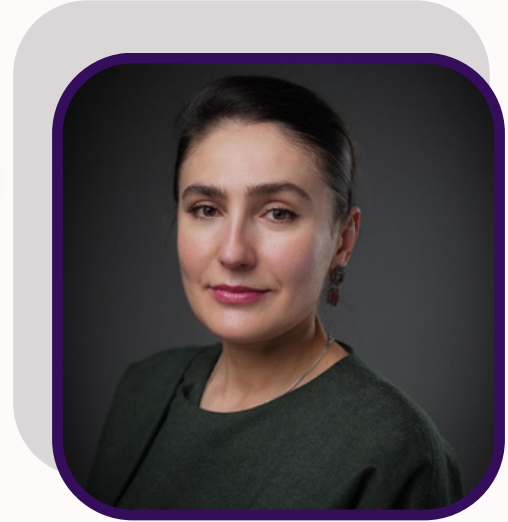




EXPERT COMMENT



GEORGIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS ALIGNMENT WITH THE EU CSFP



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Georgia's Foreign Policy and Its Alignment with the EU CSFP

Georgia's recent foreign policy strategy is characterized with notable deviations from the country's long-stated EU aspiration and alignment to the West. The Georgian Dream's government has made a series of decisions that strengthens Georgia's dependence on Russia and may just undermine Europeanization efforts. Furthermore, the newly signed Strategic Partnership agreement between Georgia and China raised questions about Georgia's foreign policy vector. While pragmatic explanations have been used to back the controversial decisions toward Russia and China by the government of Georgia, it may deepen authoritarian tendencies in the country.

Georgia's EU integration is based on AA/DCFTA, with an emphasis on CSFP alignment, which is the core document determining the country's advancement on the EU membership aspirations. While the EU accelerated the integration process for the Associated Trio last year, Tbilisi's lukewarm support to Ukraine in its war against Russia and the recent controversial foreign policy posture has called into question Georgia's alignment with the EU CSFP. According to the [EU Council](#) 2023 report, Georgia aligned itself with only 51 declarations out of 107, registering a further drop from the previous year (48%) to 31%.

At the request of the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP), a selection of experts from different countries responded to the following questions:

1. *What are the risks of strengthening ties with Russia and China on the way of the EU integration?*
2. *What Georgia should do to be in line with the EU CSFP and to improve its alignment rate with the EU foreign policy?*



**Dr. Niklas
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*The Director of the
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Chinese influence in Georgia. Unfortunately, if Georgia does not reduce its cooperation with Russia and China, inviting “another Hungary” into the EU could further undermine the democratic cohesion of the EU and should not be a priority of Brussels settlement is made, Georgia is on the right side of the line and in the Western sphere.

For Georgia to become a member of the EU, it has an obligation to prove to Brussels that its economic and democratic institutions are stable. This is something that many current members of the EU still struggle with. but Georgia's democratic development has been under a significant threat due to the increasing influence of totalitarian states like China and Russia, and Tbilisi's current swing toward Moscow. This trend not only distances Georgia from its collaboration with the EU and the U.S. but also complicates its chances of becoming a full member - or even a partner - of the EU. Tbilisi's ties with Russia and active opposition to European values and interests contradict the EU's core principles.

A further challenge facing the accession process is the "gradual convergence" with the Common Security and Defence Policy and European Defence Agency policies. Georgia's abstention from 23 out of 26 declarations is concerning, as it implies implicit support for a Russian invasion of Europe, particularly Ukraine. This is despite Georgia being the victim of the Russian aggression in 2008, effectively leaving 20 percent of its territory under Russian control.

