Georgia and the European Union
from the Mediterranean Perspective

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Abstract: *The aim of the article is to highlight Mediterranean identity and its role in the European Union, as well as its importance in European integration for Member and non-Member States. The research is divided into two parts: (1) studying the issues of Mediterranean identity inside the European Union and (2) exploring the importance of this identity in Georgia's Europeanization.*

By analyzing the similarities between Georgia and Mediterranean countries, as well as evaluating the membership of these states in the EU, the article tries to draw perspectives for Georgia to become a Member State, possible negative and positive aspects of this membership for the country, as well as for the EU. What role Georgia's links to Mediterranean identity might play in this process and which are the most important elements of such progression.

Keywords: *EU membership, European integration, European Union, Georgia, Mediterranean identity.*

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1.   Introduction

The following paper is about *Mediterranean identity* and its role in the European Union, as well as its importance in European integration for Member and non-Member States. The research is divided into two parts: (1) studying the issues of Mediterranean identity inside the European Union and (2) exploring the importance of this identity in Georgia's Europeanization.

The first part is about Spain, Italy and Greece inside the EU, starting with an overview of the history of these countries since they applied to join the Union until they joined. Especially in the cases of Greece and Spain this part of the paper describes in detail the enlargement process, the main problems and the main benefits for both sides. Later, the study follows with analyzing the role of these countries since they joined the EU, their main contributions to the EU building process and the main problems created by them inside the Union. Then the study focuses on the importance of the Mediterranean countries as a whole for the society, analyzing the history, politics, geography and economy, with an emphasis on their Mediterranean character. Also it analyzes the Mediterranean identity as a bigger identity than the national one, but smaller than the European identity—a bridge between the two. The importance of this Mediterranean identity in the context of the European integration is about the identification of the people of Europe with the European building process. As the authors believe in the idea of a future development of the organization in a more federal way, combining different strategies from intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism and federalism, the problem of the identity of the people of Europe is very important. The result of the integration process anyway would be some kind of a European state, with the main need to transfer loyalty of the European people from the national level to the European one. Hence, the enlargements of the Union should take into consideration not just the political or economic points, but also the social affinity of the people. This paper intends to analyze the Mediterranean identity as part of the European identity and hence receiver of European loyalty. The methodology of this part of the paper is based on the comparison of the situation in the three countries, describing and analyzing the different situations presenting a common approach.

The second part of the paper continues the discussion of Mediterranean identity and how important a role it could play in the EU, with its possible importance for Georgia. It tries to show the power of this identity in Georgia, previously a part of the Soviet Union and therefore influenced by the post-Soviet identity. The paper tries to figure out if Georgia can be included in the Mediterranean identity or the

post-Soviet identity, or both of them. The post-Soviet identity could be also used as a way to integrate Georgian people into Europe, creating another identity above the national level but under the European identity, sharing it with other European people such as Estonians, Latvians or Lithuanians. This part discusses the history of Georgia—EU relations, the state position of Georgia towards the Union and recent developments in this way—trying to show the perspectives of the EU–Georgia's cooperation, the possible negative and positive sides of Georgia joining the Union, and the importance of Georgian identity, being close to Mediterranean one, for this process. Mediterranean identity being 'middle-level identity', thus above national identity and below the European one, can become a significant aspect of a country's adaptation and its integration into the European community, making its way smoother.

2. Mediterranean states inside the European Union: Italy, Greece and Spain

Italy was a founder member of the European Communities since the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. France and Germany mainly led the first Community; the other members had little influence in the negotiations. The Benelux countries depended on France and Germany in their economies, so they could not afford to be out of a process of integration. Italy, on the other hand, was a country divided between the north and the south. The north was more developed than the south, more Central European than Mediterranean, it was heavily industrialized and was interested in the integration process as a way to integrate with the main economies of Europe, as a way to reach the markets of the main economies of Europe (Fabbrini & Piattoni, 2007, p. 97). Nevertheless, the whole Italy won stability in its political system, supporting democracy versus different attempts of some Italian political actors, something seen also in the other Mediterranean Member States (EU, 2011a; c).

