sectors.** Large American, French, German or other Western investments in Georgia will beef up economic development and at the same time bring shared interests to the fore and contribute to greater sustainability in partnerships.

The development of defense and security capabilities is undoubtedly a priority for Georgia, and lies at the core of the foreign policy. It is important to maintain these issues in bilateral and multilateral cooperation formats. Georgia's contribution to global security has indeed been praised by its partners. However, it should be taken into consideration that the US is currently rethinking the process. The US administration views diplomacy and consolidation of democratic forces into a common front as the central instrument of its political influence. The US and NATO are downsizing their military presence in peacekeeping missions, a step already seen in Afghanistan. Therefore, **it is important that Georgia also rethink its own role in the international security system and pursue a revised communication with international partners.**

As a result of Russia's intervention in Ukraine, there will be a significant rethinking of regional and global security issues. It is difficult to say how the new security systems will be configured, and what changes will be made, but **it is important for Georgia to be an active participant of and contributor to the process.**

Partner countries define their political goals and objectives based on their national interests. However, attitudes towards the global agenda are seen as an important foreign policy priority for all partner countries. Every modern democracy positions itself in a foreign policy arena as a contributor to the international system and tries to strike a balance and find consistency between national interests and global challenges. In order to qualify as a modern democracy, in its external communication strategy, **Georgia should frame itself as a global actor and a contributor to the forming of the global agenda, rather than an actor focused solely on its national interests. It is important that Georgia be an active advocate in the international system for issues that are at the center of the global political agenda, and which are also reflected in Georgia's security concept and foreign policy**



**strategy. These issues include non-proliferation of mass weapons, energy security, environmental protection, cyber security, disinformation, hybrid threats, etc.**

As indicated in the review, Georgia's external communication campaign consists of seven directions which are consistent with the country's strategic objectives. Each of these directions has respective communication campaigns, with messages, lists of issues, and action plans. In light of the limited resources available to the country, its embassies and missions, as well as the overloaded international political agenda, the implementation of seven stand-alone campaigns is no easy task and may not yield the intended outcomes. At the same time, a universal campaign which is less considerate of the specifics and interests of individual countries and supranational organizations, can further limit the potential of achieving campaign objectives.

**It is important to consolidate all strategic goals and objectives under a single campaign format, even more so considering the consistency between these issues. It is expedient that the key campaign concept not be problem-oriented and negative, but rather positive and focused on the future. The concept of a "European Democratic State" may well serve as an overarching conceptual framework to cover such directions as NATO and EU membership, economic opportunities, protection of human rights and the Rule of Law, strengthening democratic institutions, etc. The country's cultural and historical diversity can also be fitted into the framework of the concept of "European Democratic State".**

**The occupation of Georgian territories and related security and human right issues can be displayed as a challenge not only for Georgia but for all Western democracy and placed under the overarching communication concept of "European Democratic State". The concept of the "European Democratic State" may be beneficial for the EU and NATO, especially considering there is an apparent expectation in the West to see successful democratic projects implemented in the European neighborhood.**

It is clear that the partners' attitudes towards Georgia's foreign policy strategic goals and objectives vary across the countries. Therefore, a universal campaign framework may not yield the expected outcomes in all its directions. **It is crucial that an external communication strategy is developed as a grand strategy, consisting of tactical components tailored to individual actors based on thorough calculations of partner interests and expectations.**

## Recommendations:

### Grand Strategy – A Tailored Approach

- *Georgia's external communication strategy should be developed as a Grand Strategy, consisting of tactical components tailored to individual actors based on thorough calculations of partner interests and expectations.*

### Human Rights and the Rule of Law

- *Protection of human rights, the Rule of Law, and consistent advancement towards institutional democracy should be prioritized under the external communication agenda, especially with Western democratic states and institutions.*



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### Contribution to the Global Policy Agenda

- *Georgia should frame itself as a global actor and a contributor to forming the global agenda, rather than an actor focused solely on its national interests. Georgia should advocate issues that are at the center of the global political agenda, such as non-proliferation of mass weapons, energy security, environmental protection, cyber security, disinformation, hybrid threats, etc.*

### Contribution to Global Security

- *In the process of the transformation of the global security system triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Georgia should play an active role and should find its own important niche and function in the renewed international security architecture.*

### EU-NATO Integration

- *Tactical adjustments are needed in order to bridge the gap between the approaches and expectations diverge between Georgia, on the one hand, and Germany and France, they being countries that are skeptical of Georgia's membership in NATO and the EU, on the other.*
- *Georgia should display the Euro-Atlantic project not as a single project within its Western aspirations, but as differentiated between the two directions, providing different sets of arguments and communication messages for NATO membership on the one hand and for EU membership on the other.*
- *Georgia should seize the opportunity and capitalize on novel impulses of global cooperation within strategic communication and push for the integration of Georgia on the wider agenda of Trans-Atlantic cooperation, taking advantage of its strategic partnership with the US.*
- *Georgia should maximize efforts to exert stronger pressure on skeptical countries within the multilateral format by relying on a powerful advocacy network within NATO and the EU.*
- *Georgia must consolidate the support of those NATO members states that support Georgia's membership and at the same time back harsher policies towards Russia.*
- *Georgia should cultivate broader European support within the EU, although support comes from smaller EU member states (Visegrad and Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, etc.). Such consolidated support inside of the EU will be more to consider for the country which defines its own foreign policy in the capacity of the EU leaders, in particular Germany and France.*
- *Georgian authorities developing the external communication strategy should consider the specifics of the EU, it being a multi-layered and multi-dimensional decision-making structure.*

### Cooperation with France and Germany

- *Dialogue formats with France and Germany need to cover more specific agenda items that are oriented not only on Georgia's interests, but take into consideration the political, economic, and other interests of France and Germany.*

### Economic Cooperation

- *Georgia should focus more on economic initiatives by the US and G7 countries in order to ensure its involvement in these projects.*
- *Georgia should not only communicate the country's economic potential to its partners, but take targeted action to attract the interest of large Western financial and industrial groups by offering*



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*specific wide-scale regional and transnational projects and with the possibility of co-investment conditions from the Georgian side.*

#### Overarching Campaign – a European Democratic State

- *Georgia should consolidate all strategic goals and objectives under a single overarching campaign format, focused on positive scenarios and oriented to the future and progress.*
- *The concept of “European Democratic State” may well serve as an overarching conceptual framework, covering such directions as NATO and EU membership, economic opportunities, protection of human rights and the Rule of Law, strengthening democratic institutions, and recognizing the country’s cultural and historical diversity.*
- *Georgia should display the occupation of Georgian territories and related security and human rights issues as a challenge not only for Georgia but for all Western democracy, and place in under the overarching communication concept of a European Democratic State.*
- *The concept of the “European Democratic State” may be beneficial for the EU and NATO, especially when there is an apparent expectation in the West to see successful democratic projects implemented in the European neighborhood.*

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