

Problems of Interaction of the European Union with the South Caucasian Countries as Part of the European Neighborhood Policy

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Abstract – The article analyzes the role of the European Union (EU) in modern internal political processes in the countries of the South Caucasus region. The European neighborhood policy (ENP) is aimed at the development of the EU relations with these countries. Meanwhile, the financial assistance depends on the development of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Reformation of the political system is a guarantee of the European assistance. The paper identifies a mechanism to assist the EU to carry out democratic reforms in the countries of the South Caucasus. In Georgia, application of the principle of political conditionality within the ENP had a very positive impact on the institutional changes. The interaction between the EU and Georgia implementing various projects within the 2016 Euro-Georgian Association agreement is described. The relations between the EU and Georgia changed. The relations between the EU and Azerbaijan and Armenia based on the principles of democracy, the rule of law and respect for civil rights are also developing successfully. Having considered the main areas of cooperation, it was concluded that the EU plays a significant role in complex internal political processes in these countries.

Keywords – *European Union, South Caucasus countries, European neighborhood policy, Eastern partnership, assistance, cooperation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the South Caucasus region, political processes are very complex. They are influenced by the domestic political development, the Caucasian policies of Russia, the USA, and other leading Western countries, and Turkey and Iran. The influence of these factors on the general political situation is extremely high: under their influence, a regional geopolitical configuration is formed [1]. The unique geopolitical position

and geographical proximity to Europe strengthened attention of the leading Western European countries to the region. A powerful incentive to intensify the South Caucasian policy was large reserves of raw materials which play an important role in the energy supply of Europe. In the context of the geopolitical processes taking place in the South Caucasus, the EU and its institutions have become an instrument for implementing the policies of the leading European countries. The article describes the nature of the EU relations with the South Caucasus countries within the ENP; identifies problems of their development, a mechanism of cooperation between them in bilateral and multilateral formats.

II. MATERIALS AND RESEARCH METHODS

The empirical basis is official EU documents: the European Security Strategy (ESS), 2003; the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), 2004; the program of the Eastern Partnership (EP), 2009; Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States, TACIS, 1991; the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), 2007, constitutional laws of Azerbaijan (2009) and Armenia (2017).

The methodological basis is the principle of objectivity in highlighting key issues in the EU relations with the South Caucasus countries. Their study involves the use of institutional, historical, and comparative methods for accumulating and systematizing the empirical material. The systematic method made it possible to carry out the political, geographical, economic and comprehensive analysis.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

The expansion of the was estimated as an important historical event by the elites of the eastern countries. Despite some skepticism, the EU has great resources for developing relations with its eastern neighbors, and is interested in cooperation with them in order to create a security and welfare zone. During this period, it became apparent that the EU borders were conditional, and the eastern neighboring countries had favorable opportunities for establishing cooperation with the EU in politics, security, economy and culture. The main goal of the ENP was to strengthen security and increase the welfare of the interested parties. The EU should ensure democracy, stability, and prosperity in its neighboring territories. This was emphasized in the European Security Strategy (ESB) approved in December 2003. The EU is striving to create a development zone, to form a “ring of friendly countries” to maintain a high level of relations [1]. At the same time, it should be noted that within the ENP, there was no provisions for the Eastern partner countries to provide any prospects for accession to the EU, to establish privileged relations or provide assistance in achieving goals in various areas of cooperation.

The ENP was aimed to expand cooperation with Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. However, given the different level of their development, Brussels adhered to the principle of a differentiated approach to the development of relations. The ENP was carried out in accordance with the provisions reflected in the bilateral EU agreements with these countries. The parties considered these agreements as strategically important, because they contained political and economic parameters to determine the level of progress achieved in the EU relations with its eastern neighboring countries. Cooperation agreements were based on the principles of respect for the rights and interests of the parties. However, they differed from each other by a number of factors (the general level of EU interaction with individual Eastern partner countries, the needs of each country reflected in bilateral agreements taking into account the mutual interests of the parties, etc.).