The next step in the European integration meant the establishment of the European Communities, especially the Common Market. It allowed people's movement from Italy to other Member States without discrimination, helping to solve the long-term unemployment problem. Furthermore, European funds helped Italy to try to close the enormous economic gap between the north and the south. The European Communities were acting as a mirror of modernity for the Italians, being a model to imitate, a reference for the modernization of the country. The Italian miracle after the World War II, especially in the

northern part of the country, can not be understood without the influence of the European Communities, the Common Market, the exchange of the ideas and goods, being nowadays the seventh economy of the world and the fourth largest of Europe. Another important fact, especially for southern Italy, was the Common Agricultural Policy (Carello, 1989, p. 98). This European policy is still organized in different sectors and provides different levels of protection depending on the kind of production, as direct payments, minimum prices, import tariffs and quotas from outside the Union. The benefits for Italy and especially for the Mediterranean production were huge, because it gave free access to the European market to sell its production, and preference over other Mediterranean producers from both sides of the sea (Knudsen, 2009, p. 76). It meant a privileged position in the market similar to a monopoly with all its benefits for the Mediterranean agriculture of Italy (EC, 2008/2009).

Greece was the next Mediterranean state to become a member of the European Communities in 1981. Joining the Communities meant a step forward, blocking possible regression to previous situations or potential Communist domination. The Greek agriculture obtained similar benefits as the Italian one. The European Communities also helped the modernization of Greece, starting an amazing period of stability and economic growth for the country; once again, Europe was the image to follow (Tsalicoglou, 1995, p. 91). The case of Greece is important in the sense that it was the first member of the Community that could be considered relatively poor and put an end to the idea of the Community being a club of rich states (EU, 2011b).

Spain joined the Communities in 1986; the country came from under a long dictatorship of Franco and still there was a threat of going back to another military government. The European Communities supported the democracy of Spain against reactionary forces (Preston, 1996, pp. 25–34). The idea was simple: Spain needed to join the Communities in order to develop and this could only happen by being a democratic state. Agriculture, an important sector in Spain, also obtained benefits such as free access to the European market. Due to different climate areas in Spain, there are also different agricultural productions, including continental productions. Thus, Spain also got direct payments to its agricultural sector helping the country to maintain the sector, which was suffering from international competition. It was also important to keep the population in rural areas and decrease migration from the countryside to the cities.

The modernization of Spain was huge and a wave of reforms shook the country. The sacrifices were accepted by the society, being the requirements to join the Communities, the paradigm of progress and development wished by the

Spanish. The industrial restructuring meant an important step to modernize the country; the previous political regime led by Franco promoted the creation of large industries as a measure of economic autarky because of the isolation of Spain from the world politics. This system could just work having a monopoly over the Spanish market, but once in the European Communities, these big industries could not compete with their European partners and thus disappeared. The social cost of this reform was huge but affordable, as Brussels was asking for it (Elorza, 1990, pp. 254–263). Finally, tourism in the country boosted after the enlargement. Already before it was an important economic sector, but it grew faster, year after year, following the enlargement, bringing numerous economic benefits (Martinez, 2002, pp. 56–79). Even now, it still is, with 57 million tourists in 2011, the main economic sector of Spain, acting as the motor of the economy during the current crisis (EU, 2011d).

3. Positive effects of the Mediterranean countries on the European integration

The positive effects of the Mediterranean countries when they joined the Communities, since its creation until 1986, were numerous: first of all, supplying with cheap labour for the main European economies, first with emigration and later moving the production to the Mediterranean countries with lower labour costs in production (Martin & Ross, 1999, p. 40). Their membership also meant a support to the European integration, before it mainly focused on the Western Europe and rich countries. The enlargement to Greece and Spain showed that relatively poor European states could also join the organization, thus the organization was open to any European country as long as it fulfilled the requirements.

Furthermore, Mediterranean countries gave a bigger dimension to the European Communities increasing its area of influence and providing it with wider borders; the enlargement gave a huge new frontier to the Union, the north shore of the Mediterranean Sea and the geopolitical sphere of influence of the Communities became more important, strengthening the international role of the organization, which had previously focused on the Franco-German axis (Kavakas, 2001, p. 90). Italy, Greece and Spain were important markets for European companies, especially in Germany, whose economy had mainly been focusing on exports. Here, it is important to mention the principle of solidarity, as otherwise the EU would be just a free trade area with benefits for stronger states and losses for

the poorer ones. The funds of solidarity come from the Union's own resources that are calculated according to the economic activity of its members. Germany provides more funds because its economic activity is higher, but in return it is higher because Germany has access to the European market (McGee, 1998, pp. 12–27).

