

Blog of Nino Tsubutashvili

"I am Georgian, therefore I am European".

In January 1999, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Zurab Zhvania underlined these words in Georgian at a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe in the Palace of Europe.

When I first heard these words of Zurab Zhvania, I was still a child.

The feeling of losing an identity was initially expressed in a feeling of protest, I am Georgian, why should I be a European or how am I a European, if every day I understand that I am a Georgian, a son of Georgia, a patriot who must be devoted to the culture and traditions of my country.

My confusion was exacerbated by the term "globalisation", which I first heard at school when I was told that globalisation itself implied the assimilation, and perhaps even extinction, of small cultures.

Europe...

Europeanisation...

Democratisation...

Integration...

Globalisation...

Georgia...

I'm Georgian...

And my confusion increased even more.

I have learned a lot by fighting with myself and found that accepting something new does not mean losing the culture and traditions that we have inherited from the past. We should keep pace with the challenges of the modern world and cope with them with dignity. The struggle for freedom has been the main challenge for our ancestors for centuries. In parallel to the development of society, bloody battles were replaced by an intellectual war. And if today freedom means integration with Europe, globalization, then I am ready to contribute to the struggle for the freedom of my country...

The first victory... The first constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1921... A step towards freedom...

April 9, 1991... "Our sorrow and our triumph", Restoration of Georgia's independence... A step towards freedom...

2008 ... an attempt to occupy our minds and souls, expressed in barbed wires ... mothers with dead children... unrecognized occupied territories ... a step towards freedom ...

Feelings and fears of loss of identity, misunderstandings, incorrect communication, polarized media and power struggles... and yet, a new generation, my generation, non-formal education, technological progress... a step towards freedom...

European standard – this is us, this is my generation... mobile, healthy, active, anti-conformist and loyal to novelties.

And if our national culture and traditions constantly require care and preservation, then I will tell you that the struggle for freedom and development is part of our culture, which has always ideologically accompanied our future development and was once again expressed in our country's independence. Georgia has always been a member of the European family with its own culture... and if our goal is both to preserve the old and keep progress, then yes, I am ready to create this source of light. We are millennials, our participation in the creation of history is vital, and we will try this through all channels.

My desire to work closely on EU-Georgia relations and contribute to its development led me to participate in the Jean Monnet Winter School “Europeanization and democratization: Georgia and the European Union”, organized by the European University with the support of the European Union. The Winter School was launched in the frameworks of the three-year EU Erasmus+ Jean Monnet module "Europeanization as a tool for the democratization of Georgia" (620916-EPP-1-2020-1-GE-EPPJMO-MODULE).

This winter school is intrinsically important as the participants had the opportunity to study and discuss in detail the relations between Georgia and the EU. In particular, Georgia-EU relations date back to 1991, after the collapse of the USSR and Georgia's independence. Of great importance was the Luxembourg Agreement of April 22, 1996: on the prospects for partnership and cooperation between the EU and Georgia, which became the subject of an interesting dialogue between speakers and participants.

It is noteworthy that we have heard opinions on EU-Georgia relations and their importance from top officials, namely: Chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia Archil Talakvadze, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia Carl Hartzell, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia David Zalkaliani and other important state officials, representatives of civil society organisations and related field experts whose activities are directly related to the EU-Georgia ties. They paid special attention to the political dialogue and instruments, institutions and mechanisms of bilateral relations between the EU and Georgia.

High-level politicians and EU institutions have always paid particular attention to the Eastern Partnership initiative, which was the subject of a special discussion in the format of the Winter School, logically followed by a discussion on the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU, which entered into force on July 1, 2016. EU-Georgia bonds are based on common values. The implementation of the Association Agreement will strengthen and further develop democratic institutions. The document is an action plan for approximating Georgia with the European Union. The Association Agreement envisages such a high level approximation that its full implementation will make Georgia's Europeanisation process irreversible.

We talked about an issue of occupation and the EU's role in a conflict resolution process. The actualization of the occupation theme included not only the events of 2008 and the 1990s, but also the revival of the memory of 1918-1921 and the creation of a real picture of the Soviet occupation. Russia has become a threat of Georgian democracy and its European course. A historical example of this was February 1921 and the occupation of Georgia by the Red Army. It coincided with the dates of the Winter School, so commemorated the centennial of these tragic events while discussing historic attempts of Georgia's Europeanisation and democratisation efforts.

Jean Monnet's online winter school "Europeanization and democratization: Georgia and the European Union" is an opportunity to study in detail the importance of the Europeanization process of Georgia, its political and economic prospects and the positive impact of democracy on building a better future for the country. More importantly, you have a chance to get answers from the highest level political or institutional representatives of Georgia and the EU on difficult questions and to understand that instead of fighting against identity, the EU supports the preservation of cultures and individualism.

Lastly, I reiterate that we are victims of a mental occupation, but I believe that we can free our minds from the barbed wires, which will bring territorial integrity and liberty back to our country.

... And yes, Mr. Zhvania, in fight with my mind I discovered that "I am Georgian, and therefore, I am European!"