The situation is also about values and norms. Nonetheless, this does not preclude Georgia from taking steps toward joining the EU, although it may be for the wrong reasons. The EU views the current situation as an opportunity for expansion and seeks to include Georgia in the accession process with Moldova and Ukraine, despite the last two states being ahead of Georgia. It is also seen as an opportunity to balance the Russian and



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The conflict arch, which stretches from Moldova through Ukraine to the South Caucasus and Central Asia, has become a focal point for Kremlin's geopolitical efforts. Consequently, Russia represents a significant threat to the stability, territorial integrity, sovereignty and progress toward European integration of these countries. In the aftermath of Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, significant geopolitical shift has had a profound impact on Georgia's foreign and security policies. This transformation involves the rise of authoritarian states - Russia, China, Turkey and Iran - as predominant forces seeking to shape the agenda in the region by gradually reducing the influence of the EU and the US. While China holds the position of being the primary economic and trade ally, there is a potential future risk if it opts to employ its financial influence and support authoritarian tendencies in Georgia.

Georgia is currently at a crucial juncture, positioned between the Western and Russian global orders, all the while contending with the intricate choices between authoritarianism and

democratic transformation within its own borders. Interestingly, as Georgia seeks to swiftly align with European norms and implement democratic amendments, the ruling party is cautious about reforms that could imperil its hold on power domestically. Such a complex backdrop makes the navigation of Euro-Atlantic integration even more challenging. This underlines a necessity for comprehensive discussions on political and security concerns. By identifying gaps and aligning interests with its Western counterparts, Georgia has the potential to draw on European experiences in support of domestic reforms and capitalize on this favourable moment for the country's European future.



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The risks of strengthening ties with Russia in the midst of its war of aggression against Ukraine should be obvious. When the EU launched its neighbourhood policy in 2004, it did not want to force countries to choose between Brussels and Moscow, but the Putin regime's actions have imposed that choice. Even countries in the EU with traditionally good relations with Russia, such as Germany, have had to re-evaluate their policies. With China, the picture is more complex: it is possible to have constructive relations with China, particularly in the economic sphere, and still be aligned with the EU's approach - in other words, to see China as a partner in some areas, a competitor in others, but also as a systemic rival. While the Georgian government might say that (for example) adopting sanctions against Russia would have a disproportionate economic effect on

Georgia, its failure to align with statements on human rights and the treatment of minorities, including sexual minorities, calls into question its acceptance of EU values - an essential criterion for membership. I would advise the Georgian government to start by aligning itself with all EU statements relating to values, to show that it truly wants integration into the EU. If it limited the areas of non-alignment to those where Georgia has compelling economic interests, then it would get a more sympathetic hearing from the EU. But as it stands, it risks alienating its partners and undermining Georgia's long-term interest in European (and Euro-Atlantic) integration.



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The risks stemming from strengthening ties with Russia need to be distinguished from those related to advancing relations with China. Seeking closer economic ties with Russia, when Moscow wages a full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine and aims to unravel the European security order, contradicts Georgia's European aspirations and also Georgia's long-standing warning about the threats posed by neo-imperial Russia. Furthermore, Georgia's growing economic dependence on Russia increases its vulnerability to Moscow and offers the Kremlin additional leverage to limit Georgia's sovereignty.

Shaping relations with China requires striking a balance between economic interests and strategic priorities, similarly to what the EU is seeking to achieve. Georgia should protect the security of critical infrastructure, diversify suppliers and strengthen its resilience to foreign influence, while

exploring scope for mutual economic benefits. The bottom line is that the partnership with Europe and the US should be the reference framework to define relations with China.

Alignment with the EU CFSP has been an important part of Georgia's European integration. Foreign policy convergence matters ever more for two reasons. For one, given the current window of opportunity, achieving EU candidate status should be the defining priority of Georgia's foreign policy. For another, with great power

competition growing and a war raging in Europe, Georgia's foreign policy positioning becomes a salient issue on the EU integration agenda. This is why formal and informal consultations with Western partners should be multiplied to openly address Georgia's recent track record of increasing misalignment and foster convergence. Alignment with the EU should continue to be the anchor of Georgia's foreign policy.



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Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.

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