In terms of integration, the inclusion of Mediterranean countries into the European integration process meant more supporters of the European dream. As these countries were less developed, the idea of Europe was the paradigm of society and the support to the European integration was stronger with a more idealistic approach, with bigger acceptance to further integration. There are many examples of such support of the Mediterranean states to the European integration—such as the founding father of the federalist movement in Europe, the Italian Spinelli, or the support of the Italian government to the European Defence Community and the European Political Community in the 1950s, or the role of the Italian Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo in the Genscher-Colombo report, or the role of the former Prime Minister of Spain Felipe González Márquez in the creation of the European citizenship, or the outstanding supporters of the European building process such as the Spanish philosopher Josè Ortega y Gasset, or the humanist Salvador de Madariaga, founder of the College of Europe, or the wide support to the new Treaties are all examples of the Mediterranean contribution to the European integration (Brown Wells, 2007, p. 34).

4. Negative effects of the Mediterranean countries on the European integration

The Mediterranean states are known in Europe as more corrupted, at least before the last enlargements of the organization to Central and Eastern Europe. The corruption related with European funds was notorious in different fields, such as agriculture, plus bad implementation by the Mediterranean governments of European legislation in order to favour their economic actors (for example, the Bresciani case in Italy, Greece with the case of the tourist guides, or Spain with the environmental legislation). In terms of Italy, it is influenced by different criminal organizations and in terms of Greece—the state often being a main actor in the "wrongdoings" (Della Porta, 1997, pp. 35–45; Vannucci, 1997, pp. 50–60).

In economic terms, the Mediterranean countries, after a significant development and economic growth, currently have bad economic performances, being

a threat to the stability of the eurozone. However, their importance to other economies of Europe makes unlikely a bigger crisis that could lead us to the end of the common currency. Greece could abandon the euro, but Spain and Italy are too big to fall and therefore are united with the fate of the euro. As their economic performances were not sufficient and the governments did not follow the common rules, more and more people are now supporting the creation of a common economic government in Europe—thus, deeper European integration—to avoid this situation in the future.

Additionally, the social system of Mediterranean countries are a threat to their economic stability and thus to European stability. At the moment we can find four social models inside the EU: the Scandinavian model, the Continental model, the Anglo-Saxon model and the Mediterranean one; being unsustainable, the Mediterranean model is currently held by Italy, Spain and Greece. The reform of these models could result in the adoption of the Anglo-Saxon model in the Mediterranean countries in a long term, but the more active social actors in those states will make the transition difficult unless it is done with a big social pact between the main social powers, the government, business associations and trade unions (ETUC, n.d.; Bosch, Lehndorff & Rubery, 2009, p. 69).

5.   Mediterranean identity

Construction of Europe needs the integration of its people. After years of economic integration, the political integration should be the next step in the process. In order to achieve a deeper political integration, the people of Europe should share a common identity respecting the national identities of the Member States at the same time. It is not the people against the state, rather it is more of creating a new political organization on the European level, where the political power of the citizens will come from being Europeans, not from belonging to any European nation. As it has been pointed out by most scholars involved in the European integration after the World War II, such as Altiero Spinelli, Salvador de Madariaga, Jean Monnet or Robert Schuman, the nations were the source of the conflict because it was a confrontation of nations against each other. The idea of national state and belonging to a society just as a member of the nation implies the concept of the nation as the last and sole entity holding the sovereignty of the people. It is an idea against the humanistic ideas of the French Revolution, the *Social Contract* of Rousseau, the 'perpetual peace' of Kant and those of many other European philosophers. The European integration does not

necessarily mean destroying in any way European nations, but it will take away the political power, the sovereignty from a nation, giving it to a new political organization based on citizenship rather than nationality.

There are different levels of integration, such as family, town, county, region, nation and state. The Mediterranean identity is between the state identity and the European identity and thus it could help integrating the people of Europe. The Mediterranean identity is wider than the national identity of the Member States, because it also includes different areas of other states, such as southern Portugal or southern France, plus other Member States such as Cyprus or Malta. The Mediterranean level of identity could act as a bridge between the state identity and the European identity, making the process of political integration in Europe easier. People all over the northern shore of the Mediterranean feel what Fernand Braudel (2002) defined as a cultural highway in his book *Memory and the Mediterranean*.