In the post-Soviet period, the Eu provided economic and financial assistance to the countries of the South Caucasus [2]. Assistance projects for these countries were developed (the CIS Technical Assistance Program (TACIS) which requires institutional, legislative and administrative reforms; private sector and economic development; social aspects of transition; infrastructure development; environmental protection, natural resource management; agricultural development, nuclear safety [3]. Among the EU assistance projects, the European Instrument for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) is important [4]. Non-governmental organizations working in Georgia received 17 million euros [5]. The priority was independent media and parliamentary structures.

In implementing European programs, difficulties were caused by the policies of the leadership of the South Caucasus countries. The Armenian President S. Sargsyan voiced a desire to become a member of the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) during his visit to Moscow on September 3,

2013. On October 10, 2014, Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) [6]. This event showed that the Armenian authorities paid attention to the development of relations with the Russian Federation. At the same time, the change in the Armenian foreign policy was criticized by the EU leadership who hoped for an early integration of Armenia into European structures. They were dissatisfied that the decision to change the foreign policy was made a few months after the official negotiations of the republican leaders in Brussels. [7] In this regard, the European political circles were not satisfied with the change in the foreign policy vector of Armenia, believing that through the development of partnerships with the EU, it was possible to modernize political and economic institutions and implement democratic reforms [8].

The opposition part of the Armenian electorate condemned the policy of the national leadership and demanded amendments to the constitution, providing for the redistribution of powers in favor of the parliament. These requirements were supported by the international organizations, in particular the Council of Europe. As a result of the referendum held on November 27, 2005, the constitution was amended. The new text was called the “Second Constitution”, or the “2005 Constitution”. The amendments were determined by those commitments that Armenia made to the EU. The draft constitution was developed by a coalition of the government parties and organizations. According to the Central Election Commission, 64 % of the citizens participated in the referendum, of which 93.3 % wanted to amend the constitution. According to Article 49, the president is the head of the state, the guarantor of its independence, territorial integrity and security elected for five years [9]. Due to the need to amend the constitution, the referendum was held on December 6, 2015. It was supported by the majority of the Armenian population. New changes included the transition from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government, as well as the rejection of the majority system of parliamentary elections [9].

The amendments entered into force in January 2017. Public administration is based on the principle of separation of powers and a balance between the legislative, executive and judicial powers (Article 5). This rule was present in the text of the constitution adopted in 1995; however, the principle of separation of powers was finally enshrined in the constitution [10]. In general, it should be noted that political institutions were formed under the strong external influence. In 1991, the process of transformation of the political system began in Armenia; it was accompanied by the opposition of a new socio-political structure of the Soviet model.

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In Azerbaijan, the political system was transformed in difficult conditions. The constitutions were adopted on November 12, 1995, in 2002 and 2009. According to the amendments, in the first round of the presidential election, the candidate could receive a simple majority of votes (rather than 2/3 of the votes). After the 2009 referendum, 41 amendments were made to 29 articles of the constitution; the powers of the president significantly increased. The president began to exercise control over the executive branch. Public administration began to be based on the principle of separation of powers: the Milli Majlis (parliament) exercised legislative power, the president exercised executive power, and the judiciary was declared an independent branch of government. The specifics of the separation of powers gave reason to believe that the presidential institution dominates in the political process: the president implemented the domestic and foreign policies. In this regard, the resolution by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe indicated that the President of Azerbaijan had broad powers. [11] The Cabinet of Ministers implemented decrees and instructions of the President; the ministers reported for their work. The prime minister was appointed by the president, and the parliament approved the nomination. If the candidacy of the prime minister was not approved by the deputies, the president could approve it without their consent. The parliament could initiate and adopt resolutions, approve the state budget.

In 2009, the state commission began to work in Georgia in order to change the current constitution of the country and create a balanced system of state power and administration. Representatives of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition, experts, and public activists took part in the commission. Its creation meant that the constitution of the republic had significant shortcomings, and its new model should be developed by various representatives.

