

Управління територіальними конфліктами в Грузії: ахіллесова п'ята зовнішньої політики Євросоюзу

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Сусідство політично та воєнно-нестабільного регіону Південного Кавказу становить незмінну загрозу мирові, стабільності та енергетичній безпеці Євросоюзу. З огляду на цю небезпеку Європейська комісія закликала ЄС взяти активнішу участь у вирішенні конфлікту з метою уникнення подальшого погіршення ситуації, яке може мати «серйозні наслідки для ЄС». Відтак, ЄС повільно, але ненастанно та щоразу активніше долучався до проблеми Південного Кавказу з метою довгострокової стабілізації в регіоні.

Однак грузинсько-російська війна 2008 р. виразно продемонструвала неефективність політики Європейського союзу у вирішенні конфлікту в регіоні. У статті проаналізовано, чому Євросоюзові було не до снаги вирішити територіальні конфлікти в Грузії. Автор спирається на відомості, зібрані під час низки інтерв'ю в Тбілісі, Брюсселі та Празі з грузинськими та європейськими дипломатами в 2009-2011 рр., аби з'ясувати, що з цього приводу думають посадові особи та політичні діячі і наскільки вагомими вони вважають причини невдачі Євросоюзу.

У статті висунуто і перевірено кілька гіпотез, зокрема, про чутливість процесу прийняття рішень в ЄС до зовнішніх впливів, негативної ролі Росії в регіоні, розбіжностей позицій держав-членів ЄС щодо питань зовнішньої політики стосовно східних сусідів, та про неефективне управління інструментами зовнішньої політики організації як потенційні причини такої невдачі.

З об'єктивних причин у статті не розглянуто змін, спричинених Лісабонською угодою, яким надалі варто дати оцінку у цьому контексті. Проте ця розвідка є спробою докладного аналізу і має велике значення для всіх зацікавлених сторін.

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Managing Territorial Conflicts in Georgia: Achilles' Heel of the European Union Foreign Policy

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The 2008 Georgia-Russia war clearly demonstrated the apparent failure of the EU conflict resolution policy in the region. The paper thus investigates why the Union could not resolve the territorial conflicts in Georgia. It draws on data collected using intensive interviews in Tbilisi, Brussels and Prague to reveal what the decision- and policy-makers think of, and the importance they attach to the reasons of the EU failure.

Keywords – European Union, conflict resolution, Georgia, Russia, EU instruments, EU decision-making vulnerability, incoherence of EU member states' positions

I. Introduction

Due to a constant threat to peace, stability and energy security of Europe coming from the territorial conflicts of the South Caucasus, the European Union has been slowly but steadily and increasingly involved in the region in order to stabilize it in the long-term.

However, recent developments in Georgia have revealed the obvious failures of the EU in the conflict resolution. Consequently, it is relevant, interesting and striking to investigate *why the European Union could not resolve the territorial conflicts in Georgia*.

Several hypotheses have been stipulated for the analysis, including vulnerability of the EU decision-making to the external influence, Russia's negative role in the South Caucasus, differences in the positions of the EU member states on the foreign affairs' issues in their Eastern neighborhood, and ineffective management of the Union's foreign policy instruments as potential reasons of this pitfall.

They were tested in the paper on the basis of the research utilizing extensive content analysis of academic literature and interviews in Brussels, Prague and Tbilisi with the State Minister of Reintegration of Georgia, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the Embassy of Georgia to the Czech Republic, the Mission of Georgia to the EU, the European Commission and the EU member states. The results with no priority order are presented in the following chapters.

II. Methodology

Open-ended and semi-structured interviews [1] were conducted with Georgian diplomats and state officials in Tbilisi and Prague and with European diplomats in Brussels in 2009-2011. The information obtained was analyzed on an ongoing manner. Due to objective reasons access to the Russian diplomats was relatively

challenging at the moment of the research. However, their involvement would have been beneficial for an extensive investigation.

III. Findings

Several important conclusions can be drawn from the analysis. Most importantly, *vulnerability of the EU decision-making to the external influence seriously hampered the process of active and fast EU actions globally, including in its Eastern neighborhood*. As representatives of the Mission of Georgia to the EU and the Embassy of Georgia to the Czech Republic claim, apart from the national capitals, decisive Russian lobby is concentrated on middle level staff of the EU who basically formulates the Union's position. Indeed, I personally witnessed during the meetings of the Georgian delegations with the president of the European Commission, as well as the president of the European Council in Autumn 2010 how extensively the lobby was pressurizing the EU officials and their staff to avoid serious pro-Georgian statements.

Moreover, *the EU failed to effectively resolve the conflicts in Georgia due to another strong external actor in the region – Russia*. Having far-reaching goals in the South Caucasus, such as „exclusive military and political presence“ and exclusive control over the Caspian Sea resources and their transit routes [2], [3], Russia has been actively utilizing a wide array of its foreign policy instruments in the post-Soviet countries, including Georgia. Updated from the leading scholars, Tolstrup calls them “military, economic and political levers“ in the hands of Russia as an external negative actor imposing “managed instability“ in the South Caucasus. These instruments include „military interventions, military bases, threats, support to the secessionist entities, support of anti-western groups/governments, trade embargos, energy monopoly“, etc. [4].

Furthermore, *differences in the positions of the EU member states considerably limited the EU's potential for conflict resolution vis-à-vis Russia in the region*. The European institutions as well as the researchers have numerously emphasized the importance of convergence of the EU and national interests that would give the Union more influential role globally, including *vis-à-vis* Russia [5], [6]. As Schmidt-Felzmann has neatly put it, exploiting the divergent positions between the EU institutions and the national capitals, Russians „obtained political leverage by playing them off against each other“ [7] (e.g. Russian-German pipeline Nord Stream).

In addition, *the EU has both used weak instruments and misused the strong ones that seriously undermined its influence on the conflict resolution in Georgia*. It is widely acknowledged that the strongest incentive (i.e. full membership) is absent from the EU instruments in the European Neighborhood Policy countries. However, the Union have not used other important instruments effectively either. For example, as the representatives of the Mission of Georgia to the EU argue, it would have been an effective step from the Union to start negotiations on visa liberalization with

Georgia much earlier than it has done so, as it would have made the central government more attractive for the people of the separatist regions. To the contrary, the Union announced its serious interest much later than with Russia. As most of the citizens of the separatist regions have the Russian citizenship, according to the Georgian diplomats, (by misusing such strong incentives [e.g. visa liberalization]) the EU empowered Russia and lost its considerable instrument in the conflict resolution. I have also done a significant investigation on another platform of the EU's considerable influence – the Geneva Talks – which is still under-researched and un-theorised case. The analysis clearly indicated that the EU instruments of its foreign policy-making” (i.e. conditionality and social learning) also failed to change the preferences of the separatists in Georgia and to resolve the conflict.

IV. Conclusion

In sum, the research results explicitly demonstrated that an effective usage of “blackmail, subversion and the rhetoric of threat” in the region by Russia, high level of vulnerability of the EU decision-making vis-à-vis the external influence, lack of coherence in the EU position, and an inappropriate utilization of EU instruments significantly reduced the Union's potential for successful and effective conflict resolution in Georgia.

Due to objective reasons the paper did not consider changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, and it needs further evaluation to this direction. Nevertheless, this research is a remarkable attempt for a profound analysis, and it carries an immense significance for all interested parties.

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