Mediterranean identity is based on different aspects, such as social behaviour, family, the role of mothers, food, religion, language originating in Latin or using the phonetic characteristics of Greek language, sports with a predominance of football and some ethnical traces, even though the Mediterranean are a mix of many different folks and people. These are trivial facts treated individually, but if combined they create a strong identity in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean identity has been barely expressed in political terms inside the Union or in the Mediterranean countries, but we see very similar models of social policies in all Mediterranean countries whose roots are based on a common identity.

In the EU, we find some common issues for the Mediterranean states, such as immigration. It is the consequence of the geographical position of the Mediterranean Member States of the Union forming the Union's southern border. The Mediterranean states are willing to increase cooperation in this topic and normally act as a whole, inside the Community (Caldwell, 2010, p. 89). But these are rarely exceptions to their approach to the European Union issues, where we do not see often any common position from the Mediterranean states, acting as a bloc. It leads us to see the Mediterranean identity as a bridge between people, not between the states, and that is important step in the creation of the European identity (Lonni, 2003).

6. Georgia and the European Union

Georgia is a relatively small country in the Caucasus region of the Far East Europe, country with a long and "colourful" history. Being on the border of Europe and Asia meant that for Georgian society and a country as whole, the question whether to belong to Europe or not was always very topical. But integration to Europe and developing towards Europe has always been a priority (Müller, 2011). Georgia is thought to be a key geographical point in human migrations to Europe and hence it played a major role in the colonization of the European continent. For example, genetic analyses have suggested that most probably the original inhabitants of Spain, the Iberians, came from the region of Abkhazia in Georgia (Valera, 2007, p. 54). The Caucasian ethnic group is the majority of the continent nowadays and link somehow common the ethnic roots to Georgians and the rest of the Europeans (Baum, 2008, p. 87).

In 1918, the head of Georgian government Noe Zhordania used political unrest caused by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia to declare the country independent. The priority for the Georgian government was integration to the European political world in a way to reassure the country's recent independence. He started establishing closer cooperation with European states. Later on, Zhordania explained: "Soviet Russia offered us [a] military alliance, which we rejected. We have taken different paths, they are heading for the East and we, for the West." (Kirchick, 2010) Georgia's independence lasted for three years and the country regained its independence only after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, thus Tbilisi's European plans had to be postponed until this time. The Soviet influence played a major role in the Georgian society: first of all, changing the link with religion, it closed the area to the other Mediterranean countries in a physical way, making almost impossible any cultural exchange, destroying the Mediterranean link established during centuries of constant cultural and economic exchange (Mamaladze, 1981, pp. 98–120). The influence of the Soviet Union increased after the World War II and it meant the imposition of Bolshevik standards in an area more influenced by Mensheviks and small plots of private property. The Bolsheviks' idea—the necessity to destroy the society in order to build a new one—had an important cultural influence over many territories and nations under the Soviet Union and created some kind of a common identity, destroying previous links.

Soon after achieving independence, Georgia faced a series of huge problems, including wars in its breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, civil war and heavy corruption.

By 2003, the reform momentum sputtered to a halt, and Georgia was a near failed state. Political power was increasingly fragmented, corruption and crime were rampant, there were massive arrears in pension payments and teachers' salaries, and infrastructure was in a state of near collapse… (World Bank, 2009, p. 1).

It can be said that during this period, the stronger identity of Georgia was united with the post-Soviet identity. The example of other post-Soviet states, such as Estonia, cannot be applied in the case of Georgia—first of all, because the Russian influence during the occupation was stronger in Georgia than in Estonia, because of the German influence over the Baltic region. Also Estonia used its independence between the two world wars to get closer with its European partners. Finally, because of geographical reasons: Estonia is located very close to European areas such as Finland, and the Baltic Sea worked as a communication channel. The Black Sea and the Mediterranean did not exert similar effects on Georgia and the geographical isolation of the country in European terms did not help to improve the situation.