According to the package of constitutional amendments submitted in November 2010, the system of state power should have been modernized by strengthening the powers of parliament and weakening the powers of the president. The desire of the civil society to strengthen the power of the parliament reflected constitutional tendencies in international practice. The European political circles positively evaluated these changes.

During the implementation of the ENP, the role of the EU in regional relations increased, and its influence intensified. Brussels wanted to expand the dialogue with these countries: in 2003, an EU special representative was sent to the South Caucasus. The main priorities were identified: strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, respect for the rights and freedoms of citizens.

The EU assistance projects approved in 2011 regulated bilateral cooperation programs aimed at supporting the eastern partner countries and solving the problems faced by several or all eastern EU partner countries. Within these projects, special attention was paid to those countries that succeeded in creating democratic institutions. The protection of the inalienable

rights of citizens and the rule of law were considered indispensable for receiving European assistance [12].

Within the ENP, it was planned to develop bilateral relations in various directions, including reforms in the field of security and state building. In general, following the transformation of political systems in the countries of the South Caucasus, one can note the growing role of the EU in this process. So, as a result of constitutional reforms in Georgia, the presidential system of government was changed, the role of parliament increased and the system of local self-government was reformed. These changes were aimed at creating an improved control and balance system in this republic. In Azerbaijan and Armenia, some constitutional amendments were also made, although there were certain shortcomings in the implementation of reforms in these republics. In Azerbaijan, the practice of applying fundamental democratic rights depended on the executive branch, which is why European experts considered this republic a country with a "facade democracy" [13].

The EU was a significant donor for the countries of the South Caucasus. In accordance with the EU foreign aid regulation program published in 2006, priority relations with eastern neighboring countries should be based on adherence to universal values such as democracy, the rule of law, improved governance, respect for human rights and the market economy [14].

As a result of the development of new mechanisms and formats within the ENP program, in 2009 the EU's political dialogue with the countries of the South Caucasus intensified: there was a positive dynamics in cooperation between them in the development of civil society which was important for expanding ties between non-governmental organizations operating in these countries and similar European structures. Brussels relied on monitoring results, reports made by civil societies, local and international non-governmental organizations.

The ENP provided for EU cooperation with the countries of the South Caucasus in bilateral and multilateral formats. Within the bilateral cooperation, it was necessary to create political and legal frameworks in the relations between the parties; multilateral cooperation was aimed at developing regional ties with the countries of the South Caucasus through joint political, economic and social projects. The ENP was aimed to create conditions for expanding mutually beneficial ties, and strengthen security in the South Caucasus. In the format of bilateral cooperation, the ENP provided for the implementation of institutional development projects: the EU sought to promote democratic reforms in the eastern partner countries. As part of the ENP, in 2010–2013, the EU allocated 600 million euros to support democratic reforms in 6 eastern partner countries [15].

The pace of reforms determined the general level of their cooperation with the EU. At the same time, the Eastern partner countries that have achieved the greatest success in carrying out democratic reforms have received more benefits in accordance with the principles of "more for more" reflected in the ENP. This initiative was aimed at promoting democratic reforms in the eastern partner countries. As noted at the EU

summit in Vilnius held on November 28–29, 2013, it was necessary to include their national parliaments, as well as civil societies, business associations and other interested parties, in cooperation with the eastern partner countries.

IV. FINDINGS

Thus, the involvement of the South Caucasian countries in various EU projects within the ENP partnership was an important external factor of democratic reforms. Agreements with these countries indicated that democratic values were a priority, and quality of bilateral and multilateral cooperation depended on the adherence to the universal values. After the adoption of the ENP, qualitative changes took place in EU relations with the countries of the South Caucasus [16]. The sectoral component was an important part of this agreement. Harmonization of the Georgian legislation and the EU legislation was a priority. The Euro-Georgian Association aimed to modernize Georgia, europeanize this republic [17].

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