The difficult situation in the country described above led to the Rose Revolution in November 2003, when young Mikheil Saakashvili and his political partners overthrew President Eduard Shevardnadze, former USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs (Coppieters & Legvold, 2005, pp. 274–290). Revolution meant a great deal for Georgia, it brought to the country a young and pro-Western government, which, with a new style of politics, managed to pass very painful but long-needed reforms, significantly reduce corruption, establish a very business-friendly environment, etc. The trust and support of Western partners returned, investments started to flow in and the country's economic situation started to improve tremendously (Coppieters & Legvold, 2005, pp. 274–290). One of the tasks of the new Georgian government was also to shift the identity of Georgia from post-Soviet to European, following the example of other former socialist states.

When it comes to fighting corruption, the country's success has been also acknowledged by the civil society organization Transparency International. The organization reported that after the Rose Revolution, the new government engaged in "large-scale reform, resulting in an almost complete eradication of petty bribery" and even though "its actions at times have been drastic—take, for example, the decision to disband the entire traffic police force—but the results are impressive" (Transparency International, 2011). In the organization's Corruption Perceptions Index, Georgia ranked 124th back in 2003 scoring 1.8 on a scale of 10 to 0, while in the following years the country's results have been improving and in 2011 Georgia ranked 64th scoring 4.1 (Transparency

International, CPI, n.d.). In contrast to its neighbours, Azerbaijan and Armenia who are constantly trying to keep the balance between their relations with the EU and Russia, in Georgia, not only the government and the ruling party but also the opposition are united behind the pro-European way of the country (Cornell & Nilsson, 2009). The EU itself becomes more concerned in the region of South Caucasus, engaging in different cooperation programmes to support necessary reforms (Chochia, 2012). Since the first day after coming into the power, Mr. Saakashvili and his government have been pointing out that the main goal of the country is to join the European community and develop towards the West (Georgiev, 2008, pp. 34–51). As a symbolic fact, European Union flags were introduced, and still are raised, on every government building and main state institutions. The new government also started to work on the new Georgian identity by changing the understanding of the Soviet past of the country and underlining its disastrous effect on the Georgian nation. Soon after Saakashvili came to power, the Soviet occupation museum was opened in the capital Tbilisi, and many similarities could be drawn with other former Soviet states who went through similar process of re-defining the past.

English became the main foreign language in the country's educational system instead of Russian, and obtaining a degree from European or American universities was widely promoted (Rubdy & Saraceni, 2006, p. 64). All this led to a change in the country to focus on European matters, free from the influence of Russia. Cooperation with the European Union deepened and improved (EU, 2006) and the process has been actively promoted by the government in the media, thus the Georgian society became more aware of the European Union, its way of development, its values (Müller, 2011). But the Georgian government focused more on the leading states of the Union, such as France and Germany, as the mirror for Georgia.

Georgia has faced serious problems during recent years, including a heavy defeat in the war of summer 2008 against Russia over Georgia's small break-away republic of South Ossetia, as Russia tried to keep control in the region, which it considers to be within it sphere of interests (Chochia, 2009). The war almost destroyed the country's economy, and even though the situation was saved by a huge post-conflict aid package of 4.5 billion USD from the Western countries, the effect of a global economic crisis was very heavy on Georgia, as all its economic indexes went significantly down (World Bank, 2009). There were demonstrations against the government and many thought Saakashvili would not be able to hold power; however, he remained in power, mainly due to the opposition's disunity and incompetence, and started to make reforms to improve the country's situation. But the situation in the country remains quite

difficult as unemployment and inflation is very high (World Bank, 2009; World Bank Indicators, n.d.), and poverty rate has increased (UNDAF, 2011). The much promoted European orientation of the country suffered a setback in terms of politics, but still the population is focused on the Europe as the mirror of progress and as a social model for the Georgian society. Nevertheless, the focus was again on economic terms, mainly the modernization of the country, and not much effort was made in terms of culture. Many things have changed in Georgia during last decade, but one thing has certainly not changed—the Georgian society's and the whole country's preferences to develop and move towards the West and particularly towards Europe (Müller, 2011). On the other hand, the European Union itself shows support to Georgia and the recent developments have confirmed this fact.

7. Negative and positive aspects of Georgia joining the European Union

Georgian government has clearly defined pro-European ideas; it clearly sees the European Union as a main partner and future destination for the country (Piris, 2010, pp. 301–314). Cooperation with the EU is a priority and Tbilisi is trying to show its commitment to the cooperation. Georgia understands that the EU would mean a huge modernization for the country, development in such fields as human rights protection, social mobility, environmental protection and domestic politics. The government advertises among the people the idea that being closer to the EU, or in the best-case scenario, joining the Union, would mean a huge development for the country and would stand for its absolute and total modernization. Many reforms are taken with the reasoning that these steps would bring the country closer to the EU and the idea is very much accepted by the people (Staab, 2011, pp. 64–67). This shows that the government will be able to introduce and implement sometimes painful reforms which will be required by the EU.

Georgia clearly sees the European Union and belonging to a genuine pluralistic security community and its value system as a guarantee for the security and stable development, country's international leverage (Staab, 2011). On the other hand, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton once more underlined EU's full support and its "strong commitment to strengthening relationship with Georgia", when she visited the country in July 2010 for Association Agreement

negotiations. Baroness Ashton called the European Neighbourhood as a top priority and Georgia an important partner, as she said:

> *Today, we are building on already strong foundations to bring Georgia closer to the EU. We remain fully committed to supporting stability, democratic development and economic development in Georgia… stability and prosperity here enhances stability and prosperity in the European Union* (EU, 2010).

The political stability in Georgia is a very important fact in this regard. One of the issues Saakashvili's government has been criticized for was the constitution and the switch of power to president after the revolution. Tbilisi, which tries to improve its relationship with Europe after it has been damaged due to the 2008 war, started the constitutional reform in order to change the political system and shift more power from the presidency towards the parliament and the government. Tbilisi even invited the Venice Commission to review the reform, which mostly had a positive feedback on the amendments, even though criticizing the aspect of the difficulty of removing the Prime Minister. The stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy is a core political element when the country joins the European Union, thus Saakashvili's such a strong personal position (of course, if he, by a stroke of luck, is to become Prime Minister) will surely be a problem. Saakashvili does not jail his opposition, like some other leaders in the post-Soviet area, but conditions of the opposition and freedom of the media stay as points to be concerned and worried about (Cecire, 2011). Furthermore, the system of elections in Georgia remains poor, as voters are mostly not offered a clear ideas about the policies, thus the candidates are identified whether being on one side of a political frontline or another. The EU is used as a paradigm of political standards, while Europe acts as the catalyst for the democratization of Georgia, as it did in the case of Greece and Spain, when both countries after their respective dictatorships became democracies, and supported the political reforms on European standards.

A true democratization of Georgia is and will be a challenge for the European Union and Georgia. It should do all it can do ensure that reforms in Georgia will continue (Mitchell, 2008, p. 89). As a chairperson of one of the leading Georgian NGOs, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, explained:

> *For us, EU integration means democratization, economic standards and security, but on the democracy side, the EU is not utilizing all its leverage the way it could. For instance, the huge economic assistance after the war should have been used to ask for democratic reforms. The EU is focusing on free trade agreements, economic*

> *harmonization, but there are no benchmarks on the rule of law and*
> *the respect for human rights. (Pop, 2011)*

Another important field is the existence of a functional market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces. And when it comes to Georgia, it should be mentioned that the country's economy is struggling. In a successful scenario, Georgia might be a new, stable and profitable market, which EU is probably always looking for, but for this to be the case, there is still a very long way to go and definitely more actions and efforts are required from the both sides. Economy also means a change in the mentality of the people, changing the economic model from a post-Soviet situation where the market is a jungle to a social market, where there is freedom, but also the rule of law and social policies decreasing the negative effects of pure capitalism. In this case, we do not see any similarity with the Mediterranean states, which are very generous in their public social subsidies, and Georgia is closer to the Anglo-Saxon model. It can be compared to other ex-Soviet Republics, such as Estonia, where the social model is also similar to the Anglo-Saxon, with the state acting as a supervisor of the free market, against the Mediterranean style of controlling the market. Thus, we can affirm that the identity of Georgia in this field is more linked with its Soviet past than with its Mediterranean identity (Mikhalev, 2003, pp. 107–123).

Agricultural sector, one of the main sectors of the EU cooperation, is extremely weak in Georgia. Saakashvili's government put the sector high on the agenda, but the actions remain very questionable. As a senior fellow at the country's leading think tank, Dr. Vladimer Papava said:

When the Minister of Agriculture talks about developing agriculture through the export of frog legs, developing crocodile farms in west Georgia, and bringing South African farmers to the country, a few simple questions comes to mind— has he got any idea about agriculture? (Papava, 2010)

When talking about the Mediterranean context, Georgia's agriculture can be considered as so-called Mediterranean agriculture, thus the experience that the Mediterranean countries had in this field will be very useful (Iglesias *et al*., 2009, pp. 267–290). The European Union will definitely bring a huge positive impact on Georgia's agriculture, allowing it to modernize its production, which is very much needed in the country. As a post-Soviet country, Georgia's agriculture very much needed a modernization after the collapse of the Soviet model of farming, but due to continuing wars and destabilization in the country, as well as a high level of corruption, especially before the Rose Revolution, the country practically never managed to modernize its agriculture in the way that

it would be competitive. Georgia's agriculture is able to grow various produce, including wheat, vegetables and fruits, but still due to the lack of modern production systems, the country needs to import agricultural products from the neighbouring countries, mainly Turkey. Furthermore, special attention should be paid to Georgian wine and the country is still struggling after its wine production was banned from Russian markets. Since then Georgian government has tried to improve the production, as well as to advertise it more in order to be able to sell it elsewhere and of course in the EU, as wine still remains the country's main product. Having more possibility to sell wine in the EU would solve the problems in the field. Therefore, the EU would definitely bring improvement in the sector, by modernizing it and of course allowing the country to have free access to European markets and sell its production in the EU with import barriers, such as quotas, taxes, etc. The Mediterranean agricultural production of Georgia is strongly linked with those of Greece, Spain and Italy, and it has a cultural expression in many folk traditions linked with harvest, food, dietary habits, etc. Georgia could become a competitor to the Mediterranean states of the Union, as its production is similar, and thus it could raise some suspicion among the farmers of these states. As the Common Agricultural Policy supports mainly the continental production and gives preferential access to the Mediterranean products, the impact in terms of money will not be huge in Georgia, but it will open a market full of consumers for the Georgian production and therefore it will push for a better use of the current economic system in agricultural terms (Fennell, 1980, pp. 149–190).

The social system is also a very important field, as in Georgia it is quite unstable and will definitely be a challenge for the EU. Georgian side, on the other hand, should also keep in mind the immigration issue, as the country might experience possible exodus of a very high percentage of its population, which was a case for previously accepted (to the EU) Eastern European countries (Pollard, Latorre & Sriskandarajah, 2008; see also Kelo & Wächter, 2004). Even though the Common Market would allow Georgia to lower its unemployment rate, which is one of the most problematic issues in the country and has been such since its restoration of independence. Georgia would mean cheap labour, making the situation similar as it was in case of Italy and Greece.

Another issue is European Union's energy policy. If it is in Europe's interests to reduce its energy dependence on Russia, then protecting peace and stability in Georgia, therefore, protecting oil and gas pipelines crossing through the country, should be a priority for the EU and reaching this goal will definitely turn into a huge success for the Union, its world position and its overall objectives. But here the issue of EU–Russian relations comes up and the Caucasus region is

a sensitive topic in those relations. Russia definitely sees the region as in its sphere of influence and has made attempts to rebuild it. It is under the post-Soviet influence of the Russian model of society, different from the European understanding of society (Duffield & Birchfield, 2011, pp. 169–186). However, when it comes to the Mediterranean issue in this case, it is important to underline Italy's friendly relations with Russia, which makes it very unlikely that it would fully support any alternative routes, excluding Russia.

The internal conflicts of Georgia are probably the most problematic and challenging issues when it comes to EU–Russian relations. After the August war of 2008 and recognition of two separatist regions by Russia, the EU Monitoring Mission is the only international monitoring body in the conflict zone, as soon after the war Russia vetoed the extension of UN and OSCE monitoring missions in the area. The EU was very slow to engage itself in the problem and devote more attention to these conflicts before the war and now it spends huge sums of money to keep the monitoring mission and try to control the situation in the conflict zone. The situation itself is risky and the tension between the countries remains very high, so the EU needs to stay engaged and try to keep the situation under control, using its diplomatic tools (Popescu & Wilson, 2009). The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton has confirmed EU's position concerning the issues during her visit to Georgia in July 2010 and said that the European Union

> welcome[s] Georgia's commitment to solving the conflict only through peaceful means and diplomatic efforts… The EU will remain fully engaged in conflict resolution efforts, using the variety of tools at our disposal. The EU Monitoring Mission remains an indispensable factor for stability. (EU, 2010)

The successful outcomes of close EU engagement will certainly benefit the Union and will increase its significance as a global political actor, however, the challenges of such close involvement are very clear. When it comes to the Mediterranean countries, Spain's internal problems mean its solidarity to Georgia in this case; as for Greece, expelling ethnic Georgian population from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as mass deportation from Russia, draws parallels with the migration of ethnic Greeks after the conflict with Turkey.

8.   Conclusion: Mediterranean identity vs. Georgian identity

Analyzing the similarities between Georgia and the Mediterranean states inside the EU, positive and negative effects of Georgia's possible integration into the EU can be found. Georgia could supply the EU with cheap labour, including the localization of European companies there to lower production costs. Georgia could also increase the EU's role on international level, as the country is located at a crossroads of civilizations (King, 2009, p. 86). But at the same time, it is also a disadvantage, because of the possible confrontation with Russia. Georgia itself, due to its size, cannot be as important in market terms for the EU as are Italy and Spain, but the possibilities of further opening of the markets of Central Asia and to some extent to the Middle East, could supply the EU with a robust presence in these markets with the consequent economic benefits (de Waal, 2010, p. 145). Finally, following the example of Greece, Italy and Spain, Georgia is a fervent believer of the European integration and would like to take part in it.

There are also parallel negative effects for the Union in case of Georgia's accession, similar to those of other Mediterranean countries. First of all, corruption that will increase the level of corruption in the EU and generate the same problems as in the Mediterranean Member States. Second, Georgia, as a less developed country, will generate economic tensions inside the EU. The problem could not be big, due to Georgia's size, but in the current economic conditions even that is important as it could mean further economic challenges. Finally, the Mediterranean identity is strong in Georgia and it could help in the European building process, contributing to deeper integration. As we have seen, in order to have any kind of state, even if it is a supranational state, the link of the people with the political structure is needed. There has to be some kind of identification and thus political loyalty of the people. The European identity above the national identity (never to be eliminated) is needed in order to establish stable political institutions on the European level and the Mediterranean identity could help serving as a bridge between these two levels of identification. In the case of Georgia's accession to the EU, the Mediterranean identity will be stronger, helping to develop the desperately needed European identity.

The implication of Georgia in the EU from a more domestic perspective shows that Saakashvili's government is driven more than ever by the ideology, the country's policy is very pro-United States and pro-European (Wheatley, 2010). The goal is to join the European Communities and NATO: this is seen as the best and may be even only way of development, protection and solving the problems (Jacoby, 2006, pp. 101–130). This ideology is widely shared by Georgian society

and there has not been a serious alternative in the minds of Georgians to the way towards joining the European family. Georgians consider themselves as Europeans, especially when it comes to identity—the Mediterranean identity is seen as something very similar to Georgian one. Connections are especially tight with Greece, sharing one religion (considering the fact that Georgians are very religious and the Orthodox Church is seen as a very influential body), many traditions, minority related connections (many Georgians living in Greece and a huge number of Greeks who have lived in Georgia for a very long time). And, of course, the history, starting from the legend that every Georgian is very proud of—the legend known primarily from Greek mythology about the Golden Fleece and Jason, together with Argonauts travelling from Greece to ancient Georgia to seize it from Colchis.

The main concern will be whether Georgia can or cannot join the organization or what kind of relations is it going to have with the EU. Its future in a way depends on the relations of Turkey and the EU, because of the obvious geographical reasons and here the Mediterranean identity plays a major role. Turkey as a Mediterranean state has been involved in the development of the cooperation in the Mediterranean area, acting as a key player, leading somehow the Muslim Mediterranean states in its relations with the EU, promoting a new Ottomanism and, at the same time, acting as a partner of the Union. The future of the enlargement to Turkey will define its ambiguous position—if the country joins the organization it should forget its imperialistic approach based on religion, if it does not, the relations of Turkey with the EU would be done via the Union for the Mediterranean. Currently this organization is empty and without any influence, but it could be the future vehicle of the relations between Turkey, the EU, the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Here, the Mediterranean identity of Georgia could play a key role in its relations with the EU, including the country in the association and thus developing stable relations with the European Union.

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